EDITORIAL

Talk of "relevant psychology" and "the crisis in psychology" is increasing in psychological circles in this country. The editors would like to see this new journal contributing to serious debate and understanding of a psychology which is clearly at a cross-roads. Discontent with mainstream psychology - or to use Russell Jacoby's telling polemical phrase, "conformist psychology" - is something which is becoming ever more apparent in the hallowed corridors of South African psychology departments. No longer can the portraits of Galton, Binet, Skinner, Titchener, Wundt, J B Watson, Fechner and, here and there, the token Rogers or the misunderstood Piaget, contain the critical searching of the South African psychology student (and hence, significantly, the South African psychologist). Our discipline is being torn apart by its inability to contribute meaningfully to a South African society increasingly in the throes of a deep structural crisis.

And yet, there has emerged from the crisis in psychology an increasing number of people prepared to ask the critical questions, and prepared to assert the contribution of psychology in overcoming our crippling apartheid society. It is our belief that this endeavour needs some kind of forum, and we hope that Psychology in Society can fill part of this gap.

The editorial which follows aims to set out the project of Psychology in Society. It has been written collectively by editors based in Durban and Johannesburg and, consequently, does

not represent a definitive position for each one of us. There
are differences in our approach to the theory and practice of
psychology which are not taken up here - the editorial should
rather be seen as an attempt to open up some of the critical
questions which we hope the journal will take up in the future.

Psychology in Society has been conceived by a group of South
African psychologists who share a general critique of that
network of ideas and practices that has come to be known as
"psychology" in the Anglo-American world.[1] In particular, we
share a concern as South Africans about the uses and abuses to
which "psychology" is put in the maintenance of apartheid and
other forms of social oppression in this country. And it is
precisely this deficiency in mainstream psychology publishing
(and thinking) that has prompted the editors of this journal to
bring out a new dimension to psychological debate in South Africa.

There can be no doubt that psychological theory and political
and social practice are intimately part of one another, no
matter what the psychological establishment might think. The
theoretical products of psychology are put to use in schools,
prisons, hospitals and on the factory floor. They contribute
to the strategy employed by the military and the police force
and, on a more general level, they permeate the everyday
consciousness of millions through their distribution as "pop
psychology" via the media.[2]

In our apartheid society, with its blatant political and

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[1] A great deal of the psychology practised in Africa, South
America, and even Europe and the Soviet Union, has its origins
in this Anglo-American orthodoxy and is equally problematic.

[2] We are indebted for much of the terminology used here to
Adlam, et. al, 1977.

ideological controls, and its obvious economic exploitation, the question as to whose interests mainstream psychology serves cannot be long in coming. In general terms, there is no specific instance of psychological practice that has escaped this kind of critical scrutiny (although the specific relationships to apart-heid are yet to be explored adequately). We would like, at this point, to take up a few of the more important areas of critique, namely the practices of clinical psychology, psychology in industry and educational psychology, as well as the nature of theoretical production in psychology.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

> Our clients ask ... the same question: is there something wrong with them, or is there something wrong with the world around them? And with few exceptions, psychologists tell them that there is something wrong with them and nothing wrong with the world. We usually ignore the possibility of structural social problems ... we are taking a significant political stand.
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> (Beit-Hallahmi, 1974, p. 125)

Beit-Hallahmi's attack on clinical psychology needs to be taken seriously. Traditional approaches to clinical practice do tend to view mental suffering as a failure on the part of an individual to adapt, rather than critically considering the social reality into which that person is drawn. As a result, the extremely complex relationship of the individual to society remains unquestioned and unexamined by either therapist or "client".

Psychotherapy, which emerged as a significant force in the present epoch of individualism, represents an attempt to

intervene in human misery at the level of the individual. While there is no doubt that it has, when properly conceived, the potential to be a liberating force for the individual, all "systems of therapy that operate within the individualistic paradigm, [are] of necessity a conservative social force" (Lichtman, 1982, p. 93 - our emphasis).

