

## Editorial: Reflecting on research and practice in psychology: serving and facilitating rigour

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All the contributors to the current issue have, to a greater or a lesser extent, dealt with either the theory or the practice or a combination of these two facets of the science of psychology. In covering innovative techniques, as well as older techniques applied innovatively, the contributions have helped push forward the boundaries of the field of psychology. This is in essence why psychologists conduct research and attempt to get their findings published. In line with this aim, we at the *SAJP* have repeatedly called on academics, as well as practitioners, to reflect and report on their research and practice. I believe that a meta-analysis approach to research is what is needed more than anything else to move the profession forward in the 21st century. Questions such as the following require answers.

- a) What are our core aims as researchers and practitioners?
- b) To what extent are we achieving these aims? And how can we know if we are in fact in achieving these aims?
- c) In what ways do changing times impact on psychological research and practice, and how can we be sure that our core aims are aligned with the expectations of the population we serve, on the one hand, and the rigour of the science we practise, on the other?
- d) Does theory follow practice or does practice follow theory in psychology?
- e) How much recognition does the psychology profession get from the other professions? How can the status of psychology be assessed in a valid, reliable and trustworthy manner?
- f) Is psychology (in terms of both theory and practice) meeting the high demands set by evolving 21st century society?

Irrespective of one's vantage point when considering these questions, the 'bigger picture' should be kept in mind at all times. History has shown that no research paradigm, no matter how popular or practically applicable, 'lasts' longer than 50 years, after which it reaches the limits of its science and usefulness (Savickas, 2006). Authors should therefore always be aware of the importance of locating their research endeavours in sound theoretical contexts and providing plausible conceptual frameworks (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2009) before commencing their research and eventually applying their findings in practice. For example, in a ground-breaking meta-theoretical/meta-analytical contribution in the *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, Savickas (1993) changed the practice and theory of career counselling forever by challenging the positivistic style that characterised the career counselling profession at the time. He urged researchers and practitioners alike to reconsider the merits of a positivist approach to career counselling and argued powerfully in favour of qualitative-quantitative approach to the profession. Today, few theorists and practitioners are unaware of the importance of the following concepts for career counselling in the 21st century: a combined quantitative-qualitative approach to career counselling, career construction counselling, a storied approach to career counselling, life designing and career adaptability.

Apart from what has already been said, we at the *SAJP* wish to know how practitioners determine the 'success' of their practices, how they ascertain the satisfaction levels of their clients post-intervention, and, most importantly, how they go about renewing their practices. We also wish to reiterate that we would very much like to receive articles from private practitioners as well. In particular, we would like to know how they move from practice to theory (or vice versa).

It is against this background that I again call upon interested readers to submit articles on meta-analyses (e.g. articles on how theoretical approaches can be combined to provide the foundations for new approaches in psychology) and on new psychometric instruments. Please read all the

contributions critically and, based on these, let us know if you think the psychology profession has remained static over the past number of years or has moved forward. Also, let us know if you think some of the ideas proposed in the current contributions warrant further investigation. Finally, give us your ideas on possible future research topics. After all, it is incumbent upon us as psychologists not only to act in the best interests of our clients but also to leave a worthwhile legacy for those who follow us. Surely this is a worthy and exciting challenge!

The articles in this issue have been grouped under four headlines that deal with broadly similar issues to enable readers to make connections between seemingly different contributions. The first three articles can therefore be grouped under the heading *Aspects of family coping strategies*.

### **Aspects of family coping strategies**

Concepts such as '(family) adversity', 'coping' and '(the quest for) resilience' have become part of the vocabulary of social researchers in South Africa in recent years. In the lead article, *The determinants of family resilience among families in low and middle-income contexts: a systematic literature review*, Arvin Bhana and Shaneel Bachoo (Bhana & Bachoo, 2011) discuss some of the determinants of family resilience that emerged from a systematic search of 12 databases for relevant peer-reviewed publications from 1991 to 2010.

