

Widening participation in psychology: Student perspectives through analysis of interviews on how an interest in psychology may be met for as many as possible

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Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teaching staff and students associated with a long-standing Certificate of Higher Education in Psychology course. Participants were invited to give their views upon why a declining number of people from 'wider participation' or 'socially disadvantaged' backgrounds come forward to register and seek a qualification or simply satisfy their thirst for studying psychology at a good level. After transcription and analysis the themes that emerged are considered and their implications for widening participation in the undergraduate study of psychology discussed. The results provide preliminary data for comparison with more mainstream degree level programmes. An attempt to define and distinguish between widening participation and students of a socially disadvantaged background is made through students' interpretation of these concepts. The seeming lack of support for open-access, first level qualifications in psychology that offer part-time study to support educational or personal development alongside employment and other personal commitments are discussed.

Keywords: *widening participation versus social disadvantage; atypical student; lifelong learning; mature students; student progression; perceptions of psychology.*

THIS RESEARCH originated from discussions between a colleague and myself, as two psychologists teaching in mainstream higher education, jointly delivering a Research Methods module in an adult education (Lifelong Learning) context. The nature of open-access, often part-time, qualifications is that of embracing a wide variety of people from backgrounds that provide representation of most categories within the 'wider participation' remit such as: age; gender; ethnicity; educational and/or cultural background; socio-economic status; employment status; any form of disability or medical condition. In summary, an atypical qualification will tend to attract an atypical student and problems of 'levelling out' a disparate intake towards an equal level of minimum competence is often very challenging and not for everyone's taste who teaches at Higher Educa-

tion (HE) level. However, the work is deeply rewarding, particularly in the instances of unpicking previous educational experiences towards better self-confidence and achieving unresolved academic potential. The types of students that enrol do not represent a typical undergraduate in that cohorts are often skewed towards people overwriting a previous decision to leave education prior to either further or higher education. It also tends to attract people who are interested in the subject but have no need of a qualification or the desire to commit to a full-time degree programme without 'testing the water'. Some students just enrol to study a subject that was not freely available when they first studied and the 'kudos' of doing it 'at university' has additional appeal especially if they have children for whom a degree is almost a natural expectation.

At this point it is worthwhile distinguishing between the first of many terminological conflicts that this whole area seems to hold. This study looked at students and staff in what was previously known as an adult education department. It did not look at students who were part of a lifelong learning programme within mainstream departments of a university. The adult education programme discussed here has existed for approaching 40 years at the University of Leicester and previously sat within the School of Education. It now falls within the College of Social Sciences and is presently delivered through the University of Leicester Institute of Lifelong Learning (LILL). This may prompt a debate in its own right as to where lifelong learning as a concept is best addressed but that is not the primary concern of this study. A good discussion of such matters and the fact that they are not restricted to the UK but also occur in Australia amongst other places is well presented at a general level by Candy (2000).

There is little direct examination of how widening participation specific to the study of Psychology or any other subject available. However Educational Action Research (Bowl, Cooke & Hockings, 2008) does attempt to correct this by reporting the first phase of a project aimed at taking both a psychological and sociological approach to seeing how this may be addressed. What these authors propose is better self-scrutiny within universities to establish students' expectations and conceptualisations of HE. Furthermore they suggest better integration of research with teaching practice within universities and the creation of a paradigm of reflective consideration of engagement for all students. In particular at this initial stage, they raise the topic of how teaching practitioners in HE often feel isolated from the more traditional research practices of article publication and thus have little opportunity to contribute to the academic literature on the subject.

What was particularly useful to examine the area of psychology qualifications specifi-

cally aimed at widening participation was that in this instance the author was fortunate in having good access to volunteer participants through her role as Course Director for a Certificate of Higher Education in Psychology. This is a Level 1 at HE, part-time, two-year, evening qualification offered by the LILL with three cohorts: two in Leicester and one in Northampton. Beyond helping with this project, being involved in qualitative research with a focus, real procedures and results was useful as a teaching tool for the group. Discussions around obtaining ethical approval through the correct procedures were enhanced not only by having a primary example of the processes but also by having personal significance as a participant.

Thus, the aim of this work was to identify what is a 'widening participation' student of Psychology, how it feels to be one and the barriers that may stop others from similar backgrounds also taking advantage of part-time study of Psychology. Since it is the economics of running such programmes that often determine their viability and favour, it is from HEFCE the first definition of Widening Participation is drawn:

Widening participation addresses the large discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different social groups. Under-representation is closely connected with broader issues of equity and social inclusion, so we are concerned with ensuring equality of opportunity for disabled students, mature students, women and men, and all ethnic groups.'

