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UFS
THE HUMANITIES
PSYCHOLOGY

RESEARCH MENU

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

2025

The research interests of the staff members in the Department of Psychology (UFS) include a wide array of research topics. The use of qualitative or quantitative approaches (or a combination of these) in pure or applied research enables us to explore, describe, explain, and predict human phenomena, thus gaining insight into individuals and the shaping of society. In the pursuit of the discovery of new knowledge, we use systematic ways of finding answers to questions such as:

- What are the sociohistorical and psychological factors that shape the development and personality of individuals?
- How do cultural and WEIRD vs. non-WEIRD contextual living conditions impact personality development?
- How do individuals define themselves and find their place in the world?
- What are the antecedents and outcomes of optimal human functioning and well-being?
- What are the psychosocial risk and protective factors that influence the psychological well-being of individuals?
- How can cultural variables explain or account for well-being, and how can well-being be promoted across the life span?
- How is mental illness conceptualised in various population groups and what are the various socio-demographic variables linked to well-being and mental health?
- Which constructs best predict the psychological well-being within the student population?
- How do community engagement activities facilitate development in students and community partners?
- What is the journey of becoming a professional within the field of psychology?
- Why does criminal behaviour develop and how do offender populations cope and adjust?
- How can measuring instruments be developed and validated for cross-cultural settings?
- How can research facilitate the development and evaluation of programmes?

KAREN DE VILLIERS

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Highest qualification: MA (Counselling Psychology), 1996

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research theme: Cyberpsychology concerning social comparisons on social networking sites

The majority of research on the mental-health effects of social networking has focused on Facebook, with only a few studies looking into the effects of Instagram on psychological well-being. Social media allows users to express their thoughts and feelings through writing, pictures, and videos. Instagram is the most popular platform among teenagers due to its extensive features. Little is known about the social and psychological factors that lead to consumers becoming fanatics of this app.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- What effect does Instagram have on users' mental health and behaviour during a pandemic?
- What is the psychology of Instagram likes, and how do they relate to self-esteem and social status?
- What effect does extensive and frequent use of social media (including Instagram) have on self-esteem and identity integration?
- What is the relationship between social comparison and self-esteem among late-adolescent Instagram users?

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students

PROF PAUL FOUCHÉ

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Highest qualification: DPhil, 1999

Post level/rank: Full Professor

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research theme: Psychobiographical and psycho-historical studies.

My research involves the psychological study of deceased exemplary, iconic, and significant personalities within a socio-historical, cultural and political context. These personalities may be seen as outliers or persons of “historical significance” who have had a lasting impact on society. It entails the psycho-historical study of exemplary and sometimes controversial South Africans, as well as international figures in the fields of politics, warfare, arts, music, literature, academia, science, and leadership. Most projects are studies from a longitudinal-developmental trajectory perspective, as well as analysed from a cultural and WEIRD vs. non-WEIRD perspective.

The research question I am interested in answering: What significant socio-cultural, political, historical, as well as psychological factors shaped the development and personality of the psychobiographical subject (personality) under study, and what was the impact of WEIRD vs. non-WEIRD contextual factors on personality development?

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor

Available to supervise	
Master’s students ✓	PhD students ✓

PROF JACQUES JORDAAN

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2015

Post level/rank: Senior Lecturer

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Overarching research themes:

- Psychological criminology which explores the intersection of psychology and criminology, aiming to utilize psychological knowledge to understand, explain, describe, and prevent offending behaviour.
- Assessing the effectiveness of interventions and programmes within the correctional environment.
- Examining the psychometric properties of measurement scales commonly used in offender studies.