According to these authors, resilience research has traditionally revolved around individual risk and protective factors that make it possible for individuals to succeed despite unfavourable circumstances. The scope of resilience research has in recent times expanded into the interpersonal realm, giving rise to constructs such as family resilience (FR). Empirically validated determinants of family resilience are identified with particular reference to low and middle-income countries (LMICs), and the findings are discussed relative to the findings from better-resourced contexts. This article offers a meta-analytic overview that warrants the attention of all researchers in this field.

In contrast to resilience research, few researchers venture into the field of schizophrenia research and related issues. Schizophrenia as a psychiatric disorder affects roughly 1% of the world's population and impacts a much larger percentage of the population. It is therefore easy to understand why family interventions (e.g. patients and relatives attending psychiatric therapy sessions) need to be effective in order to prevent a recurrence of symptoms. In the second contribution, *Family therapy for schizophrenia in the South African context: challenges and pathways to implementation*, Janis Kritzinger, Leslie Swartz, Sumaya Mall and Laila Asmal (Kritzinger, Swartz, Mall, & Asmal, 2011) discuss an investigation into the nature of and the search for familial coping strategies. Because of the shift in South Africa from institutionalisation to community care, family therapy treatment models offer practitioners an important option to explore. The authors conclude that additional challenges such as the stigmatisation of mental illness and cultural perceptions of illness may create barriers to mental health care in countries like South Africa.

Research on the position of women in a (still largely) male-dominated society is crucially important, which makes the contributions in the second section of this issue particularly apt.

### **Dealing with challenges faced by women**

Given that South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence globally, it is mystifying that so little research has been done locally on interventions to combat this form of violence. Kim de la Harpe and Floretta Boonzaier's (De la Harpe & Boonzaier, 2011) contribution, *Women's experiences of an intervention for violent men*, is therefore especially welcome. Investigating an intervention for domestically violent men on the basis of the experiences of six female partners, and using interpretative phenomenology to examine the women's experiences of the intervention programme, the authors discovered that the men in the study continued to dominate their female partners' programme participation by keeping information about domestic violence secret and accusing the women of being the abusers. This while the women continued to experience psychological abuse. The authors emphasise the importance of listening to women's voices when programme

effectiveness is assessed in an attempt to predict future abuse and increase the long-term efficacy of intervention programmes.

Debates are ongoing on the role of women in academia and on ways of measuring the objective and subjective career success of female academics at universities. In the second article in this section, *Career success of women academics in South Africa*, Sarah Riordan and Joha Louw-Potgieter (Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011) discuss the results of a study in which they used theoretically derived career psychology variables to explain the career success of academic women in South Africa. Having examined the impact of work centrality (regulated by care-giving), motivation, career anchors and self-efficacy on career success, the authors use the results to develop a framework of excellence promotion for female academics. Although this study was limited in design and scope, its findings could well have broader horizontal impact (i.e. in terms of its applicability in different settings) and vertical impact (i.e. across gender lines).

I can hardly recall an issue of the *SAJP* that did not deal with the issue of HIV&AIDS and related matters, and the current issue is no exception. In the third contribution in this section, *Narratives of masculinity in the Daily Sun: implications for HIV risk and prevention*, Andrew Gibbs and Geoff Jobson (Gibbs & Jobson, 2011), writing from a narrative psychology perspective, argue that prevailing and hegemonic masculinities more often than not place women and men at risk of contracting HIV due to the reinforcing of gender inequalities. Paradoxically, though, challenging these masculinities is increasingly regarded as a precondition for combating HIV&AIDS, and understanding the make-up of narratives of masculinity is considered a precondition for gaining insight into whether such narratives shape or do not shape HIV-related health behaviours. Since the media are a central space in which masculinity narratives are produced and reproduced, the authors analysed narratives in the *Daily Sun* newspaper in December 2008 in order to identify the different narratives of masculinity that predominate in the newspaper. Three different global narratives, namely, masculinity and work; masculinity, violence and crime; and masculinity and HIV were discovered. The negative implications of their findings for HIV prevention are elucidated.

