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"TO RULE AND OWN, OR TO LIVE LIKE SHY DEER": THE DILEMMAS OF A PROFESSION (1)

Johann Louw
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town
Cape Town

At its 1989 and 1990 annual conferences, the Psychological Association of South Africa (PASA), showed the clearest evidence as yet of going through a process of self-examination as a result of changing political realities in this country. At the 1990 conference, this was operationalized as a need to restructure the Association to provide a home for all South African psychologists. Without negating the debates conducted at these annual meetings, I believe, however, that there is an underlying, deeper issue at stake here. For me, this is related to the process of professionalization (2).

Since the essay is not intended as a conceptual analysis of what a profession is, I shall simply use the definition given by Abbott (1988): " ... professions are exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases" (p8). By extension, professionalization then is the process via which the occupational group establishes its exclusivity over a specific knowledge domain (see J. Louw, 1990, p14 for a definition of the professionalization of psychology).

Professionalization can be examined at a number of levels of abstraction. For example: in terms of the role of intellectuals in society, or in terms of the division of expert labour in society. At a somewhat less abstract and more empirical level one might consider the process of professionalization as it unfolds in a particular occupation. At a fairly concrete level, one might

examine practical measures a profession has at its disposal to advance its position vis-a-vis other professions, or to provide better services in society. Given the context of this essay, it treats the topic at fairly concrete levels of analysis.

The discussion opens with two theses, which are essential to clarify the contentions made subsequently. These take the form of ten practical suggestions as to how the profession might respond to its current dilemmas.

1. SOUTH AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY IS EXPERIENCING A CRISIS IN TERMS OF CULTURAL LEGITIMACY.

Cultural legitimacy refers to the acceptance and acknowledgement of the professional group's expertise, and the trust placed in that expertise. It connects the tasks of the profession to central values (such as health, happiness, justice, salvation, etc.) in the larger culture; it allows the members of the profession to do what they claim they are able to do.

But the legitimation of a profession's expertise is a much more fragmentary process than the professions would have us believe. Typically, working relationships or alliances are formed with other professional groups, or with particular groups in society. Very often, as Rose (1985) has demonstrated so clearly, these alliances produce knowledge that is administratively useful - knowledge which is criticized for being a factor in the management and control of the less powerful in society. This is partly what the current dilemma of South African psychology is about: psychologists now realize that they are too closely aligned to powerful groups in society, and want to do something about it.

The formation of alliances is obviously a political process (Danziger, 1990): be it academic, professional or societal politics. Writing about a slightly different point, Danziger had this to say: " ... alliances have to be formed, competitors have to be defeated, programs have to be formulated, recruits have to be won, power bases have to be captured, organizations have to be formed, and so on. These political exigencies necessarily leave their mark on the discipline itself, and not least on its investigative practices. The political environment largely determines what types of knowledge product can be successfully marketed at a particular time and place." (p182).

At different times, different audiences or alliances make different demands on the profession. Large scale changes in the balance of political power, for example, introduce new audiences or clients. In fact, audiences called into being by such shifts in the political power balance in particular call questions

of legitimacy into being. After all, it is going to influence whether the discipline will wither away or will develop, since social change can destroy or create professional work (see below for a discussion of the centrality of work).

The crisis of legitimacy therefore may reside in the fact that a group of professionals wish to address a new audience, but its practices, theories and methods are not, or might not be, positively valued by the particular audience or clients. (It is safe to say that community psychology is an attempt to reach such a different audience). This is quite clear when one looks at the criticisms levelled against the practice of psychology in South Africa: the lack of cultural understanding and relevancy; the appropriateness of research instruments and relevance of hypotheses; its irrelevance to social problems; psychological technology as an instrument of oppression; inappropriateness of western models of theory and practices; and so on. (Lazarus, 1988, provided an overview of such criticisms; I have followed the original terminology of these criticisms fairly closely). I believe that the organizational aspects of a profession are equally important in this regard, and ought to be included in the critical re-examination of the discipline.

