

Beyond therapy: Career Opportunities for Emerging Psychologists



A compilation of presentations from the
22nd South African Psychology Conference
Thursday, 22 September 2016, 10:30 – 12:30.

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1. Introduction

The PsySSA Division for Research and Methodology hosted a Careers Workshop during the 22nd South African Psychology Congress in September 2016. This workshop comprised a range of panel presentations by various recognised researchers who are working in different sectors of the industry (such as in the corporate sector, education, marketing, health, academia, social development, violence research, psychometry and community-based research). The panel took the form of a presentation and discussion whereby each researcher introduced him/herself, provided a brief description of the kind of work that he/she does as well as how it relates to the specific sector of research, spoke about his/her journey to reach their current position, and answered any career-related questions asked of them by the audience. The audience consisted of Undergraduate, Honours and Masters psychology students, and psychology interns who are interested in a career in research psychology and related fields.

2. Objectives of the Workshop:

The workshop aimed to:

- To equip students with knowledge about research psychology and other research-related career opportunities
- To connect students to key stakeholders in the field of South African research
- To encourage discussions concerning the status of research psychology in South Africa
- To enhance communication and collaboration with student members

In the pages to follow, psychology professionals use an autoethnographic approach to illustrate the diversity of options that a research qualification opens to pursue careers in a number of dynamic fields.

The PsySSA Division for Research Methodology hopes that these accounts will inspire future generations of psychology graduates to think more broadly about what psychology offers as a profession so as not to confine careers in psychology to the traditional silos of the practitioner.

3. Research offers diverse opportunities

Ms. Lynn Hendricks, Director, Research Ambition and Operational Research Training Facilitator, Centre for Evidence-Based Health Care, Stellenbosch University

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I have been in the research field for 12 years and I have taught, supervised, and mentored many students within my academic and professional career. I have a passion for mentoring students because I never quite had the same opportunity when I was not sure about the trajectory my career would take.

As an art major in high school I thought that design and creativity would be beneficial to my career aspiration of a zoologist and wildlife researcher. I had other subjects such as Biology, Science, Maths and Geography and dreamt about the African Serengeti right through my Grade 12 exams. I applied and got rejected at the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch University. Not to be deterred I applied through the University of South Africa and enrolled as a first year Biology student. Life threw me a lucky curveball and I landed up in the United States a few months after graduating from high school. Two days after arriving in the USA, I took my one suitcase and was driven 8 hours to interview and write an entrance exam at a university. I was offered a scholarship to study Biology at Freed-Hardeman University in the small town of Henderson, Tennessee. My suitcase, my aspirations, and I had found direction and a place to call home for the next 4 years.

In my third year I decided to do an Experimental Psychology module as an elective. By the time I had completed by final year I was graduating with a B.Sc in Psychology with a specialisation in counseling. These curveballs. I completed my counseling internship in Tennessee at a home for female juvenile offenders, an NGO for single moms, an ECD centre for kids with special needs and in Alabama at the community female prison and at a NGO which up skills mentally retarded individuals.

I moved back to Cape Town and enrolled in the fulltime, with course work, Research Psychology Masters dual programme between the University of the Western Cape and the University of Oslo. I set my sights on the prized Human Science Research Council internship. I applied for the HSRC internship twice. Each time I did not get the letter I was hoping for. The third time, in my cover letter I stated, "I have applied twice...I have set my goal to do my internship at the HSRC and I will continue applying until I am successful". I started as a Junior Researcher 6 months later. The internship was the defining moment in my research career. I had exposure to senior researchers, how grant applications and funding worked, how international projects were run, how to design studies and write proposals in under 60 minutes and most importantly, how to navigate the publishing phenomenon.

I later worked as a Researcher at the Early Learning Resource Unit where I got experience in Project Management on provincial projects and started working with the Department of Social Development. Later on I went into lecturing part time at the University of the Western Cape and then took a full time position as the Head of Research for Midrand Graduate Institute at the Durbanville, Cape Town campus. I also lectured at Manzini Christian College in Swaziland and a semester at Pneumatix College in Somerset West. I lectured for about 8 years before I felt the need to spread my wings again. I was not sure which way I would be flying until I was headhunted by the City of Cape Town to conduct research on the homeless within the municipality - an amazing opportunity to have a national impact. Research in the political world is a whole new phenomenon altogether...but we cannot speak about it - 'it is classified'.