My research interest primarily lies in the field of psychocriminology and focuses on various aspects of incarcerated offenders, including their mental health, coping abilities, adjustment, aggression, psychopathy, criminal thinking, victimisation, perpetrator trauma, and risk behaviours. Furthermore, I have a keen interest in conducting studies related to the psychometric properties of measurement scales and questionnaires frequently used in offender studies. Additionally, I am also interested in studies focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of intervention programmes within the correctional environment.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- What are the psychometric properties of the Prison Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ) among male and female incarcerated offenders?
- What are the psychometric properties of the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) among male and female incarcerated offenders?
- What predictors contribute significantly to the variance of recidivism in male incarcerated offenders?
- Which personality traits describes the most significant percentage of variance in the criminal thinking styles of incarcerated offenders?

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓

DR AYANDA KHANYE

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Highest qualification: PhD (Higher Education), 2016

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Educational Psychology

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Overarching research themes:

- Career development
- Child psychology

I am primarily interested in research topics regarding career development across the life span, focusing on community-based empowerment and social change, exploring issues of inequality, class, and gender, and how these impact people's career development and career transitioning in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

I am also interested in how children learn, effective child development strategies, strategies to promote early childhood, and play interventions with traumatised children.

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods ✓

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students

DR MOSA MALEMA

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Highest qualification: PhD

Post/Rank: Lecturer

Registration: Clinical Psychologist

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Overarching research themes:

Wellbeing and development throughout the lifespan

Dr Malema's research interests seek to explain the relationship between past traumatic experiences and human development throughout the lifespan. She is primarily interested in the impact of complex trauma on parenting ability, emotional development and vulnerability to developing Psychopathology later in life. Dr Malema's secondary research interests lie in Health Psychology and she focuses specifically on wellbeing in persons with Epilepsy and identity and meaning construction in individuals with either male or female factor infertility.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- What is the impact of historical complex trauma experiences on parenting ability?
- What is the relationship between complex trauma and emotional development?
- Why is there increased predisposition to mental illness in adult survivors of childhood complex trauma?
- Do people with Epilepsy enjoy a fulfilling life?
- What are the Psychologists' levels of awareness of the impact of Epilepsy on psychological functioning?
- How does infertility shape the self-concept in men and women with either primary or secondary infertility?
- What psychological constructs underlie subjective reports of life satisfaction in persons with epilepsy or infertility?

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	Ph.D. students ✓

MULALO MPILO

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Highest qualification: MA Research Psychology

Post/Rank: Lecturer

Registration: Research Psychologist

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Overarching research themes

- Child poverty with a specific focus on material deprivation
- Child well-being
- Developing Human capabilities and social cohesion in families

My research is founded on the idea that childhood is a social construct, recognising children as social actors with agency, rights, and a set of capabilities. This stance acknowledges that children's lives should be understood within context. Considering South Africa's socio-political landscape, the area of child well-being research finds relevance. The overarching aim of my research covers areas such as child well-being, Child poverty and Material Deprivation, using a child-centred perspective.

Another area of interest is families' role in developing human capabilities and social cohesion.

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students	Ph.D. students

DR PRAVANI NAIDOO

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2010

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Not applicable

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Overarching research themes:

- Student well-being
- The positive psychology of disability

Specific focus areas:

- Informed largely by 3rd wave positive psychology, I am interested in mechanisms and processes that promote student well-being, with a focus on mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions, and self-compassion.
- Within the positive psychology of disability, I am interested in exploring well-being literacy and optimal human functioning amongst persons with disabilities.

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓

PROF LUZELLE NAUDÉ

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2008

Post level/rank: Full Professor

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research theme: 'Who am I?': identity development during adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Individuals follow various pathways to answer the pressing question: Who am I? This process is filled with excitement and possibility, but also with challenges and contradictions. I am interested in the ways in which individuals define themselves and find their place in the world.

