

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## **The Third Southern African Students’ Psychology Conference Johannesburg, 24 to 28 June 2013**

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I love learning, whether it is through a lecture, practical application or a book. Not only that, I love the opportunity experiential learning brings to the individual. Furthermore, when it is incorporated in a learning programme, the reflective component of experiential learning provides a heightened sense of being part of something bigger than self. It not only enriches the individual with a deeper knowledge of one’s self and capabilities, but also an opportunity to peer into this emerging new professional identity rearing to go and contribute! That’s the essence of what I came with to the Student’s Conference. Although it was my first students’ conference to attend, I had a sense of ‘this is bigger than me this is a special moment

in time' euphoric feeling. No other experience could have captured this 'awesome' feeling for me than the award winning WITS choir.



Their lovely voices filled the auditorium and whetted our appetites in anticipation of the conference programme. I felt the spirit of camaraderie permeate the air, a wonderful sense of togetherness and I thought to myself 'aha! We are now here, it is time!'

### **The pre-conference workshop experience ...**

The pre-conference workshops yielded for me a great opportunity to have an appreciation of the identity of a psychology professional, their role and responsibilities. I enjoyed the *Not the Oprah Winfrey Show* workshop session. In it I could hear the gruelling experience of becoming an excellent writer of scientific material. This panel of professional writers helped me to appreciate the old adage saying 'practice makes perfect!' Seeing the editor of the *South African Journal of Psychology*, Professor Anthony Pillay, was a gob-smacking moment for me as I had read several of his articles for my research project. I had the wonderful privilege to shake his hand and have a brief chat! The *Peeking behind the papers* workshop session which introduced the People Behind The Papers initiative was a moving experience for me. The idea of capturing the experiences of someone who is making a contribution to the psychology arena in some way or other is absolutely genius! In my view, it is these very stories that inspire and encourage emerging professionals. Mentioned during the session was Professor David Fourie whose reflections on his experiences were captured before his untimely demise. Truly remarkable!

### **The main conference experience...**

Soon the conference was officially opened and it came to life! Presentation sessions consisted of both paper and poster presentations. Being a research psychology

student, the ongoing dialogue on the research psychology discipline and its impact on the South African landscape tweaked my interest and hence I attended most of those sessions. Sibusiso Maseko, one of the students from the Unisa 2013 MA Research Consultation (Marc) programme facilitated a round table discussion wherein Minja Millovanovic, Fana Simelane, Maxine Chow and Carien Duplessis (a fellow 2013 Marc student) shared their views on the relevance and practice of research psychology within the contexts of academia, counselling, marketing, and social research. Each session on research psychology held in different capacities helped me to see and appreciate the important and diverse role this discipline plays in our society today. It seemed in essence though, to be the ‘unsung hero’ of our time. I also attended other paper presentations with the likes of Mbongiseni Madikane, Sheryl Neel and Catherine Rogers, and heard them speak of their experiences from their chosen field of study. As I sat and listened, I realised that all these presenters were special and exceptional in their own way. They had each brought their learning experience to share! What a wonderful platform this student conference was to every student and professional! So as I also put up my poster presentation, I had a sense that I had something to share with the greater student community on the value of engaging in reflective practice.



Owing to personal circumstances, I was unable to attend the closing ceremony, and yet it was at this event that my poster was acknowledged as best poster and so I was awarded the Best Poster Presentation Award! Coming to know this later on, I had mixed feelings of disbelief and elation! I considered all the lovely posters that had been showcased beside my own and was amazed and humbled that mine had received the most number of votes! Reflecting on the journey of the poster’s production process... truly it is a privilege, an experience for which I will forever be grateful. Special acknowledgements go to my lecturers and my peers, each of you hold a special ‘reflection nugget’ in me as you have contributed to my Marc experience in more ways than you will ever know. Lastly, special thanks go to the wider team of student conference organisers, thank you for providing us with this platform to learn, share and grow!

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



**Kudzai Singatsho Nyabadza** is currently studying towards a Master's degree in Research Psychology at Unisa. Her research interests lie in experiential learning, reflexivity, identity development, and social group issues. For her Master's project she is using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of apartheid-era victims and the effects of intergenerational humiliation.