

Listening for a Leak:

Students Story Their Experiences in Undergraduate Psychology

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Abstract

There are cracks in academic Psychology's pipeline: What starts out as a diverse stream of incoming students ends in a homogeneous trickle. We know racism and androcentrism contribute to the leakage, but we need to listen to students' personal experiences to get a fuller picture. I conducted open-ended narrative interviews with nine undergraduate Psychology students at York University, and found consistent ambivalence and alienation. These seemed difficult to reconcile; participants seemed constrained by the ways of thinking trained into them by academic Psychology. A collaborative zine-making workshop made space for other modes of thinking: students hand-made an art book (zine) together, critically exploring their experiences. The zine reflects the complex conversations and tinkering that helped create it, contributing to a picture of how we might confront the cracks in Psychology education if we want the field to welcome in those it has tended to push out.

Keywords: qualitative research, research-creation, zines, participatory research, interview-based zine-making, pedagogy, curriculum, decolonizing psychology, narrative thematic analysis, narrative interviewing.

Dedicated to students who want Psychology to love them back.

Thank you so much to Alexandra Rutherford, Michaela Hynie, my friends and colleagues Danielle Christie, Tal Davidzon, Lucas Servén Marín, and Gabrielle Gregatti; and my parents, Marina Primorac and James Martin.

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Listening for a Leak: Students Story Their Experiences in Undergraduate Psychology

For Psychology to respond to the needs of all people, to contribute to human well-being and a more just and inclusive society, the field needs radical change. Psychology research conventions have been established and entrenched by the same groups of people who establish and entrench other systems of power (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), so it is no wonder that the research itself tends to follow trends that reproduce racism, sexism, and other forms of structural oppression.

Radically changing this system may seem impossible: if you're familiar with Psychology, says South African psychologist Suntosh Pillay, you'll know that "change is usually met with resistance and defense by those who benefit from the status quo" (Pillay, 2017). But some theories of change propose a way to combat that resistance and defense. Solórzano and Yosso argue that we can precipitate systemic change through the use of narrative, challenging the way "stories" about research are conventionally told through "counter-storytelling" (2002), a method developed by critical race theorists for conveying the experiences of those often missing from dominant narratives.

Counter-storytelling treats intersectional lived experience as an important source of knowledge, rather than dismissing it as a collection of biases to circumvent. If you haven't encountered counter-stories in Psychology, it's easy to overlook the fact that hegemonic Psychology traffics in stories — the dominant narratives in Psychology can seem simply like objective recordings of how things truly are. Counter-stories can be used to expose the seams of these master narratives, highlighting the inherent racism, sexism, etc., in the stories told to us by mainstream Psychology. As I introduce the present project, I use counter-storytelling for this purpose: to try to trace the gaps in the mainstream narratives of psychology, to put a finger on the

stories that are important but under-represented. I use counter-storytelling beyond its original intended focus on racism, attending instead to experiences of pushout and marginalization, regardless of the particular axes of identity that contribute to a felt sense of marginalization.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) emphasize the importance of counter stories that go beyond self-consciously responding to the standard story, which would otherwise continue to dominate the discourse (p. 32). Accordingly, I try to do things differently. I don't directly address and oppose a list of master narratives in Psychology — this would still confer too much attention on those master narratives. Instead, I use bits of counter-storytelling theory to foreground experiences of marginalization and prejudice in academic Psychology, in order to prefigure possibilities for radical change.

Cornish et al. (2016) provide some helpful imagery for a possible counter-story about the difficulty of radical change in Psychology: if we set our sights on small “cracks” in the system, “small spaces and everyday acts of resistance,” we might “cumulatively produce the crumbling of seemingly impenetrable edifices of power” (Cornish et al., 2016, p. 116). Pillay borrows Cornish et al.'s image, enjoining readers to add to “recent attempts to ‘crack the fortress’ of Psychology,” to lay waste to the “relations of power” that stack into the “vulnerable problematic system” of mainstream Psychology (p. 136). Let's go with it. Picture a stone base, thick, sheer walls. The Fortress Of Psychology is windowless, except for a few narrow slits in upper towers, defended by experts who peek out and call, “friend or foe?” when anyone approaches.

Hold your horses, you might say. Do we really need to demolish this impressive edifice? Indeed, the old building can look so strong and beautiful from some angles: upper spires gleam glassily, supported by a massive, solid base of experimentation and theorizing. Can't we just patch the cracks? Maybe a shiny renovation could make some interior rooms more

accommodating? Many broom closets in the fortress of Psychology have already been repurposed to resist the structural oppression it has historically reproduced: we have feminist Psychology, Black Psychology, and critical Psychology, to name a few. These are shiny new retrofits in the old fortress.