From the inception of the psychology profession, psychologists have paid especial attention to the position of children as a particularly vulnerable sector of the population. More specifically, they have endeavoured to find ways to protect children. This issue forms the theme of the third section.

### **Finding ways to safeguard children**

All social researchers in South Africa are fully aware of the emotional impact of key terms from the HIV&AIDS vocabulary such as 'othering' and 'stigma'. In the first article in this section, *HIV and AIDS related stigma: a necessary protective mechanism for children in high exposure areas?*, Julia Goodall, Mary van der Riet, Beverley Killian and Vivien O'Neill (Goodall, Van der Riet, Killian, & O'Neill 2011) highlight the curious phenomenon that HIV research is often conducted in the context of the stigma attached to HIV&AIDS with little reflection on the complex social processes that contribute to its presence. Using a qualitative research design, the authors found that the stigma construction process seemingly operates as a protective response that promotes 'othering'. They conclude that a focus on how children give meaning to this stigma will greatly help change future health behaviours in this specific context.

The second article, *Overnights and overkill: post-divorce contact for infants and toddlers*, deals with a different aspect of the protection of children, namely, the painful and traumatic issue of post-divorce contact, by elaborating on issues of access, attachment, the best interests of the child, contact, custody and visitation rights. In his article, Martin Strous (Strous, 2011), an internationally recognised authority in the field, says that, in post-divorce and post-separation contexts, overnight visitation is increasingly recommended for non-resident parents. He deals with the differing opinions on whether sleepover access actually serves the best interests of young children. With a view to encouraging debate on children's needs regarding overnight contact during early developmental phases, Strous reviews relevant research and reflects critically on emerging trends relating to

attachment theory, practical experience, parental and gender rights, cultural considerations and adversarial legal contexts. He concludes that insistence on overnight contact, especially in highly contested cases, may not be in the best interests of children. This article warrants the attention of all psychologists involved in legal work on divorce issues, especially where young children are involved.

Job and Dorah Dubihlela (Dubihlela & Dubihlela, 2011), in the third contribution to this section, *Youth attitudes towards advertisements depicting nudity and alcohol: ethical dilemmas in advertising*, highlight the complexity of the ethical issues involved in such advertising. They maintain that little clarity exists on what is ethical and what is unethical in advertising, thus creating dilemmas for professionals who design advertising campaigns. The authors specifically examine how the youth are influenced by/respond to advertisements in which nudity and alcohol are portrayed and conclude that young people have different views on controversial advertisements and that their definitions of what comprises controversial advertisements are influenced by their particular contexts. Given the central role that ethical issues play in all research endeavours, irrespective of where, when or how the research is actually conducted, all researchers will benefit from reading this contribution.

It is common knowledge that adolescence itself confronts adolescents with idiosyncratic and momentous challenges. These challenges are heightened if adolescents are faced with the additional trials of being HIV positive. Shlaine L'Etang (L'Etang, 2011) concludes the third section of the current issue with her article, *A cognitive-behavioural-based counselling intervention programme: a rationale for the counselling of adolescents and youth living with HIV&AIDS in a rural South African town*. In the article, she maintains that not much has been done to meet the distinctive psychosocial, emotional and psychological needs of South African adolescents and youth living with HIV&AIDS from a developmental point of view. Charting some initiatives that have been implemented to target the health of young PLWHA, the author states that new interventions are required to cater for the needs of these people, specifically on how the virus can be managed. A must-read for those involved in counselling adolescents affected by HIV&AIDS.

Very few issues of any scholarly journal do not at some stage address the problem of psychological assessment and prediction of success. Accordingly, the concluding section of the current issue of the *SAJP* covers this subject and is entitled *Aspects of assessing and predicting performance*.