(Accessed 30 March 2009 from: www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/)

But what is widening participation (WP) from a layperson's point of view? Is social disadvantage (SD), a term favoured by Government towards an institution's performance figures, the same thing and why are the numbers of students falling on programmes that cater specifically for diversity of intake and more flexible part-time study at HE level? Can a person's circumstances based on postcode and a deprivation index be an appropriate way to define the

advantage or disadvantage someone has purely in terms of supposed socio-economic status? What can we, as practitioners, do about it? Is it a general malaise in HE or has Psychology unique problems that set it apart?

Psychology typically appeals to a different demographic to other adult education programmes within LILL through having more enrolments with few or no previous qualifications rather than graduates returning to study interests such as Archaeology, Ecology, Art or Local History, etc. It has a comparable intake in terms of educational background to the Counselling programme offered by the University of Leicester and run at the same centres albeit with a fraction of enrolments and no attached progression routes. Thus can Psychology as a subject be more helpful in the drive towards HE for WP/SD individuals overall than it currently is? Has it got special appeal and what is it that Psychology has that draws people towards a HE qualification in the first place? How do people construct the terms: 'psychology', 'widening participation' and 'social disadvantage'?

Thus, some definitions and alternative perspectives to represent the reality and the essence of the matter are required. What benefits the study of Psychology offers need to be analysed along with perceived obstacles to involvement. Observed shortcomings and suggestions for the future from the 'consumers' would also seem a sensible and possibly fruitful inquiry that should create new ideas for improving appeal and hence enrolments.

Method

To collect patterns of conceptualisation, a qualitative method was employed to allow free expression and participants to structure their responses through natural discourse. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven men and 13 women across all three cohorts of students on the Certificate in Psychology. The average age of the students interviewed was 37 years with age ranging

from 23- to 57-years-old. In terms of ethnicity: 15 declared they were 'White'; two declared they were 'Mixed'; one declared she was 'Asian' and two declared they were 'Black'. Of the sample, seven paid their own course fees and 13 received a waiver through LEA support. The large majority of students on the Certificate did not have a HE qualification already. Two students (one Northampton; one Leicester) each held a Certificate of HE in Counselling; one student was a Chartered Secretary and one student had three good A levels which would have gained her entry to university in most circumstances if she had so wished. The remaining 16 participants either held vocational qualifications such as Level 3 NVQs (three students); BTEC (one student); City and Guilds award (two students) or no qualifications beyond compulsory education (10 students). All features of the sample were consistent with properties of the whole group of 28 students enrolled on the Certificate.

The research took place in January 2009 with students due to take a Research Methods module either in March 2009 or March 2010. They were asked if they would be prepared to volunteer to provide data for these classes. It was also explained verbally to them that there was a further purpose of providing material for an upcoming symposium on WP due for the 2009 British Psychological Society Annual Conference. No obligation was placed on the students to take part and those that volunteered arranged to meet with the researcher prior to class entirely on a voluntary basis with no peer awareness, unless voluntarily divulged, of who had taken part or not. It was also emphasised that all data would be anonymous and only examined as group data. Thus, the interview was primarily framed as a mechanism to provide interview data for an in-class activity with a supplementary aim of providing insight to why recruitment to the certificate was becoming problematic towards discussion of this at a symposium.

The questions were formed by the researcher discussing with a colleague what

the terminology such as 'widening participation' and 'social disadvantage' meant. No conclusions were met and, therefore, the first task was to find out what interpretations of such phrases existed. This seemed particularly pertinent since the certificate is labelled a 'widening participation' programme but do the people on it know this? By inference the topic was directed towards participation in Psychology and also, by inference participation in a HE qualification. It was not explicitly stated as such and by order of the questions it went from the very abstract idea of just widening participation (in whatever form came to mind) and definitions of social disadvantage (on any basis) towards the more concrete concept of expanding numbers in the study of Psychology from a wider perspective.

This provided a list of 10 questions for students to answer starting with open responses to: Q1: 'What is widening participation?' and Q2: 'What is social disadvantage?' The next five questions focussed upon the study of psychology; Q3: 'What does the study of psychology offer you?' Q4: 'How would you persuade other people that studying psychology is worthwhile?' Q5: 'How successful do you consider your study of psychology been?' Q6: 'In your experience what do you think are the main inhibiting factors to yourself or others studying psychology?' Q7: 'What else needs to be in place to support the study of psychology from the point of view of a university course?' The penultimate two questions returned towards definitions and examined the self and others as being part of a 'widening participation' remit: Q8: 'Would you consider yourself part of a Wider Participation programme?' and Q9: 'What are the grounds that you consider makes a student representative of being part of a wider participation programme?' The last question asked for explanations to resolve any problem regarding 'widening participation' students: Q10: 'Have you any explanation for why applications from WP students have reduced?'