From a lifespan developmental perspective, the journey towards an established sense of self is present throughout life but is especially prominent during the 'third decade of life' when late adolescents and emerging adults have the opportunity to reflect on the past, present, and future. My research agenda includes status and narrative perspectives and is focused on the interface between identity dimensions and socio-cultural contexts (such as family, romantic relationships, social media, and education), with a strong appreciation for the dynamics of diversity in the multicultural milieu of South Africa. I follow mixed-methods, quantitative, and qualitative approaches when exploring topics such as intersectionality and the integration of multiple identities, transformational journeys regarding self and society, and the challenges of forming an integrated identity in contexts of change and transition.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- How do adolescents and emerging adults define themselves? Which identity domains (gender/sexual, ethnic, career/professional, spiritual) are salient in their lives?
- What processes do individuals follow to resolve what Erikson called the 'identity crisis'? How do they explore their 'possible selves' and finally commit to an integrated, but multidimensional understanding of who they are?
- How is identity development informed by contextual aspects such as friends, families, romance, higher-education studies, the workplace, and social media?
- What are the challenges that individuals experience in the process of finding a sense of self?

For more information, please visit the *IDEaS* interdisciplinary research hub at www.ufs.ac.za/ideas-hub

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods ✓
Available to act as		
Supervisor ✓		Co-supervisor
Available to supervise		
Master's students ✓		PhD students ✓

DR CARLA NEL

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2013

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Clinical Psychology

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Overarching research themes:

The life stories of eminent, exceptional or exemplary historical figures have often been subjected to psychological dissection, contributing to the discipline's theoretical development. My interest lies in such psychobiographical exploration of single and multiple cases, specifically with the aim of understanding adjustment and achievement within the context of adversity.

Specific focus areas:

- The exploration and understanding of exceptional individuals' personality development and the attainment of psychological well-being within specific socio-historical contexts;
- Utilising psychobiographical research within the context of professional training in psychology;
- Methodological developments within life history research.

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓

DR LINDI NEL

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2012

Post level/rank: Senior Lecturer

Registration category: Clinical Psychology

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Overarching research theme: **Becoming a psychologist – the journey.**

My research focus area is *attachment processes and practices* as it relates to various parenting contexts. In this regard, I ask and explore critical questions regarding different family structures, and (de)attachment beyond infancy. This focus area includes ways of relating, methods of attaching and implications for parenting I prefer to work from a psychofortigenic framework – suggesting that most of these topics are explored from a ‘what works well / meaning-making’ approach rather than a ‘what goes wrong’ stance.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- Attachment between caregivers and children – why and how?
- Which practices maintain healthy attachment in various types of relationships?
- Which dynamics, processes, and practices contribute to positive attachment and how is it experienced?
- In considering the development in the field of attachment theory and practice in the context of familial trends (including different family structures), where do we stand, what do we know, and more importantly, what do we *not know*?

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master’s students ✓	PhD students ✓

DR MPH O RAMARUMO

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology) 2014

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Clinical Psychology

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Overarching research theme:

I am interested in the following research areas:

- Substance abuse and intervention amongst youth
- Mental health and wellbeing of people with chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes
- Medical negligence and mental health
- Psycho-legal research

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- Substance abuse among young people and the impact substances have on their mental health.
- People with chronic conditions have comorbid mental health issues and interventions tailored to address those needed.
- Professional medical negligence.

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓

DR NTSOAKI FLORENCE TADI

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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2011

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Clinical Psychology

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Overarching research theme: Cultural perspectives on parenting and mental Health

Studies with children enable us to learn more about their development and identify effective ways to help them develop as responsible citizens with the potential to contribute positively to society. My special interest and goal is to collaborate and engage with communities to gain insights and conduct culturally sensitive research.

Specific focus areas:

- Parenting Styles and Mental Health Outcome
- Identifying culturally relevant risk factors for suicide among Sesotho youth in South Africa
- Cultural Perspective on Mental Health – Mental Health Literacy
- Parental Mental Health Literacy

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓

HENRY TAYLOR

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Highest qualification: MSc (Counselling Psychology), 2003

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research theme:

The relationship between different variables and psychological well-being/satisfaction with life/happiness.

I am also interested in the benefits of creative art therapy/expressive art therapy interventions for health and well-being.

The research questions I am interested in answering:

My particular interest is in the factors (variables) that increase (and/or decrease) people's psychological well-being/satisfaction with life/happiness, since every person strives towards well-being and/or happiness.