I started my research consultancy, Research Ambition, in 2013 as I had been consulting for about 5 years prior to students, staff, and NGOs and wanted to start building my company and client database. The company now has a strong client base as well as a service provider database. We see many students and most of the research work is requested instead of applied for.

I also work as an Operational Research Training Facilitator at the Centre for Evidence-Based Healthcare at Stellenbosch University. The world of medical practice and health research has been opened up to me. I decided to return to the desk for my second masters in Clinical

Epidemiology. One of those curve balls I did not see coming, but when I caught it I embraced it. It seems like I have made it full circle back to research in the Health Sciences. I plan to complete next year and then pursue my PhD in Psychiatric Epidemiology and specialise in research methodology.

Sometimes I still wonder about the Serengeti. I stay grounded because I know that I love what I do. I enjoy coming to work each day. I may tire of the amount of things the research life forces you to do to survive in the 'publish or perish' world but this is what I am meant to do. I have travelled to numerous countries with my research, met wonderful and amazing people, I learn something new every day and I have the pleasure of seeing new information that I have conceptualised and generated in print, with the knowledge that people's voices are being heard that may have never have been observed by others or ever make it to the public domain - this is the feeling I get when I think of the Serengeti.

My advice to aspiring psychologists is to follow your dreams with zeal and ambition. Nothing comes easy. You have to work for what you want. You have to be courageous and go after it no matter what it takes. Acknowledge your dreams, put a deadline on it, and start working towards your goal!

Until the lions have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter
(African Proverb)

4. A career in market research

Ms. Rakhee Naik, Kaufman Levin Associates (KLA)

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Market research, in essence, is the interpretation of market information that speaks to consumer behaviour.

I had obtained my Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of the Witwatersrand majoring in Psychology and Media Studies. I had initially focused on completing my Masters in Educational Psychology based on my passion of working with children and more specifically my curiosity of the human mind. I went on to complete my Honours in General Psychology where I was further exposed to statistics and research and design. This provided me with the foundation that was soon be the beginning of my career trajectory. When applying for a Masters course, I applied for a Masters in Educational Psychology and Research Psychology, a response you will often hear from students in this field. This is primarily due to the perception that Research Psychology is not 'real psychology' among other things resulting in students often applying for this course as a second option. Nevertheless, my love for numbers had drawn me into completing my Masters in Research Psychology.

On obtaining my degree, I went on to complete my internship at a non-profit organisation in the education sector where I stayed on as Project Researcher for 3 years. My internship and role at this organisation assisted in the practical application of the theory that I learnt throughout my university career. My day-to-day tasks primarily included monitoring and evaluation activities in the education sector. During my time there, I completed my HPCSA Board Exam in Research Psychology and qualified as a Research Psychologist with the Health Professions Board of South Africa.

I have always had a passion for media-related sectors and market research served as the perfect combination. In 2016, I began working at a Market Research company, Kaufman Levin Associates (KLA), as a Research Manager. KLA provides both quantitative and

qualitative market research services to businesses in all sectors of the South African economy, and in some cases, within Africa and abroad. KLA, through traditional and more innovative methods, provides answers to clients across an array of business needs. Common questions that are often asked by clients include how they are able to obtain new consumers, how they are able to keep their current consumer base, whether their products/ services are as effective as they can be, and whether their marketing techniques are effective in growing their brand. Therefore, understanding who the consumer is and how they behave in relation to their needs and wants, forms a vital component in efficiently being able to address business needs. In this way, KLA prides itself on providing solution-focused and action-orientated insights that can be applied in the real world.

My involvement in market research is primarily from a quantitative viewpoint where my day-to-day tasks include ensuring the smooth running of projects from beginning to end. The typical research process includes writing proposals and costing for projects, questionnaire design, ensuring the smooth running of the data collection/fieldwork and analysis and reporting. Depending on the objectives of the research, analysis and reporting primarily consists of percentages, cross-tabulations and to some extent, correlations, factor analysis, and regression among other statistical techniques. In addition to this, KLA also assists clients in understanding who their consumer is and how they are able to more efficiently target these individuals in growing their presence within the market, including, at times, identifying the price point at which consumers would be most willing to purchase a particular product. Although only touching the surface, this is indicative of the flexibility and broad exposure that one is favoured to when working within this field.