More recent formulations of psychotherapy, which venture beyond the individual, tend to limit their analysis to the level of the family. In so doing, they fail to acknowledge the family's role as a mediating institution for the wider social structure, reflecting and expressing the conflicts which inhere in it.

But psychologists ignore social forces at their peril. Psychological disturbance is not randomly distributed in the South African population, and it must be one of the tasks of a progressive approach to examine the social influences on the incidence and severity of mental disturbance in our people. The effects of exploitative interpersonal relations and other forms of social oppression (including that of women) need to be examined with regard to the production and prevalence of pathology.

In failing to take seriously the social determination of individuals, psychotherapy has become, in the words of Joel Kovel, "the heroin of late capitalism" (1977). It takes the form of a one-to-one transaction (whether in individual, family or group therapy) which serves to mask the important social determinants of human functioning. Psychological disturbance, rather than being viewed as the outcome of social ills, is attributed to individual "weakness" or disease. Happiness comes

to be a commodity which one purchases rather than a condition of social life.

In South Africa, psychotherapy is still very much located within this conservative-conformist paradigm. It is compounded by the fact that in practice, if not in theory, therapeutic services are aimed at specific racial and class groups. For example, while white patients in institutions receive a combination of psychotherapy, chemotherapy and psychiatric rehabilitation, black patients, by and large, receive only custodial care and chemo-therapy (WHO, 1977). The fact that there are significantly few black clinicians (either psychiatrists or psychologists)[3], and a large number of people requiring mental health services, means that these services are almost exclusively devoted to custodianship.

Custodial care has been the target of numerous attacks. Prominent amongst these have been the criticisms of institutionalisation put forward by Szasz, Foucault, Goffman and Scheff, who have pointed to the repressive nature of commitment.[4] Alternative styles of dealing with mental health issues which have been incorporated into community processes[5], have clearly demonstrated the ability of communities to absorb people having a wide range of emotional problems, in a way which is of benefit to both the individual and the community. However, this form of collective therapeutic endeavour is contrary to the competitive individualism which characterises capitalist society, and as such, represents a

[3] The issue is not so much one of race as one of language.

[4] On these critiques see Sedgwick (1982) and Brown (1973).

[5] For examples of such projects in Italy and China, see Francescato & Jones (1973) and Lu (1978).

fundamental challenge to mainstream psychology.

This is not to say that all forms of psychotherapy should be
eliminated. The alleviation of individual suffering generated
by our present social existence must be provided - in Russell
Jacoby's words, "band-aids" are necessary (1975). On another
level, there are obviously a number of techniques which hold some
hope for those aiming at a progressive psychotherapeutic
practice. But no matter what we do as psychotherapists, we must
of necessity ground ourselves in a thorough understanding of
the interrelations between psychological functioning and social
reality.

PSYCHOLOGY IN INDUSTRY

Of the specific instances of the relationship between psychology
and political practice, the one that has perhaps been most
critically examined in the South African context is industrial
psychology. One is tempted to follow the lead given by Nick
Heather and get on to those areas of psychology which are more
compatible with a critical practice:

> The subject of the political function of
> industrial psychology need not take up
> much of our precious space. Industrial
> psychology always serves the interests of
> management and is invariably calculated
> in the long run to increase profits. The
> reader should not be conned into
> believing otherwise.
> (Heather, 1976, p. 103).

The field of labour relations, however, needs to be analysed very
carefully, especially in the light of the tendency toward reform
in the overall South African political context. As Saul and Gelb
(1981) point out, the crisis facing South Africa is "organic",

that is, it is so deeply part of the overall social structure that "political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making efforts to cure them within certain limits, and to overcome them" (p. 3, quoting Gramsci). With the emergence of an increasingly militant trade union movement on South Africa's agenda in the late 1970s and 1980s, management is being forced into precisely this kind of formative response to the crisis on the factory floor.