A further eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members (seven women, one man) who volunteered data on the topic of WP in Psychology. These were two administrators (either for the Certificate of HE or BSc in Psychology), three past tutors (for the Certificate of HE and BSc in Psychology) two current tutors (Certificate of HE and BSc in Psychology) plus one current tutor of the Certificate of HE in Psychology who additionally taught 'A' level Psychology in a Northamptonshire comprehensive school. The questions addressed to the staff volunteers were the same as to the students apart from some wording alterations.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Willig, 2008) was introduced to the students to conduct thematic analysis of the data towards categorisation of the data. Data from all 20 part-time Certificate students and all eight staff members were used for analysis with no sub-groups comparisons made albeit gender, age, ethnicity and employment criteria remained with the data. The data had first been analysed privately by the researcher before it was introduced as a class exercise where students independently identified themes from responses to individual questions. The themes recognised by the researcher were placed alongside those produced by the students and following discussion, agreement of the themes and their grounding in the data was settled. The themes presented in this paper are thus the product of initial thematic analysis by the researcher followed by group discussion of their merit as representative of the transcribed data.

Results

For the purposes of this paper the questions addressing the experience of studying psychology are not reported since the focus of this paper is to consider conceptualisation of types of student based on WP or social disadvantage. The student experience is also one of the better researched areas of WP so it was also felt need not be repeated here in detail.

Therefore, results are presented in two sections. The first and largest section considers definitions of WP and SD and contains question by question (Q1, Q2, Q8 & Q9) responses. The final section offers explanations/suggestions for the decline in numbers of WP students derived from the last question of the interview (Q10).

Definitions: Q1: What is widening participation?

Responses were very broad and included generalities of whomever, wherever doing whatever. An important point to note is that most responses included definitions at a group level rather than at an individual level.

Student: *'Lots of people get included in an activity.'* (Female, 39, Asian ethnicity, carer)

Thus, WP is a very universal term. Particular to psychology students it seemed the word 'participation' had special connotation that meant WP people are the stuff of data as well as students. This was not just the academics viewpoint – some Certificate students (ironically) also saw participation as part of research rather than involvement on a course. This clearly may have been a bias introduced by high awareness of being within a study at the time of response but somehow it appeared to go beyond that. The same should not be so true of the staff interviewed, yet they too mentioned research purposes as a reason to widen participation. This is something that need revisiting as it may be peculiar to psychologists that the term 'widening participation' is conceptualised primarily as not including more people to the study psychology as much as have wider or more representative samples within research. The ambiguity of the interpretation was clearly evident and somewhat disturbing if diversity of engagement is at the observed level rather than professional inclusion. The emphasis on 'generalisability' and population parameters from sample statistics harking back to Galton may mean that teaching quantitative methods so forcefully takes students away from deeper inter-

pretations of what psychology is and how broadly it applies in life generally and to all people.

Student: *'I suppose it's quite a large group of subjects involved in an experiment.'* Female, 28, mixed ethnicity, waitress)

Returning closer to the funders' definition, it is increasing diversity as well as just upping the numbers and particularly extending to a less ready group.

Student: *'I presume it means getting more people than usual to study and getting a variety of people from various walks of life, various groups of people.'* (Female, 42, white ethnicity, teaching assistant)

Further to these definitions, participants also expressed methods to increase participation based on invitation and encouragement to go beyond 'the selected few'. Thus, increasing awareness, invitation and availability were all critical.

Student: *'increasing the scope ...sort of inviting more people to join in, making things broader so that there's more people can actually take part in whatever it is that you are offering.'* (Female, 53, white ethnicity, works with adults with learning difficulties)