We tend to view what I have called the production of a new audience (or the formation of new alliances), simply as a response to a perceived societal need. My objection to this would be that problems do not arise out there in society or in specific client groups, independently from the activities of the professional group and ready-made for their interventions. The profession itself at least participates in the definition of these problems, if not in their "social construction" (see Gusfield, 1981, for just one example).

Construing human difficulties as social problems simultaneously calls client groups into being. It is a truism to say that professions need clients; professional recognition presupposes the constitution of a lay public (Larson, unpublished). A lay public, however, must have knowledge in common with the profession, which allows them to understand "the marks of expertise" (Larson's term). Our task, stated in these terms, is to create a new public and new marks of expertise, recognizable by such clients.

Thus to enable us to understand the crisis in South African psychology, and how we can respond to different client groups and their problems, simple needs assessments will not suffice. We also have to look closely at how the profession describes "treatable" clients. In American and European clinical psychology of the 1970s, for example, a shift occurred away from the old and the verbally less skilled as clients, toward young, relatively intelligent, dynamic clients. This is evidence of an unpalatable truth that professionals

have to be alert to: lines of professional demarcation often run parallel to divisions in society in terms of social position and background.

For me the problem therefore appears to be more complicated as simply a matter of access to services and skills, and new responses to emerging needs. Of course these are important considerations in terms of the credibility of psychologists, but it seems to me the question of legitimacy goes much deeper than that. Professions are not simply passive, responding agents in this process - they also create the problem. Psychologists do not provide services simply on the basis of needs in or demands of certain sectors in society; Van Hoorn (1988, p. 68) has argued that it is rather a case of influential elites deciding what the proper functioning of an organization, business, school, etc. ought to be, and then introducing this vision via their professional activity.

2. WORK IS A CENTRAL CONSIDERATION WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE PROFESSIONS.

In the division of expert labour, professions act to establish and maintain control over defined areas of work. It is often understood that certification and licensing laws are indications of the successful accomplishment of this goal. Such laws constitute a legal recognition of the profession's area of expertise, and establish certain tasks as belonging to its exclusive domain of work.

To establish such an exclusive area of work, psychology had to stake a claim to knowledge and know-how which was uniquely its own. This is a fascinating story in its own right, but not one which can be dealt with here (see Hornstein, 1988, for an illustration). Suffice it to say that psychology has a dual task of demarcation: firstly, it has to demarcate its knowledge, skills and work from those of the lay public. A profession which is suspected of offering little else but dressed-up commonsense does not have a great chance of survival. But at the same time, as argued earlier, psychology relies on the lay public's recognition of its "marks of expertise" for their access to psychological services. Psychology therefore cannot afford to become a profession in the sense of law and medicine for example, which base their practice on esoteric, inaccessible knowledge and know-how. Secondly, psychology also has to demarcate its area of work from that of other professions. This is the element of monopolization in professional work, which leads one to a consideration of the effects of professionalization on society. It is by now a well-known argument that professional organizations, privileged access to political decisions, and institutionalized power relations go together. And it is at this level, I believe, that the recent crisis of

confidence occurred with regard to the social progress and service ethic claimed by the professions.

Professions compete for the control of tasks in the work place, what Abbott called the jurisdiction of a profession. (In simplistic terms, who is doing what to whom). Jurisdictions describe the contents of a profession's work, and therefore are mutually exclusive, with the result that interprofessional disputes about jurisdiction are characteristic of their development. For those who think that this is a trivial issue in the world of work today, working as a psychologist in a general or psychiatric hospital for a while might provide a quite forceful demonstration to the contrary.

It is said quite often that the boundaries between the professions must be dissolved. But in this regard we have to be very careful, even if this would prove to be possible. After all, professionalization is part of historical processes of "the long duration": the increasing use of scientific knowledge for practical purposes; specialization of tasks; the development of industrial capitalism and industrial state socialism; the expansion of state involvement in providing knowledge-based services; etc. Thus we may believe that the boundaries between the professions need to be dissolved, but the outcome will be quite unpredictable, and we might not like the consequences. The best analogy I can think of here would be unilateral disarmament.