But inside, it still gets stuffy. It echoes. And if you wind your way down to examine the foundations, it gets dark and damp. You have to push through cobwebs, feel your way along damp walls. Your fingertips might prick on bones poking out of the aging mortar. What are those? According to the American Psychological Association (APA), the culture of Psychology is “rooted in oppressive and exclusionary psychological science and practice” (APA, 2021): these bones are load-bearing. To use systemic racism as one of many examples, Psychology directly created research to justify beliefs in white supremacy, and still has limited opportunities for Black people and other people of colour to access higher education (e.g. Adams et al., 2015; 2018; Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; APA, 2009; Callahan et al., 2018; Gillborn et al., 2021; Guthrie, 1998; Maton et al., 2011; Sarr et al., 2022; Williams, 2021). To those who might dismiss this as a few unfortunate events in the past, the APA insists that “moments of harm have been the dominant theme in Psychology’s history;” the history of Psychology is rotten with them (see the APA-commissioned *Historical Chronology*, 2021; Winston, 2020).

Yes, some areas of Psychology are more likely to challenge the harmful beliefs of the status quo, but the mainstream knowledge we encounter in Psychology is hegemonic (Adams et al., 2018): a Psychology that was built on the soil of “Western” culture (European and European-American), but which has now embedded itself in in pop culture, academic language, and healthcare across the world (Pillay, 2017, p. 136). Hegemonic Psychology reinforces narratives of those already in power, re-entrenching rather than challenging structural oppression (Adams et

al., 2018): from graduate admissions criteria that bias against Black and Indigenous applicants in Canada (Sarr et al., 2022) to the world’s top psychology journals making universal claims about “human psychology” based on a very narrow range of participants (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). The vast majority of current knowledge about human Psychology comes from studies on “WEIRD” undergraduate students: those of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic backgrounds (WEIRD; Henrich et al., 2010). The knowledge gained from these narrow, homogeneous samples purports to tell us things about the fundamental nature of cognition and affect in any humans, anywhere, but WEIRD subjects are some of the least representative of the global population. They do, however, match the demographics of those of us who most easily become psychologists and professors—those of us who pass most easily through the fortress’s pipeline. So, the problems with Psychology are deep and structural, undergirding an enormous body of knowledge.

As an amateur plumber, I wonder how Psychology’s rotten foundation might be related to its plumbing issue. The plumbing is important: to gain access to the inner sanctum of Psychology, you need to pass through a complex tangle of pipes and valves: undergraduate courses, graduate degrees, postdocs, associateships... . But these academic pipes, at least those in North America and Europe, steadily ‘leak’ students in a troubling pattern.

The pipeline starts outside the fortress walls, with a diverse torrent of undergraduates entering the wide, calcified mouth of a pipe, with the words “*Introductory Psych Courses*” etched above it. Every few meters, there’s a hole in the side of the pipe. Much of the pipe’s contents gush out of these. The rest continue on through a narrower pipe. Inside the walls of the fortress, more lengths of pipe branch off, channelling students through to different stories of the fortress. Throughout, occasional valves, cracks, and rust spots cause students to trickle out of the

pipeline: dropping out, failing out, switching majors. Some pass through a series of pipes that ends in a Bachelor's degree. A smaller subset keeps moving, funnelling through internships, administrative requirements, graduate courses, theses, dissertations. A few find themselves in the upper centre of the fortress with PhDs and Psychology-related careers. Most students leak out somewhere earlier along the pipeline.

You'd hope this leakage would be wastewater, overflow — those who aren't suited to a career in Psychology, or at worse an equitably random percentage of the initial stream of students. But this doesn't seem to be the case. The proportion of women, Black students, indigenous students, and other non-white students becomes progressively smaller as the pipeline goes on from undergraduate to graduate degrees, and from there to professional and academic careers (see Goulden, Mason, & Frasch, 2011). It is difficult to find rich data on the range of people who are at a higher risk of being undeservedly pushed out of Canada's Psychology programs, but there are clues as to the inverse. By examining Psychology curricula and textbooks, you can get a sense of who is more likely to feel at home. Men, for instance: examining social psychology textbooks for androcentrism and gendered stereotypes, George et al. (2020) found that not only were men represented much more often than women, but women who were mentioned were more often illustrative examples of the concepts being taught than important contributing figures. Despite efforts to reduce androcentrism in the sciences, and the fact that women are now more likely to study academic Psychology than men are, the former are also more likely to leave before reaching tenure (Goulden, Mason, & Frasch, 2011).