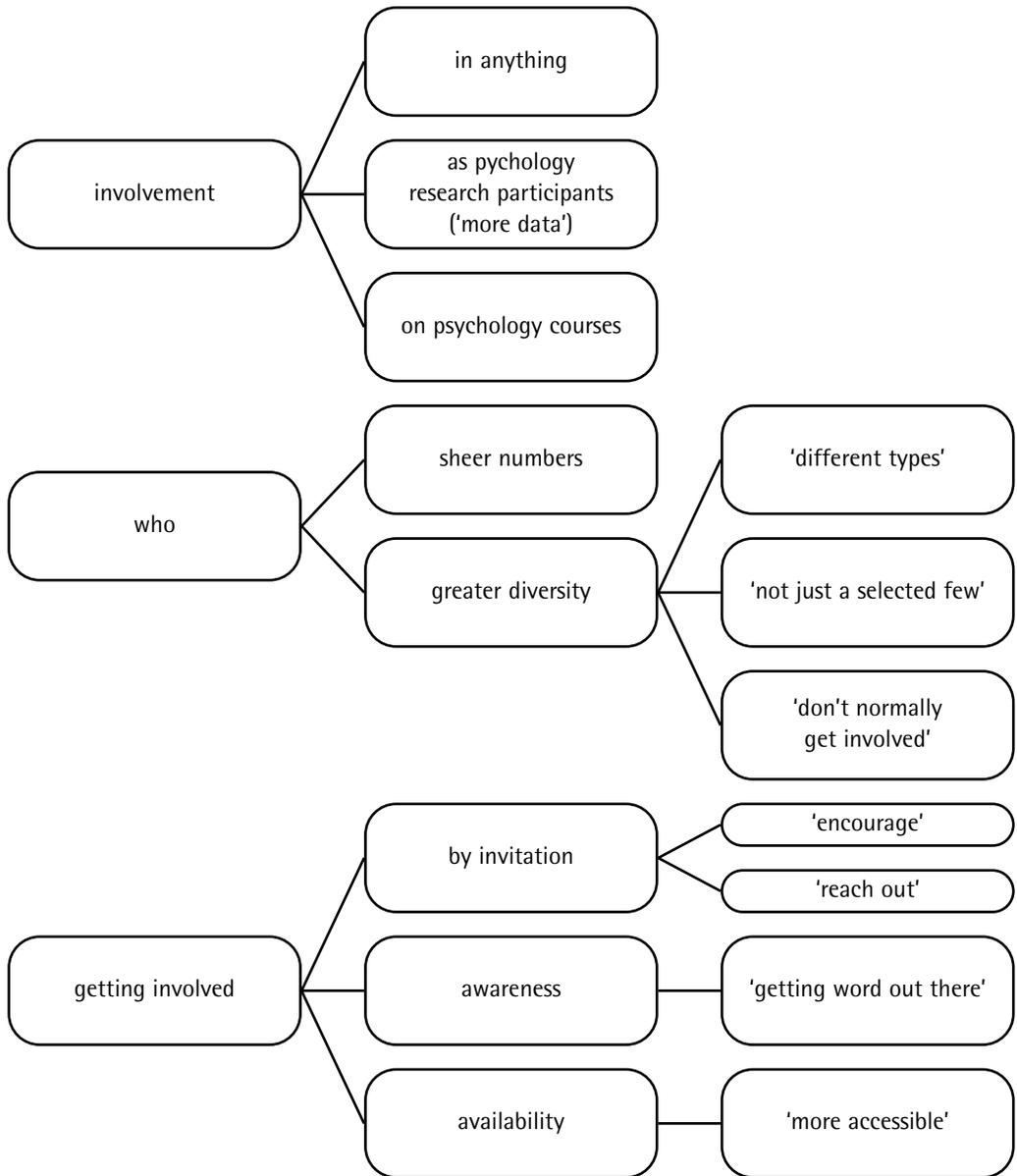
Staff tended to return both standardised responses such as: *'Opening up higher education ... to people from diverse backgrounds.'* And, as with students, less obvious definitions such as *'getting members of the local community involved in things that they wouldn't normally get involved in'* and *'to encourage more students to take part in research or take part in a degree in psychology.'*

The main themes are summarised below (see Figure 1).

Definitions: Q2: What is social disadvantage?

This provoked more spontaneous responses than the question on WP and was less variably defined. Everyone had an opinion and felt it was inequality with position in society and a hierarchy dictating handicap from one or several sources. Minimal standards should exist yet some fell below them. A lot of the

Figure 1: Widening Participation – in what, by whom and how.



factors were interwoven and escape from circumstance was not always possible without great effort. Predominantly it was defined as having a lack of something: resources, expectation, self-esteem, mobility, opportunity or even basic social skills.

Student: *'Social disadvantage? i.e. you might be born into ... into an area where people don't necessarily earn a high income and so in turn ... your main focus when you leave school is not to go to university because you probably can't afford to ... or your parents can't afford to so you probably go and get work. I feel people who have that background are disadvantaged. Probably financially disadvantaged into going on into further education and things like that.'* (Male, 38, Black ethnicity, youth worker)

Staff: *'Socially disadvantaged group of people ... haven't ... would be people who haven't grown up with the expectation that they wouldn't achieve much in life. Perhaps through lack of financial resources or experience in their family or their peer group.'*

The main themes are summarised below (see Figure 2).