In an article which lays bare the political role that psychology has come to play in industry, Bosquet (1980) points out that management cannot continue to run a factory by intimidation and repression indefinitely. He traces the development of "human relations in industry" in the USA in the 1930s, and shows that industrial psychology emerged as a powerful branch of the psychological establishment precisely because of the huge demand for a behavioural technology which would deflect conflict between management and workers, while maintaining the economic exploitation of workers on which the profit margin was built.

It is no accident that the field of industrial relations has become such a huge South African growth industry since the mid-1970s. In February 1973, an estimated 100 000 workers came out on strike in Durban and worker militancy has increasingly and constructively been channelled through a number of progressive trade union groupings since then. The 1970s also witnessed a massive wave of political unrest in working-class communities which, as it becomes more organised and politically self-conscious, threatens to destroy the economic and political bases of apartheid and, hence, the profitability constraints faced by South African capitalism. As Webster (1980) demonstrates, "it

is in the context of the structural transformation of the economy (in particular, or new demand for semi-skilled black labourers) and growing working-class organisation, that social research into industry grew in the late 1960s and 1970s" (p. 10). We see management turning more and more to the industrial psychologist to defuse the situation and to foster the illusion in the minds of workers that the factory is a happy, co-operative enterprise with their interests at heart.

This is not to say that industrial psychology is party to a conspiracy. It portrays the industrial arena as politically "innocent" and, consequently, operates to resolve certain "human conflicts", but this ideological bias is often motivated by a profound humanistic concern for all in the workplace. However, it is this problematic "innocent humanism" which characterises most industrial psychology teaching and research in South Africa that needs to be subjected to a rigorous social and structural criticism.

In concluding this section, allow us a lengthy quote from Nick Heather's book, which captures quite nicely the ultimate political allegience of mainstream industrial psychology, and possibly points to the direction in which an emancipatory industrial psychology might move:

> The simple point is, of course, that in a capitalist society the interests of workers and management are, by definition, irreconcilable, since the essence of capitalism is the exploitation of the worker's labour by the owner of capital. The ideology of the new 'humanistic' industrial psychology is a trick to persuade the worker into thinking that this conflict of class interests does not exist. When we hear industrial psychologists advocate the overthrow of

> capitalism, we may take their work and
> views more seriously.
>
> (1976, p. 104).

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

With the publication of the De Lange Report[6] in late 1981,
education has come to the forefront of public debate in South
Africa. A great deal of concern has been focussed on the role
of education in the maintenance of the social relations of
apartheid (i.e., the present status quo), and it is against this
background that educational psychology must be critically
examined.

Significantly, De Lange's recommendations place emphasis on the
need to move to a meritocratic justification for the provision
of education in South Africa. However, the maintenance of the
economic and political bases of apartheid, which is in fact one
of the starting points of the report, means that this shift can
have no more than an ideological implication - school will
still be "a massive indoctrination device for delivering, bound
and gagged, the dependable producers and consumers upon which
the technological society relies" (Heather, 1976, p. 108).

The meritocratic trend in educational thinking is of crucial
importance for educational psychologists. Two of their most
important functions - testing and counselling - are central
to the workings of the educational system envisaged by De Lange.
Psychometric testing and vocational guidance will provide
mechanisms through which any individual is allocated to a place

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[6] See HSRC (1981). Although not officially titled the De Lange
Report, we will refer to it as such in accordance with common
usage in educational circles.

in the social division of labour and will give a "scientific" flavour to the ideology of individual merit. However, as we will go on to argue, this very process will serve to conceal the political role that educational psychology plays in determining individual abilities.