### **Aspects of assessing and predicting performance**

Jeanine Blumenau and Yvonne Broom (Blumenau & Broom, 2011) in their article, *Performance of South African adolescents on two versions of the Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test*, support the view that the multicultural and multilingual nature of South African society places high requirements on psychological tests in terms of their cultural appropriateness. A number of tests are widely used even though they may not have been standardised on South African populations (e.g. The Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test (RAVLT)). The authors investigate how South African learners fared on the RAVLT as well as on an adapted version of this test, the South African List Learning Test (SALLT), and note the impact of language differences on performance. This study provides scientific support for the frequent call for research on the impact of language experience on test performance and confirms the need for the development and standardisation of culturally relevant psychological tests in South Africa.

Joseph Seabi concludes this issue of the *SAJP* with his article, *Relating learning strategies, self-esteem, intellectual functioning with academic achievement among first-year engineering students*. Like others before him, the author investigates the relationship between learning strategies, self-esteem, intellectual functioning and academic achievement in first-year engineering students in South Africa. Predictably, modest (but significant) correlations were found, for example, between self-esteem, learning strategies and academic achievement. Likewise, factors such as (an adequate) study attitude, absence of anxiety, sound test-taking strategies and the ability to organise emerged

as significant contributors to academic achievement. Because of the ongoing search for models that can predict student success at tertiary level and thereby assist professionals in their attempts to enhance throughput rates, this article warrants study by all researchers interested in the twin issues of assessment and the prediction of success at tertiary level.

In the concluding contribution to this issue of the *SAJP*, Cooper, Nicholas and Bawa (2011) comment on two articles that appeared previously in the *SAJP*. In their comment, these authors contest Kagee's (2006; 2009) assertions that South African clinical psychology lacks empirical evidence, claiming that Kagee's own assertions lack such evidence. They maintain that South African psychology has made significant evidence-based strides over the past number of years.

*From an editorial perspective, my only comment is the following: Critical and constructive (albeit sometimes robust) debate can only be good for any profession and its associated journal(s). Let us continue to engage in the spirit of protecting the right of others to speak their mind, even though we may not always agree with their point of view.*

The contributions in this issue are, once again, diverse in terms of institution, gender, and national/international profile. However, as before, we urge emerging authors (particularly black and female authors) to submit manuscripts. Likewise, we request colleagues to review articles and to submit their reviews within the time stipulated. In addition, we encourage colleagues who are currently not on our reviewer list to contact us. We also reiterate that reviewers receive three CPD points for each article reviewed, one of which is for ethics. Please be advised, though, that we do not issue CPD certificates. The letter from the editor, in which receipt of your review is acknowledged, serves as your CPD certificate.

Should you have any ideas for further improving the *SAJP*, please feel free to contact me personally ([kobus.maree@up.ac.za](mailto:kobus.maree@up.ac.za)). Your feedback is needed to shape the future direction of the journal.

Colleagues who regularly publish in scholarly journals will be aware that most scholarly journals charge page fees for articles accepted for publication. This is a generally agreed-upon principle to help publishing entities balance their books. PsySSA has accordingly also decided to charge page fees starting with the next issue of the *SAJP*. Authors will be notified about the fee they have to pay upon acceptance of their articles.

- a) The following sliding scale will be implemented:
1. A maximum of one 'free' solicited international contribution per issue.
  2. All other international authors will be expected to pay page fees.
  3. Private practitioners will pay less than authors attached to tertiary institutions (who receive subsidies for articles published).
- b) Page fees per page:
1. R250.00 per published page (authors employed by universities).
  2. R125.00 per published page (authors not involved in academia).

As always, I wish to thank the colleagues involved in the editorial and publishing process for their sterling help and support: our Consulting Editor, Anthony Pillay, our Consulting Editor: Statistics, Tyrone Pretorius, our Associate Editors, Linda Theron and Willy Nel (both of whom also double as our copy editors), our Publishing Editor, Erna Kinsey, Fatima Seedat and Nosipho Thathi from the PsySSA offices, and, of course, the centre piece of our office, our Editorial secretary, Moipone Williams

Enjoy reading this issue of the *SAJP*.

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