Definitions: Q8: Would you consider yourself part of a Widening Participant programme? (students only)

This provoked a surprising response of going beyond any essential criteria of being a WP student or not to unprompted returns of what the benefits of studying psychology were in a general way by indicating why getting involved was worthwhile no matter who you were, where you came from or how you applied your new knowledge of psychology.

Of the 20 students: 10 agreed they were widening participation students for the reasons of: actually taking a course and being a student (3); being an adult with an interrupted education that did not follow a traditional path into HE (5) or by not coming from a background with the expectation of entering HE (2).

The most graphic of these latter reasons is illustrated by the following quote:

'Yes – I would say that I am. Yeah I don't feel that I fit into the normal set of people that go to university and the likes ... and I don't feel that I came from that sort of stock, if you like.' (Male, 43, White ethnicity, ex-services, cabinet-maker)

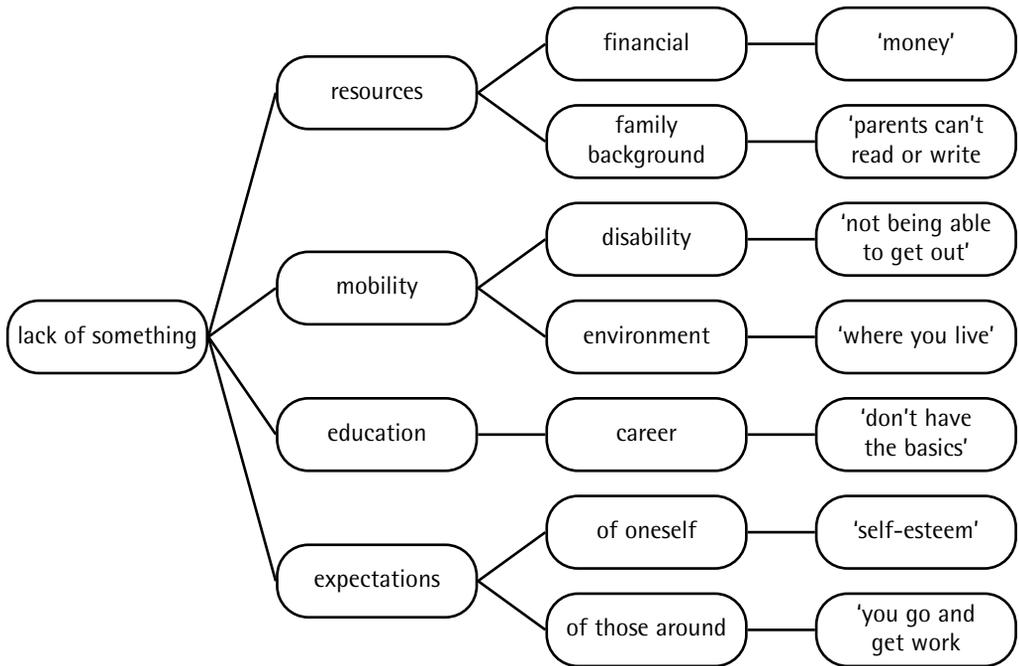
A further three students evaluated whether they were WP students from the contributions they made to the class: one concluding she was; one hoping she was; and one thinking she was not. Three students said 'no' and one student had no answer as she said she had no knowledge of what the phrase meant. Two students saw WP outside education with mention of the application of psychology to work and understanding others more generally as shown by the quote below:

'Yes. Yes – I work in a café and we get a lot of people who I am friendly to. A lot of different people. Some of the elderly just come in for a nice chat which is ... to them ... essential for their living. We have schizophrenics who come in ... again come in just for a polite conversation with somebody ... a friendly person ... someone who is just not stereotypical about what they're suffering and how they are.' (Female, 28, Mixed ethnicity, waitress)

One response maintained the concept of participation (despite it being the eighth question) as being part of an experiment as illustrated with the following:

'Yes, yeah. And whatever happens, at the end of the day, the lecturers are studying us. I found that the job I'm in now, in mental health, I find that the management and even some of the clients or patients have a tendency to look at you in a studious manner.' (Male, 54, White ethnicity, drug and alcohol support centre manager)

Figure 2: What is social disadvantage?



Definitions: Q9: What are the grounds that make a student representative of a Widening Participant programme? (students only)

The first thing of note here was the continuing confusion as to what the question meant. Six responses linked the definition to social disadvantage and overcoming obstacles to entering HE whilst five responses reflected wider and employment experiences as factors in being able to contribute differently once within HE and towards interactions with other students.