Although controversy rages over various issues in psychometric circles (e.g., the contribution of the environment, culture-fair versus culture-free testing, compensatory education, etc.), the value of testing _per se_ remains largely unquestioned. The tendency is towards acceptance of an _operational_ definition of intellect or ability, so that the contribution which IQ testing makes to maintaining systems of social relations and social control is deflected and diverted. Consequently, in South Africa we are faced with the introduction of "canalization": the mechanism whereby children will be streamed into various forms of education on the basis of academic achievement:

> This achievement will be assessed by
> various tests. These tests are supposed
> to measure 'inborn mental abilities' and
> a child's ability to gain from education
> is supposed to depend on the amount of
> intelligence he or she possesses. ...
> [but] the child's ability to answer these
> tests depends on the extent to which he
> or she has been brought up in the same
> intellectual and cultural traditions as
> the people who draw them up. For example,
> middle class children receive books and
> expensive conceptual toys at an early age.
> They are therefore able to develop this
> part of their abilities at a far younger
> age than working class children. Black
> and white poorer children do not have
> expensive toys and books and so do not
> develop 'book IQs' and 'toy IQs'. It is
> this knowledge that psychometric tests
> presuppose in measuring ability.
> Consequently working class children find
> these tests difficult to cope with while
> middle class kids enjoy an advantage.

(NEUSA, 1982, p. 9)

NEUSA goes on to argue that the obvious outcome of this is the
perpetuation of the

> myth that working class children are
> 'stupid' and lack ability. This myth is
> used to justify the fact that they do not
> continue with an academic education but
> are channeled into technical or mechanical
> learning, which, it is claimed, they are
> more suited for.
>
> (Ibid., p. 9)

It does not take much imagination to see why De Lange has placed
so much emphasis on school guidance: the role of the school
psychologist will be to provide support for the overall
canalization procedures on the level of personal contact with
children.

On another level, humanistic psychology has come to inform the
notion of teaching without force, which has come to dominate
'liberal' education. In a sense the disciplining rod has been
replaced by psychological guilt: the child who does not do well
academically or behaves "badly" in class, is confronted with
his or her own lack of self-control by disappointed parents and
teachers. The central role that this type of "anonymous
authority" has come to play is evident in the focus of
psychology courses such as behaviour modification and social
learning theory, which emphasise self-control and self-
reinforcement programmes. In this way, educational inequality
comes to be viewed as the result of the child's own failure and
not the failure of the educational and socio-political systems.

Notions of self-determination and self-control lend support to
the De Lange Report's call for distinguishing between children
on the grounds of supposed differences in "individual merit".

Mainstream psychology's collaboration in this has been, in
Eysenck's view, the

> development of those instruments and
> techniques required by a society which
> aspires to capitalize the fullest upon
> the fact that most men are created
> unequal.
> (Eysenck, 1953, p. 310, quoting Horst)

It would seem that educational psychologists, like all their
colleagues in South Africa, are faced with, and are making,
significant political decisions in their everyday work.

THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

We have briefly examined some issues which challenge the forms
of practice associated with mainstream psychology. This section
takes up a deeper level on which psychology fits the description
"conformist", one which allows us to examine more directly the
theoretical issues involved in the theory-practice dialectic.
Sedgwick (1974) characterises the main features of the
"scientific" discourse of psychological research: "it deals with
problems arising from observations that a suitably trained
researcher may make in relation to a discrete subject, or to a
plurality of such subjects ... within conditions designed to
reduce error" (p. 30). Underlying this conception of research
methodology is the epistemological orthodoxy which establishment
psychologists cling to, namely positivism, which seeks to apply
the methods and principles of the natural sciences to the
domain of the human sciences.[7]

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[7] In fact, we may be doing an injustice to the practitioners of
the natural sciences here. It is true that research psychology
initially modelled itself on 19th century physics, but
theoretical physics underwent revolutionary changes in the

The major tenets of positivist theory can be captured in three principles: that _facts_ exist outside of the investigator and independently of the experience of the investigator; that theory consists of scientific laws which make sense of those facts; and that theories can only make sense if they are open to _objective_ verification (or falsification, to use Popper's more sophisticated concept) with regard to those facts. Anyone trained in a South African psychology department will be familiar with the terms of reference of this orthodoxy: they are captured in notions like "psychological experimentation" and "the control and prediction of behaviour".[8]