The greatest advantage of research psychology is the flexibility it allows in pursuing a career in almost any sector within the economy. Researchers, with an already innate curiosity, are trained to adapt whilst thinking 'out the box', one of the most advantageous skills that could be used in practically any field. This has resulted in a high demand for researchers in the workplace who approach problems with innovative solutions. Despite market research being particularly deadline-driven, resulting in long hours at certain times, the exposure gained is more often than not, worth it. If pursuing a career within this field, it is important that you are able to work both individually and within a team, are able to manage your time

efficiently, pay attention to detail, be analytical and curious, are able to communicate effectively and are able to work under pressure.

One of the greatest benefits in being a researcher is that despite working in the field for almost 5 years, it is evident that you never stop learning. Market research in particular is an ever- evolving field that progresses on a continuous basis. New learning, techniques and ways of understanding the consumer are consistently being advanced with an intensification on differing sectors, such as advertising, marketing and psychology amongst others, coming together in answering the crucial question that forms the foundation of this industry: How does the consumer behave?

5. Psychology and Academia in motion

Ms. Mandy Wigdorowitz, JvR Psychometrics

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It was the last day to apply to university and my mother went to Wits and stood patiently in line and filled out an application form for me while I sat anxiously waiting at school. At this stage I was still completely unsure of what I wanted to do with my life, but two things were for certain: I wanted to work with, teach, and help people in some or other way and I had a fascination with biology. This much I knew, but at that stage I was not sure of what the best career path to choose was. Needless to say, I still needed to tick a box specifying some degree. So in a last minute flurry and over the phone I told my mom to tick the box that allowed me to apply my two criteria. She went with the BSc option.

In 2011 I got into the programme at Wits. Both relief and nervous excitement filled me. I found myself stuck with so many questions as I am sure most first years can relate to: Did I tick the right box? Was I going to succeed academically at university? What career path did I actually want to follow? And so the questions went on.

I was still unsure about what a BSc was exactly, and so I researched what it involved. The first thing that caught my attention was genetic counseling since it incorporated both biology (genetics) and helping people (counseling). I was thrilled by the prospects of this career.

As a supplementary subject I took psychology since it could bolster the counseling aspect of the degree, and that is when my career path changed. Prior to enlightenment, I fell into the trap that most psychology beginners find themselves in with a preconceived idea of bettering the world using Freudian (or some derivative thereof) techniques. What amazed me was the multitude of applications psychology encompasses. The scope was broad and exciting, and I found myself engrossed in the neuro and cognitive aspects within the field because neuro and cognitive psychology spoke to my interests around biology and people. I

now saw an even more applicable way to merge the two and so I veered away from genetics and moved into the neuro and cognitive realm within the field of psychology.

I completed an undergraduate degree in Psychology and Physiology and went on to completing an Honours degree in Psychology at Wits in 2014 where I took all neuro- and cognitive-related subjects. My research involved the investigation of cognitive functioning using various psychological assessments. There was a way, without using expensive (and oftentimes inaccessible) neuro-imaging techniques that I could research aspects of cognition and subsequently apply them to real-world scenarios.

Throughout my Honours year, I also put what I had learned in theory into practice, where I volunteered at Headway (a rehabilitation center for adults who have acquired a traumatic brain injury). It was an invaluable experience and further shaped my research interests.

I had an unfaltering desire to pursue academia further, but I had reached an impasse as there was no Masters programme in neuro or cognitive psychology (because this was not a pure registration category with the HPCSA). I was also adamant, though, that I wanted to register as a psychology professional. So what was I to do? I felt that I had two options: (1) I could apply for a clinical psychology programme and specialise in neuro and cognitive psychology in a roundabout way, or (2) I could apply for a research psychology programme and conduct research within my areas of interest.

Fortunately I was accepted into the Social and Psychological Research Masters programme at Wits in 2015. During the first MA class, I remember one of my lecturers spoke of two behaviours or qualities through which, if applied, would facilitate the success of the year ahead. Curiosity and commitment had not only been the cornerstone that formed the basis of my MA journey, but these two words continue to guide the way I conceptualise, conduct, and apply research. Being a researcher largely involves wanting to truly grasp a phenomenon, but also requires persistence and dedication.