Nine students indicated that the concept of participation is not just being enrolled and passing the assessment but getting stuck in at a deeper, often social, level. Governmental data does not discriminate on level of participation like an enrolled student does. It's not just a matter of turning up and sticking with it, it seems more your contribution to the event and what you gain from the experience on a broader, less concrete level than the final grade.

Time available to devote to a course was seen as a commodity and appeared to very much act as a subjective criterion for how fully (widely) one may participate and hence ones status as a WP student. This, therefore, means some people do not feel full (wider) participants yet would nominally be defined as such based on their background.

Definitions based on Q1, Q2, Q8 and Q9: Widening participation versus social disadvantage definitions

The most outstanding observation is that these terms mean quite different things and one is pitched at the group level of explanation and has broad application outside of an educational context whereas the other addresses the individual lack of something required to gain equal access. 'Participation' for many students and teachers of Psychology relates to experimental samples rather than fellow practitioners or students. There is also a mismatch in terms of the institution's labelling of some students as WP compared

to their personal interpretation of WP since they have commitments and roles elsewhere that conflict with their student identity and by extension their sense of full participation in HE. It seems this is the more primary area of concern for enrolled students – that of being able to enjoy being a full member of the university rather than any barriers to becoming a student in the first place. Indeed the reluctance or unawareness to see oneself as a WP student or construct a definition of what one is indicates the gap in concerns of the providers of WP courses and the people upon it. It seems once you are across the HE threshold it then becomes much more a matter of practical time management than reflection on the difficulties of getting to that point. Research on the successfully recruited clearly has very severe limitations in what it can say about the non-recruits.

Simple categorisation of an individual as representative of a socially disadvantaged background does not reflect mature students or many in employment who are ‘wider participation’ but not necessarily ‘socially disadvantaged’. These people do not feel ‘lacking’ and may be insulted by being referred to as deficient in something in terms of widening participation. Some students explicitly see contributing life experience as being worthy of wider participation in its own right irrespective of social background.

Those whose postcode dictates they are ‘disadvantaged’ may feel once the label has been assigned the social identity of such based on ‘lacking’ is very different to the ethos of participation which embraces the concept of invitation, inclusion and taking part. Although there is some recognition of cross-over in the terms of wider participation and social disadvantage, it seems self-labelling becomes far more likely if several criteria are met and there is a history or familiarity with social categorisation. It would appear that the commonality between coming from a wider participation background and social disadvantage emphasises the negatives through opportunity, expecta-

tions and labelling by others as typified by the experiences of first, second and third generation immigration below:

(Researcher: ‘Would you consider yourself part of a Widening Participant programme?’) *‘Yeah, definitely. Is that all right or do you want me to elaborate?’ (Researcher nods). Right ... well then I’m just saying that at school ... nobody ever mentioned ... the whole time I was at school/University. I don’t think they even mentioned college. It was just assumed that we would leave there and just work in a factory. And ... this is not a ... a criticism of our parents from the West Indies but they’ve come here and they’ve got a job which is probably better than the job that they would have in the West Indies and ... so think this is an alright job ... and if you get a job like this when you leave school, it’s all right whereas with my child being born here ... before she even left junior school she already had university in her consciousness. I suppose that’s progress – isn’t it? But definitely at school they never ever said anything to us about university. Never ever which angers me a bit ... but never mind we’ll get there in the end.’ (Male, 38, Black ethnicity, youth-worker)*

Explanation/suggestion: Q10: Have you any explanation for why applications from WP students have reduced?

In general, let’s blame the Government ...

Staff: *‘I suppose it’s been ... Government approaches to adult education/lifelong learning and the way in which it is funded and the lack of ... academics like myself who used to be very much involved in promoting courses disappearing so that the whole sort of infrastructure has changed so much. That, I think, has had a terribly detrimental effect on the kinds of courses that are now available. That’s my impression anyway.’*

Student: *‘If you pay people to get involved in studies that tends to ... people tend to like that. That’s just what it is at the minute.’ (Female, 24, white ethnicity, NHS administrator)*

NB: The student response above followed several uses of the word ‘studies’ to mean

her own engagement with HE so it may be assumed she referred to financial support within HE rather than WP in terms of research.

Or, improve the awareness of courses and Governmental help that are available ...

'I don't think they know it exists. And I think people ... when you do come from our background you are probably intimidated to even go into the ... into the University ... into the college ... because you think they'll say you need 10 'O' levels – I know they don't have 'O' levels no more. I think that's probably one of the hardest things. The first step ... going there ... to see ... because nobody likes to be rejected. Do they? So I think the thought of people paying for it as well does people in. I do think people know ... with paying for it ... I don't think people know they can get help with it from the Government to do it.' (Male, 38, Black ethnicity, youth-worker)

However, the problems of Psychology also return especially with regards to comparison with a more vocational course. Reward for invested time, money and effort is attractive and in some cases necessary as a motivation.