Now positivist theory has come under severe attack as a false theory of knowledge. We cannot here go into the details of this epistemological critique, although it raises important questions for, and ultimately challenges, the legitimacy of traditionally-conceived experimental psychology. Suffice to say that Berlin has captured the general philosophical outlook on the increasing constraints imposed by positivist theory on the development of knowledge in the twentieth century:

> The history of thought and culture is, as
> Hegel showed with great brilliance, a
> changing pattern of great liberating ideas

early part of this century with Max Planck's Quantum Theory and Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity. There is a great deal of debate about whether or not theoretical physics moved beyond the strictures of positivism, or indeed, whether or not such strictures apply equally to the natural and social sciences. Ironically, psychology has lost touch with developments in the natural sciences in its very claim that it models itself on the methods of the natural sciences.

[8] Sadly, this familiarity is usually uncritical and uninformed, a product of the manner in which psychology is often taught in our departments. Nevertheless, the degree of critical familiarity with psychology is increasing as more students and teachers of psychology begin to take epistemology and the philosophy of science seriously.

which inevitably turn into suffocating
straightjackets.
(Quoted by Bernstein, 1976, p. 57)

Much more important, from our point of view, is the political

function implicit in this conception of knowledge:

> ... the social function which determines
> the spirit of enquiry in psychology -
> whatever convictions psychologists may
> have about it - is the maintenance of the
> status quo: psychology borrows habits of
> thought from natural science and applies
> them to the human sphere in a manner
> which is logically quite inappropriate,
> but politically highly functional.

(Ingleby, 1976, p. 152)

The point that Ingleby is raising here, of course, is that

positivism is implicated in forms of political practice which

are eminently suited for the control of human beings, and in so

doing, legitimates, on the level of epistemology and

methodology, the political functions of psychology which we

discussed earlier. We can see this in the "scientific" laws

which experimental psychology generates, which also demonstrate

that it rests on a false theory of its own object of study.

The experimental method requires the researcher to isolate and

in some way quantify discrete variables which can form the

terms making up an hypothesis. Only in this way can psychology

establish the "general laws" which relate discrete independent

variables to dependent variables, and so conform to its image of

itself as one of the natural sciences. However, the notion that

one can isolate and measure aspects of a person's psychological

reality is misconceived:

> ... the focus on discrete variables fails
> to recognise the complex nature of social

> and economic determinism in the
> construction of the consciousness of human
> beings. The separation of aspects of a
> person's reality from one another,
> implied by the need to observe and
> measure independent variables, denies the
> complexity of that reality.
> (Moll, 1982, p. 188)

As Freud has pointed out, a person's reality is <u>overdetermined</u>,
and it is impossible to predict in a unidimensional "general
law" what the consciousness and activity of any human being will
be.

At the same time, we must recognise that the unidimensionality
which characterises positivism is, in some sense, an accurate
account of what a large proportion of people have come to look
like. The difficulty is with confusing the present historical
socialisation of people under exploitative social relations (as
pertain in South Africa) with the "nature" of human experiences
and consciousness. In this way, the unidimensionality of
positivism and its resultant account of human individuality, is
a mirror of the unidimensionality of people in present
capitalist societies.[9] In short, it is one thing to accurately
account for what socialisation does to people in different
societies, and another to align this with the essential "nature"
of human consciousness.

Nevertheless, despite the pseudo-scientific laws established by
psychologists failing to shed any light on the object of study
of psychology, what they can do is to provide the basis for a
technology of behaviour control: according to general rules

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[9] This naturalising glorification of the individual under
capitalism has been challenged by the Frankfurt School in the
1930s and 1940s, and again more recently by writers like Lasch
and Jacoby in America, in an attempt to free people from
oppressive social relations.

established by researchers, pertinent "independent variables"
can be manipulated to bring about defined behavioural goals.
Herein lies the political function of the experimental method.