- Is there a relationship between variables such as coping, locus of control, spirituality, relatedness to nature, and humour and life satisfaction among students/emerging adults?
- Is there a relationship between personality traits (e.g., the big five) and satisfaction with life/happiness/success or conversely anxiety/depression?
- Different patient populations' (lived) experiences of the effectiveness of art therapy interventions.

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students

ELOISE VENTER

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Highest qualification: MA (Counselling Psychology), 2017

Post level/rank: Lecturer

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research themes:

- Early childhood development (ages three to six)
- Middle childhood development (ages 6-12)
- Developmental psychology from early childhood up to and including adolescence
- Parent-child interactions/efficacy of particular parenting styles or techniques
- Gottman method of relationship counselling
- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and the development of ACT-based interventions
- Neurodevelopmental disorders (ADHD and learning disabilities)
- Scoping reviews
- Court preparation of child witnesses

The research questions I am interested in answering:

- Which factors contribute to optimal developmental outcomes during early childhood?
- Do existing models of understanding early childhood development adequately explain the development of South African pre-schoolers?
- Which parenting styles result in the best outcomes for South African adolescents?
- What is the relationship between parenting style and mental-health outcomes in South African adolescents?
- How does the efficacy of the Gottman method of relationship counselling compare to that of other frequently used relationship counselling approaches?
- How can Acceptance and Commitment therapy processes be adapted for application with children in middle childhood?

Research approach		
Quantitative	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods

Available to act as	
Supervisor	Co-supervisor ✓

Available to supervise	
Master's students ✓	PhD students

PROF STEPHEN WALKER

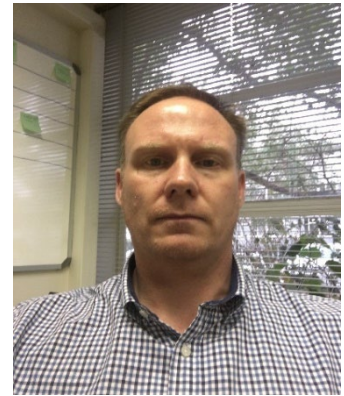
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Highest qualification: PhD (Psychology), 2003

Post level/rank: Full Professor

Registration category: Counselling Psychology

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Overarching research themes:

I have two primary areas of research interest. The first falls within the field of Contextual Behavioural Science, specifically Relational Frame Theory (RFT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). The second area of research focuses on professional issues in clinical and counselling psychology.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ACT is a third-wave cognitive behavioural therapy focussed on the development of psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility is “the ability to feel and think with openness, to attend voluntarily to your experiences of the present moment, and to move your life in directions that are important to you, building habits that allow you to live in accordance with your values and inspirations”.¹ My research focusses on the relevance of ACT processes and the efficacy ACT interventions in several areas, including psychological wellbeing, medical psychology, health promotion, meaning in life and, sport and performance. I am interested in these processes and outcomes across age ranges and cultural contexts.

Possible research questions:

- How effective are brief ACT interventions at increasing treatment compliance in chronic illness in under-resourced communities?
- Which psychological processes are associated with psychological wellbeing and psychological distress among student athletes?
- Which psychological processes are associated with body image and drive for muscularity among males in emerging adulthood?

Issues in Professional Psychology

I have a particular interest in the professional life of practicing psychologists. This includes topics such as professional ethics, practitioner burnout, boundary setting and professional development.

Possible research questions:

- What is the state of professional ethics research in South Africa?
- How do early career clinical and counselling psychologists navigate therapeutic boundaries?
- Which ethical issues are most prominent for psychologists working with children and adolescents in South Africa?

Research approach		
Quantitative ✓	Qualitative ✓	Mixed methods
Available to act as		
Supervisor ✓	Co-supervisor ✓	
Available to supervise		
Master's students ✓	PhD students ✓	

¹ Hayes, S.C. (2019). *A Liberated Mind*. New York: Avery. (p.5).