'Perhaps they don't know what it entails so ... it's the amount of effort that is required. I'm thinking of why it is dropping off but they wouldn't apply in the first place. I think maybe some other courses are going to be more popular. I'm thinking of counselling – so many people seem to know about counselling and have a job spec or what a councillor is. It's trying to describe what psychology is in the modern world rather than it being removed. Something that people can relate to. Forensics psychology – it seems people seem to know a bit more about, it's been on TV programmes and things like that. Maybe you need to show psychologists more in what other work they do, instead of straight into academia.' (Female, 57, White ethnicity, HR employee)

Discussion

Firstly, as someone who sees first-hand the transformation moving through HE brings to people it was refreshing and illuminating for the author to be able to examine the

process and to be able to collect concrete data to discuss. Having firstly looked at the literature available, it appeared primarily that ensuring wider participation in Psychology was a problem for others to discuss rather than psychologists. So it is hoped recording preliminary opinion from students and staff on the topic would be worthwhile in opening up the debate as to why there is so little self-examination, if nothing else.

Attempting to define terms and analytically examine some of the fundamentals provided clarity to the essence of the problem. Many people have no real idea of what HE entails, are scared of the commitment when they have few spare resources and also have very inaccurate representations of what Psychology is. No wonder people from the more vulnerable backgrounds are getting fewer.

A lot of the more general literature on widening participation seems to focus upon the student experience once a student has commenced study rather than the recruitment strategy in the first instance. Since Psychology degree courses are generally oversubscribed, recruitment is not so much a problem as retention and completion. The measurability of such clearly makes this approach attractive and, indeed, has great importance in determining the 'student experience' and satisfaction with what is offered in the way of support and inclusion. However, what is on offer is not so often questioned. Atypical qualifications that exist around the UK as a consequence of long-standing adult education programmes do not seem to the author to be well integrated, if at all, to the more mainstream Psychology programmes. There are problems of accreditation by the British Psychological Society and accepted recognition of the true value of the level of HE study that has taken place. The data from this study illustrated the lack of well-marked pathways and vocational returns on studying Psychology plus the question of progression to further study more generally. In the author's experience,

this has been a recurring theme outside of this research with the extent that the full value of the Certificate of HE in Psychology in terms of CATS points is only realised as the exception rather than the rule for admission onto a Psychology degree programme. Without British Psychological Society accreditation, which is not well catered for below degree level, many universities are simply put in a difficult position whether to recognise any exemptions from their programmes based on alternative but essentially equivalent qualifications. To alleviate drop out, shorter courses at HE level offer more likely completion and agreed jumping-off points which may not only increase motivation as the end is better in sight but also allows those seeking a qualification for professional development rather than a full-blown degree the chance to obtain such.

The way Psychology is delivered as a subject within an institution also has relevance as to its scope and matching with degree programmes. In particular any Research Methods modules that need engagement with an Ethical Approval procedure have to have an appropriate structure in place and have commonality with any other Psychology courses. This in practice may require support from others who may not be within the same faculty as the course being offered. Housing Certificates of HE in one area with specialised knowledge and facilities for adult education and asking for expertise and support from another area such as Psychology would need negotiation and support at a high level.

One problem with atypical students is how well integrated to the institution they feel so developing a student identity and sense of belongingness may be key as indicated by the repeated inclusion of comment on class contribution as part of the definition of 'widening participation'. O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) examined responses from a bespoke course for mature students entering university that indicated participants felt only peripheral membership of the student community. In particular the phys-

ical separateness of their building from the main campus did little to endorse a full student identity. This may have been relevant to the responses made here since none of the students in this current study were taught in a building on main campus. Indeed the Northampton cohort was not even in the same town so rarely mentioned this as an expectation of the course in the first place. However, of the Leicester groups, some enjoyed having a building and small library of their own with cafeteria and central, city location, a few did not. Of those that did mention a sense of remoteness, it was tempered by comment that they probably didn't have much time for fitting in much beyond the course anyway. Certainly there was a sense of only partial belonging but obtaining student discounts at local cinemas and retailers did seem to assist in some sense of student identity and gave tangible benefit from the label. Undergraduates within this study, on the other hand, occasionally interpreted 'wider participation' as meaning joining university sports clubs and societies. This may indicate how integral their sense of studentship is, not only as a full-time occupation but, also through a physical presence on the main campus plus living and socialising exclusively with other students in term-time. Indeed, it did not seem even worthy of expression by the undergraduates it was so unquestionably part of how they saw themselves. Of course many of the Certificate students have additional roles that the undergraduates do not through family, work and other functions plus they have often experienced part of their life as a non-student. It is highly predictable that less identification with the student role would be natural and did not seem to present a significant problem overall.

