

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Third Southern African Students' Psychology Conference 2013 Johannesburg, 24 to 28 June 2013

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Southern African **Students'**
PSYCHOLOGY CONFERENCE 2013

My conference experience began with the phrase 'your opinion, as a student, does not matter until you get to postgrad. And your opinion at postgrad level does not count until you're in Masters or PhD.' I cannot remember who exactly told me this in my first year, but it is a belief that seems to be present in many students at tertiary level. So it is needless to say how stressful it was presenting not one, but two papers at the conference (although one was more proposal-based).

When the 'call for papers' went out for the 2013 Southern African Students' Psychology Conference, I thought it was the ideal platform to get my Research Psychology Masters' dissertation out there. My research, entitled Sex, Nipple-caps, and Smoke and Mirrors looked at the reported experiences of women who worked

as strippers in the more upmarket locations in Johannesburg. However, my most significant memory of the experience was on the morning of the conference, just coming off the assessment period for my second Masters in Clinical Psychology at the University of Pretoria.

It was a cold morning. The air frosted as it left my mouth. I remember standing before the monolithic Great Hall at Wits University and feeling so small. I had been a 'Witsie' for seven long years and now I felt like a stranger to the place. The phrase 'your opinion, as a student, does not matter,' came crashing down in my mind. I could not believe that my thoughts would echo along these walls and I would be added to the list of academics that braved their voices to be heard. No words can express how much of an honour it was to be granted such an opportunity through the conference

The truth is many students desire to be counted as academics in their own right and to be respected for it. In my time spent at Wits I have met many students that have been praised by their lecturers and professors as being the future of academia. It was heartening then to understand that the field of psychology in Southern Africa not only recognises this, but also gives students the platform to further their own experiences.

The organisation of the event was well structured, from the initial email to the actual presentation itself. I was very impressed with the peer-review process in the selection of abstracts and presentations. It made me feel that my thoughts mattered. The presentation guide that listed each delegate, his or her biography, and their presentation or poster was very informative. It gave a brief overview of the types of new research unfolding in the field of psychology, within Southern Africa. I was proud to be part of the entire process. My own presentation moved from a ball of nerves to a well received and debate provoking session with like-minded peers and professionals.

When I presented for the second time with my current Masters team from the University of Pretoria, it can be said that we all found the experience very exhilarating. Much time was spent going to other presentations and discussions. Probably the most beneficial aspect was the post-presentation discussions that allowed people to connect and engage in critical thought.

With all this in mind, I have decided to revisit that phrase and rework it to say 'opinions aside, students do matter and should be developed so that they too can make a difference, academically.'



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Darrian Long is currently in his second Master's degree (Clinical Psychology) at the University of Pretoria. He holds a B.A. Honours in Industrial Sociology and a M.A. in Research Psychology from Wits. His interests include gender and sexuality, postgraduate psychotherapeutic training, and community mental health.