My MA year was a highly rewarding experience, where I gained an enormous amount of research exposure and knowledge from incredibly talented academics. Through broadening

my paradigmatic horizons, I was also able to conduct research within fields other than neuro and cognitive psychology, and this led to personal rewards and a realisation of the vastness with which research can be applied.

After completing my MA year, I got an internship at JvR Psychometrics (which I will finish in December 2016). JvR Psychometrics is predominantly a psychological test publisher and distributor. On a daily basis, my research involves statistical analysis, validation, development, norming etc., of psychological assessments specific to the South African context. The internship has afforded me the opportunity to become accredited in various psychological assessments including the MBTI, EQ-i 2.0, Hogan assessment, and the StrengthScope.

Although I am a young researcher, I have taken each opportunity presented to me to better the research psychology profession as well as to enhance my personal knowledge. Part of doing this is to critically discuss and present research on national and international platforms. In June 2016 I won the Young Scholar Award to present research at the International Test Commission (ITC) conference in Vancouver, Canada. I have also presented research at the UNISA Student Conference, the South African Psychology Congress, and the South African National Conference on Violence.

Being an active voice in the profession of psychology is highly important to me, and I want the research I do to contribute to the betterment of my fellow South Africans. In my role as an executive member of the Division for Research and Methodology at PsySSA, I am committed to contributing to the field of psychology through continuous and collaborative research. I still have a lot to learn and I am humbled by my mentors and teachers who have shaped me into a researcher and developed in me a critical lens through which to investigate phenomena in the world.

6. Trauma and violence in transition and Organisations

Ms. Sasha Gear, Just Detention International – South Africa (JDI-SA)

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I am not a psychologist – but I am in a realm where psychology would be very useful – and often wish I had some psychological training.

I got my BA with majors in English, sociology and drama and film; and it was my sociology that has had the greatest influence on my subsequent path – which has been rooted in research. Basically I did well in my 3rd year sociology research project, and had enjoyed the experience, and, to be honest, did not have a clue of what else I could do with my BA other than research, so set about looking for a position that would allow me to do more of it.

After a little stint as an administrator in an NGO where promises that I would be able to get involved with research never materialised, I was fortunate to get a nine-month research contract with a small housing NGO to look at how and if RDP housing was economically empowering its beneficiaries. I got the job with no experience on the issues, because all of those who did have some experience on the issues could not accept the very modest remuneration that was being offered.

It was hugely valuable for me in that it was the stepping-stone I needed to give me enough research experience to get a more substantial research position. I was then hired as a researcher at the CSVR on a project called *Violence and Transition*. For my part of the project, I was required to look at former combatants from different sides of the political spectrum – including MK, APLA and the SANDF – and to trace their involvement in violence prior to the political transition and then following 1994. It became a much broader exercise, looking at their current circumstances and challenges including a substantial focus on trauma and its manifestations in their current lives; and attempting to push for greater support for ex-combatants.

Following this project I was fortunate to get another research position at the CSVR, this time as part of the Criminal Justice Programme to look at the dynamics around sex and sexual violence happening in prison. This work led into a longer-term focus by the organisation on the issue. Indeed, one of the things that I really appreciated about the CSVR was the potential that staff had to develop areas of work, more or less from scratch, and establish a concerted organisational focus on them. It also meant that one was rarely ever restricted to research. For example, I was able to be part of an initiative to develop a new policy to address sexual violence in prison; I developed training materials for prison staff, linking survivors of prisoner rape with support, and I was involved in advocacy with the Portfolio Committee for Correctional Services.

This prepared me well for my current position, which is the programme director of an organisation called Just Detention International – South Africa. We are a health and human rights organisation dedicated to addressing sexual abuse in places of detention. It is not so much a research organisation – although we have done bits of research – most notably on prison officers’ experiences of violence. We are much more focused on policy development and advocacy. We are currently, for example, conducting a project at Leeuwkop prison to pilot a model to implement the Department of Correctional Services’ relatively new policy to address sexual abuse in their facilities (this involves working with warders, health and psycho-social staff, and soon also inmates).