The formality of a full-time, three-year degree with greater financial and personal commitment may not be attractive or a possibility to all particularly those lacking in confidence and/or resources. Shorter courses allow confidence and success to accrue

surrounded by similar others. Closer interaction with tutors through small group teaching can act as effective introductions to HE and make universities and the people who inhabit them appear more accessible. A better example of the contact hypothesis overcoming prejudice against universities and their occupants would be hard to find. Once students become familiar with the subject of Psychology many realise that they could find or are motivated to find resources to attain a degree and ultimately a career in Psychology.

Based on looking at HE on the whole, Kettley (2007) suggests the key components to engagement are 'bridges'; 'barriers' and 'outcomes defined by individuals and at group level'. By consideration of the responses collated so far these can be summarised in the context of first-level courses within Higher Education as follows.

Bridges can be:

- funding for HE of SD students of all ages;
- deciding whether psychologists want WP or SD;
- common to any aspect of HE but also psychology specific by:
 - making psychology appear relevant to all;
 - recognised progression routes for students;
 - local engagement with communities by the universities, and, failing that, by Psychology departments beyond using local residents as research participants.

Barriers are:

- low awareness that courses at every level and with a diversity of types exist (in some form or other, not necessarily 'accredited' or 'recommended');
- lack of clarity or cohesion on where some courses fit in terms of a career in Psychology;
- unclear perceptions of what psychology is and particularly that it is an evidence based science;

- confusion over the differences between psychology and counselling which may be resolved with the idea of insight and normality versus treatment and abnormality;
- increase interest and promote a more accessible and relevant image of psychology as relating to the everyday rather than hiding behind an overly academic facade
- poor indication of what long-term financial returns (and rewarding careers) there are to repay the investment of time, money and sacrifices in gaining the qualification
- poor appreciation of the wide application of psychology to careers other than psychology
- an undervaluation of what psychology offers at a personal level.

Outcomes:

- At an Individual level:

Student: *'I really didn't know ... pretty much anything ... and I think I was very disadvantaged on my knowledge of psychology or how people think or are. And ... I'm not quite sure of the word but it's sort of revelatory (sic) to me – it's stuff ... I've been living all my life and I've missed out on or didn't know or just brand-newly discovered. Even down to the most basic things ... that some people ... have always known.'* (Male, 43, White ethnicity, ex-services, cabinet-maker)

- At a Group level:

Student: *'We use psychology in everyday life ... it's used in everyday life. I think we all use it to ... in everyday life ... whether we know that or not. If you give me another question and I've been on the course a bit longer ... I'll have more knowledge of it. And that's what I tell my friends ... the example that I use ... don't want to take up the whole question here ... where I grew up some people don't make it whereas some people thrive. Some people have mental health issues and I do find that interesting and a lot of my friends do. And I want to know why and a lot of my friends do.'*

I want to see why there were those that didn't survive.' (Male, 38, Black ethnicity, youth-worker)

In conclusion, there appears to be a general requirement for more research on WP/SD in Psychology rather than leaving it to sociologists and educationalists. The construct of the terminologies applied by educational professionals and governmental agencies to describe students of atypical backgrounds and the impact that has in terms of interpretation is certainly under researched. How do people feel to consider someone else sees them as 'disadvantaged'? Are people aware that their value is based purely on measures associated with the group from which it is assumed they share similar features? Their age, gender, ethnicity, disadvantage based on a statistical measure of their neighbourhood and league tables of inclusion? It is an area ripe for social psychologists to investigate and see interventionist programmes scrutinised more carefully based on principles of social psychology rather than sociology alone. Individuals choose to commit to study not groups. Would people rather be invited to participate and withdraw at suitable shorter-term junctures with recognition

made of the practical difficulties of full-time study on three-year courses which involve such fundamentals as time, money and unchartered waters? Or would Psychology as a profession prefer to leave it to the politics of universities' Lifelong Learning programmes and Schools of Psychology to sort this out and wash their hands of any consideration of widening participation in Psychology as a discipline. How can Psychology be best taught at HE level to people desperate to acquire knowledge of the discipline other than through the present recognised degree-level routes? The few adult-education alternatives look less and less likely as solutions particularly since the concept of invitation is becoming replaced by that of correcting the lack of something in somebody.

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