Having introduced the notion of cultural legitimacy and the centrality of work in the abovementioned two theses, the discussion now turns to more practical considerations.

3. WHAT CAN PSYCHOLOGISTS DO THEN?

The suggestions made below are stated prescriptively, and might read as if they represent a blueprint for the professional re-organization of psychology in South Africa. That is certainly not the intention; a long-term, radical review of the profession is not intended. These are rather some relatively short-term measures we as psychologists might take to protect or improve the position of our discipline; in political terminology, one may say that a reformist strategy is involved here. It is therefore more accurate to talk of a kind of interim plan; for a more far-reaching proposal the reader is referred to a doctoral thesis by G.P. Louw at the University of Potchefstroom (1990). A final introductory comment: many of the points raised in this essay have been raised by others as well over the years.

1. The future "growth areas" for psychology in this country, in terms of where the greatest demands will be made on psychology, lie in the health and

educational domains. South African psychologists therefore will have to get involved in these particular fields of practice - at a grassroots or primary level - for their discipline to survive and grow. If psychologists can address the demands and needs of the majority of the population in these sectors effectively, a spin-off effect will be that psychology is made more visible to the new audiences, thereby creating more "friends and supporters of psychology". This is a positive outcome in itself, but it also will supply more people with at least some psychological background. Many of them eventually might end up studying psychology for three or four years, and might then work in exactly these areas.

2. The abovementioned consideration has an organizational implication: the national psychological association will have to provide a home for them as fully fledged members of the psychological community. Thus I believe it was a mistake on PASA's part not to make an Honours degree the qualification for full membership of the Association - as I see it, that is the way we will have to go. Already, many people doing psychological work, in education for example, are in this position. Acknowledge them, and draw them into the psychological community. This will strengthen the Association, and it also will be a move towards its democratization, and away from its elitist image. It might even be a small step towards reducing psychology's alliance to a particular social class or grouping. If you think that it might diminish the professional standing of the discipline, keep in mind that the national association is not a professional association; the strictly professional element of psychology in this country is accommodated by the Professional Board for Psychology.

3. The criticism of psychology's close alliance with powerful institutions in society, and providing the administrative technology "to govern the soul", has been extended to South African psychology as well. One might say that the social basis on which South African psychologists constructed their discipline was too narrow, and that we now want to broaden that social basis, by addressing our claims to legitimacy to new, less powerful audiences. We wish to extend our alliances to groups of people who fall outside the traditional ambit of the profession's practice. The difficulty is that it involves a new set of commitments, which the majority of South African psychologists might find very difficult to make. For a start, psychologists will have to produce knowledge which is not simply administratively useful, but which will assist these groups in the process of their own emancipation. From the debates at the 1990 PASA conference, and at forums such as OASSSA, it would seem that the time is more than right for such attempts (see Swartz, Gibson & Swartz, 1990).

It is quite likely that we will respond differently to different audiences or clients; after all, the nature of the difficulty or problem co-determines the knowledge developed to address it. Forming new alliances and responding differentially to different audiences of course is not new in psychology - we have been doing it all along. For example: psychologists have often developed psychometric instruments to address the personnel selection demands of industry; but to address the difficulties experienced by individuals, various psychotherapeutic techniques were developed.

4. Serious consideration must be given to the removal of the section [37(2)] in the 1974 Act which prescribes psychological acts, i.e. the licensing part of the law. (A licensing law restricts certain activities or practices to certified members of the profession only). Experience over the years has shown that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to enforce this section, and attorneys-general have been reluctant to institute prosecutions under the it. A large number of people in any event are exempted from prosecution if they perform these acts in the ordinary practice of their occupation: academics, teachers, nurses, and social workers, for example. Most psychologists agree that this section of the Act does not work well.