In conclusion, let it be said that mainstream psychology in
South Africa is far from moving away from this orthodox (and
false) conception of science. There is a tendency to glibly
equate research with doing experiments, and science with
experimentation, so that an area of huge epistemological
controversy is brushed aside in the promotion of the "pursuit
of psychology as a science" (PASA, 1982). The positivist image
haunts South African psychology.

PSYCHOLOGY IN SOCIETY

The preceding discussion has covered the major problem areas
which constitute a crisis for South African psychology,
although it is by no means exhaustive. It is also necessarily
sketchy, and a great deal of careful analysis and debate must
take place before the issues can be resolved.

The editorial should not, therefore, be seen as an exhaustive
policy statement, but rather as an attempt to demarcate a series
of critical concerns for the journal to take up in the future.
We would welcome contributions which criticise positions taken
in the editorial, as well as contributions which develop further
the positive directions we have suggested.

We hope that Psychology in Society will provide a forum for the
publication of papers, especially of an exploratory nature, for
polemic, discussion and debate. We believe it is important for
writers to "take stabs" at particular problems and would like to

see the journal providing an opportunity for this kind of
preliminary sorting and debate.

A crucial implication of our position is that we cannot view the
theory and practice of psychology in isolation from society as a
whole. For this reason, <u>Psychology in Society</u> should not be
viewed as a specifically parochial psychology journal, but rather
as an engagement with the <u>psychological realm</u>. Our concern with
substantive criticisms of psychology in South Africa at this
particular conjuncture, makes it relevant for us to accept
contributions from many different fields – such as psychology,
education, cultural studies, anthropology, history, the women's
movement and sociology.

The following are the kinds of issues we would like to see
taken up in the journal:

* Critiques of mainstream South African psychology – not simply
  reactively, but in order to work for a substantive,
  progressive psychological practice.

* Critical examinations of major theoretical positions which
  inform psychology.

* The historical development of psychology, especially in South
  Africa. We would like to see substantive, specific historical
  analyses, rather than the global "histories" which dominate
  the teaching of psychology.

* The relationship between personality and society, including
  important debates on human nature and human essence.

* Methodology in psychological research. The crisis of
  positivism and technicism in mainstream psychology is crucial
  here.

* The idea of a profession in psychology and its problematic
  relationship to South Africa.

* Ideological practices in society, especially with regard to
  race, class and the position of women, and their relationship
  to psychology.

THIS FIRST ISSUE

The foundation edition of Psychology in Society contains two
articles which deal in different ways with the limitations of
mainstream psychological research in this country, and a review
of an important recent book on the history of psychology.

Michael Savage documents numerous instances of direct and indir-
ect political manipulation of research in the social sciences
in this country. He gives important weight to the increasing
claims that South African social research has more and more
become the simple legitimator of the mainstream practices of
apartheid. While particular details which he refers to might
well have been transformed in the immediate past - and we would
welcome responses in this regard - there seems to be no reason
to believe that the overall picture of the manipulation and
shaping of social research for political ends has changed. For
psychologists and other social scientists, the implications are
both severe and challenging.

The second article argues that mainstream positivist psychology
is powerful more because of its ideological and technological
role in maintaining existing social relations, than because its
practitioners are firmly based in an understanding of their own
epistemologies. Ian Moll develops a critique of the manner in

which psychology is taught in the universities, and shows that
the poverty of the teaching of psychology is but   part of the
overall poverty of mainstream theory and practice in psychology.

Finally, Janet Simson sketches the importance of Jacoby's
perceptive, and polemical, critique of conformist psychology,
Social Amnesia. There can be no doubt that this book should be
read by every student and practitioner of psychology, and
Simson goes a long way towards telling us why.

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