We also do a great deal of advocacy work, and are working with survivors of prisoner rape, both to use their stories to raise awareness and concern for the issues, and in an attempt to create support networks for them, and make it easier for other people who have been sexually abused in prison to come forward. And boy, as we go about this, I often wish that I had a psychology degree...

As is often the way in NGOs, I also spend a huge amount of time on seeking funding for our work, reporting to donors, developing budgets and human resources policies etc., - not all my favourite stuff, but certainly skill-broadening.

A few years ago I went through a spell where all I wanted to do was bake cup cakes and be a DJ - and give myself a break from violence! When I realised that that would not cut it for me for a range of reasons, I did a little bit of exploration on other research opportunities – like maybe marketing research (on cupcake eating behaviour) or with corporates, and I very quickly began to appreciate all over again, the huge variety of meaningful work that one gets to do in many of our NGOs: That you can move from researching a “problem” into a huge range of “solution developing” and nuancing work. And that is not necessarily easy to come by elsewhere.

7. Research in Psychometrics and Assessment

Dr Nicola Taylor, Director of the Research Department at JvR Psychometrics

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I started my journey into Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch in 1998. Initially, I wanted to study Physiotherapy, but after some career counseling I decided that it was a bit too 'hands-on' for me. I had registered for a BSc with Psychology and Physiology as Majors, and happily completed my studies. When the time came to decide whether to pursue Honours in psychology or physiology, I chose psychology, because that at least included elements of human physiology, while physiology did not include aspects of psychology. During my Honours year, I realised my love for research, psychometrics, and statistics, and eventually decided to pursue my Masters by dissertation under the supervision of Prof Deon de Bruin (there were not many research psychology Masters programmes at that stage!). The plan was to develop a personality test based on the Five Factor model of personality for South Africa (which is now called the Basic Traits Inventory). Before I could register at Stellenbosch though, Deon took a position at the Rand Afrikaans University as director of the Institute for Child and Adult guidance. So I could either drop the Masters, study something different under someone else, or move to Joburg. Deon muttered the fateful words: "Stick with me and I'll make you famous" in his attempt to convince me to continue working with him. I duly followed him to Joburg, working as his research assistant for 3 years. I also completed my internship as a psychometrist at the same time.

After I finished my Masters degree, I wanted to move into the 'real world' and out of academia. I got the opportunity to speak to Jopie de Beer at JvR about starting a research department for them. JvR was in the process of publishing the Basic Traits Inventory and one of our other tests, the Sources of Work Stress Inventory, so we already had a good relationship. I spent six months at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, working with Prof Boele de Raad as part of a research exchange programme and writing my proposal for my PhD. I started at JvR when I returned, and have now been running the research department there for over 11 years.

I completed my PhD in 2008, which was no joke, working and studying at the same time! But luckily when you live, eat, and breathe research, it is easier to see it as just another project that needs to be done. I have served on numerous committees, including the DRM at PsySSA and Executive at SIOPSA, and I now also sit on the Steering Committee for the Association of Test Publishers in South Africa. I am passionate about psychology and particularly around assessment. I still have ties to academia (I am a senior research associate at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at UJ) and occasionally lecture, supervise students, moderate courses and exams, and mark theses and dissertations (for my sins).

We get to do lots of fun things in my research department. We get to do the standard norming and validation required of every test in South Africa. We also get to adapt assessments for the SA context and occasionally develop new ones. We do applied research with companies, validating their selection processes and batteries, profiling jobs, and validating their own 360 assessments. We do thematic or content analysis with 360 feedback comments and leadership development feedback. We also get to do things like profile applicants for reality shows, do research on personality and social media, look at generational differences in derailment and emotional intelligence, and profile successful farmers who have participated in a television series by reviewing transcripts and linking that to assessment results. I am not saying this to boast, but to point out that research is exciting! Every project is different and offers the opportunity to learn something new.

The advice that I have for new (and old) research psychologists is that you are only limited by your own imagination. Research is everywhere. Opportunities abound if you just look for them. As a researcher, you have the skills to investigate, question, and identify inconsistencies. You also have the skills to figure out how to answer those questions. So go do it. The world is your oyster!