If we abandon this licensing part of the Act, but keep the certification element, it would mean that we would still legally protect the professional title "psychologist". For the rest, let anyone claim to be able to cure, to educate, to provide guidance, to give counselling, and so on. What ought to happen then, is that jurisdictional disputes in the different workplaces of psychologists will direct the division of tasks between competing professions. Such disputes take place even with licensing laws in place, so this suggestion is much less radical than one may think. Furthermore, clinical practice is really the only area of psychology where jurisdictional boundaries are fiercely contested. And as for demarcating its professional expertise from non-professional activities, psychologists simply will have to demonstrate over and over again that they are better than others at what they claim to be able to do.

But what about psychological tests and their control?, I can already hear colleagues ask. It is easy enough to control this uniquely psychological technology via measures already in operation, such as those administered by the HSRC or the Testing Commission. Psychological tests would then be released by these bodies only to those who have received specific training in their use. I believe it is a sound principle to judge expertise via training and experience, rather than in terms of categories of specialization.

Paradoxically, by not tying itself down to tasks, a profession gains distinct advantages in the workplace. If it has a clear focus and a clearly established cognitive base (which psychology has), it may be easier to shift to tasks which become available in everyday practice. Again, all professions change continually as a result of various pressures: market demands, cultural values, specialization, interprofessional competition, and so on. If, as argued earlier, the central reality of a profession is its control of tasks, then freedom to adapt to changing demands of the workplace is a distinct advantage. In his address to the 1990 PASA conference, the American psychologist Wayne Holtzman provided evidence of this when he described the development of a community health psychology practice in Texas.

5. Another alternative is to create a register of practice, and only if one's name appears on that particular register, will one be allowed to practice independently. This generally speaking is the route taken by the British Psychological Society. If we examine where psychologists work, it would seem that very few psychologists are in free, independent practice. The trend in the twentieth century for all professions is to gravitate toward corporate or bureaucratic employment: Abbott (1988, p151) states that even American medicine and law are 50 percent salaried today. Furthermore, there is evidence that professionals in corporate employment identify with their position in management, and diminish their professional allegiance.

What is the implication of this for our argument? All indications are that corporate bodies are less interested in the professional registration of a person, and more in what the person can do. At these worksites people are under the primary control of the corporate body; in education, for example, one can foresee very few problems with non-registered persons. Thus we really need a register only for people in free practice (arguably for clinical psychologists as well given the nature of their work in hospitals). For the rest, the possession of a Masters degree in psychology ought to be enough to qualify themselves as psychologists, but not to free practice.

6. The new PASA constitution contains a reconceptualization of interest groups within the Association. To my mind the most significant aspect of this is the notion of multiple divisions (interest groups) - as many as psychologists would like to form. A similar reconceptualization of the registration categories seems to me overdue. If we carry on registering psychologists, as I have argued above, there seems to be two logical possibilities: either a single registration category "psychologist", or a radical proliferation of registration

categories, similar to the divisions in PASA or the American Psychologcal Association. The attraction of the latter option is that we would take the diversity in psychology seriously, and it would give the profession maximum flexibility to address emerging issues.

7. In line with suggestion 3, it might be worth our while to concentrate on practical rather than theoretical issues, and develop practices within which experiences can be obtained. If this sounds like heresy, allow me to remind you that all practical paradigms in psychology developed like this. In psychoanalysis, for example, new practices developed as a result of the tension between sexual norms and the ways people (women!) lived their lives in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Or in Danziger's (1989) words: "Typically, when psychologists turned their attention to practical, real-life, problems during the first four decades of the twentieth century they developed methods of investigation and modes of conceptualization that were developed sui generis and that diverged sharply from the then existing laboratory science of experimental science. This was nowhere more apparent than in the vast new field of psychodiagnostics, but it was just as much the case in such areas as the psychology of school work and the analysis of practical skills".

Thus what I am asking for is a kind of "thinking with one's hands", in which social or cultural problems can be explored on a limited scale. The development of psychological knowledge in practice obviously will cause strain with the academic audience within psychology; but again, that is not something new. The strain ought not to be too severe: after all, this kind of thinking will be informed by psychological knowledge. Psychologists do not enter into a completely symmetrical dialogue with their clients. Thus it becomes a psychology that is also in dialogue with its own audience of academics and theoreticians, and in which the bond between psychological knowledge and its practices is strengthened.

8. One change in the practices of psychology could be to take the knowledge of the lay public seriously. It would involve abandoning the strategy of "As a professional, I know more about you, your personality, your IQ, etc., than you do". This kind of reasoning is little more than an appropriation of the individual's knowledge about her/himself, knowledge which is then used to make important decisions about that person (see Van Hoorn, 1988). I believe it is also typical of a curative and intervention-orientated approach to human ills - but psychologists by now realize that the developments of the late twentieth-century require a preventive psychology. If the prevention of

mental health problems, of educational and labour difficulties, becomes the future task of psychologists, the reasoning implicit in the curative way of thinking is only going to subtract from psychology's contribution. Exactly how psychologists are going to be agents of prevention rather than cure is of course one of the issues of our times.

9. South African psychology must attempt to have one strong central body represent itself, and I believe the concerns involved in the re-structuring of PASA reflect a realization of this fact. Psychologists must not let the opportunity slip by to attract as many people as possible to its central organization (see also suggestion no. 2). If this sounds trivial, the reader ought to contemplate the position of psychology in the rest of Africa: it is certainly not one that inspires confidence. If the discipline takes its own position in society seriously, it must realize that representation by a single psychological organization (which might be quite diverse within itself) is in its own interest.

Furthermore, the more strongly organized a profession is, the more effective its claims to jurisdiction are. In Abbott's words: "The organized profession can better mobilize its members, can better direct media support of its position, and above all, can better support the effective academic work that generates cultural legitimacy for jurisdiction. ... It also possesses, at least in principle, the means to control its members, and can therefore reassure public fears of untrustworthy work. In contests between professions, the profession with more extensive organization usually wins" (1988, p. 82-83). This is also a strong additional argument for a psychological profession that is not governed by the confines of the medical profession.

10. Related to the abovementioned point, is the consideration that psychology must move out from under the wings of the medical profession, and administer its own professional affairs. Thus an independent professional affairs board must be established for psychology. This certainly is not a new suggestion; as early as 1951 the South African Psychological Association recommended this (Chapter 10 of G.P. Louw's 1990 doctoral thesis contains an exhaustive discussion of this issue). At the 1990 PASA conference it was raised again, now somewhat more urgently, and a motion to investigate this possibility was accepted. At present a task force of the Association is conducting such an investigation. If this route is taken, serious thought would have to be given to its constitution: matters such as the presence of members of the public on the board, and a reminder that psychology is not only a health profession, deserve consideration.

CONCLUSION.

Unity in diversity is also the organizational quest of South African psychology in the years to come. Surely it must be possible to identify at least a few commonalities of interest between psychologists - maybe the present vision statement of PASA might be a starting point. But what PASA members will have to realize is that there are hard bargaining days ahead for psychology as a profession and as an academic discipline. Unfortunately, here we will be even worse off than the politicians: psychologists are sharply divided along political lines, as well as along the lines of the different specializations in psychology.

Notes.

1. The title is drawn from Nietzsche's **Gay Science**: "Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you can be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! At long last the pursuit of knowledge will reach out for its due: it will want to rule and own; and you with it!"

2. This paper was delivered as an address at the 1990 PASA conference. It was a response to the self-examination theme of the conference, and must be read as such. Thus the argument addresses a polemic within the Association, and does not attempt a critique of the process of professionalization itself. Also, the paper is published more than a year after it has been written, and some of the issues may be less pressing than they were then. However, it was felt that the paper should be published in its original form, and that the commentators could provide updates.

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