White people are also more likely to feel at home. There is a lack of racial diversity in clinical practice throughout Canada, suggesting that students of colour might fall through the cracks before they make it to this stage, even though they are urgently needed (see, for example,

Williams, 2021). The American Psychological Association (APA) conducted a ten-year, USD\$4 million task force to examine and counteract the disproportionate leakage of ‘ethnic minority’ students (APA, 2009). They reported some improvement, but the problem persists. Gillborn, Woolnough, Jankowski & Sandle (2021) conducted focus groups with students of Asian, African, Pakistani, Caribbean, and mixed-race descent on their experiences in Psychology courses at UK universities: students found the curriculum “intensely white,” and felt excluded and underserved by its tendency to “position whiteness as the unexamined norm within psychological knowledge” (Gillborn et al., 2021, p. 8). This falls in line with a qualitative study on US Masters-level counselling programs, which participants described as geared toward “a white student being trained to be a white counselor” (Varney et al., 2019).

Psychology curricula also disadvantage people with mental health problems: students often enter the Psychology pipeline seeking to better understand and mitigate mental illness, but their own mental health is notably more likely to deteriorate throughout their degree (Woof et al., 2021). There is also research suggesting that university professors – including those who teach directly about the very topic of mental health – fear the stigma that may result from disclosing their own mental health struggles. What could potentially be a source of rich knowledge and empathic connection is thus lost (see Croteau & Gelech, 2023). In short, the fortress of Psychology is less welcoming to those with mental health issues, to Black students, to other students of colour, and to women. These are some cracks that the fortress-dwellers acknowledge, ones we have some academic research about.

I can also *feel* some cracks in the system as I navigate my own path through Psychology education. I made it through a Psychology research specialist B.Sc. at the University of Toronto, and, after leaving academic Psychology for seven years, most of an MA at York University,

doubtlessly helped along by my whiteness, my lack of visible disability, and my private school education, but I've often felt pushed out. Somehow, I feel lost and two-dimensional when attempting to communicate within Psychology, despite feeling perfectly capable, confident, hard-working, and well-rounded in the other programs I've spent significant time in (cognitive science, visual art, English, education, and women's studies). I meet criteria for academic accommodations due to chronic physical pain and learning disability, but I have found the structure of these services to make school even less accessible to me, so I eventually opted out. These are cracks that I'm slipping through, though I slide smoothly past others.

As a TA for undergraduate Psychology courses, I think I've seen some more potential leak-points: I've witnessed undergraduate curricular content that is outdated and insulting, and teaching that dehumanizes neurodivergence and fatness as well as many forms of disability and mental illness. I haven't found research that investigates any of the above as potential axes along which psychology students are made to feel unwelcome, so I hope to take some steps toward exploring their impact. There is a dearth of research on undergraduate students' experiences in Psychology, particularly experiences related to pushout and alienation. The undergraduate level is a particularly important point of intervention though: early enough in the pipeline to include people who are interested and invested in the topic but who might still be pushed out of the field later on. What should be done with the cracks in psychology is up for debate, but mapping them out within the undergraduate Psychology curriculum is an important first target for deeply changing Psychology, in the hopes of rectifying the legacies of harm the field has left and continues to perpetuate (Pillay, 2017).

* * *

So that's where I went. I decided to join some undergraduate psychology students and feel around for some cracks, without narrowing my focus to a particular identity marker or sub-population of students I had reason to expect would be pushed out. I cast a wider net. I invited nine upper-year undergraduate students at York University in Toronto, Canada, to critically explore their experiences in their Psychology program. I wondered: what do the students in this initial length of pipe experience? Do they also feel alienated or pushed out? What is it like to be a psychology student in a curriculum like York University's? What desires and complaints do they have regarding the Psychology curriculum at York? To investigate these questions, I used a mixture of qualitative methods, informed by a variety of methodological and theoretical frameworks. Most importantly, my process was influenced by narrative methods, participatory action research, embodied research-creation, and interview-based zine-making (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015; Piepmeier, 2008; Riessman, 2008; Valli, 2021; Vacchelli, 2018).

First, I had a 1-1 interview with each participant, to get a sense of their experiences of disillusionment in the program and of what a better curriculum would look like to each of them. I used narrative theory to guide my interview process (e.g. Hydén, 2014) and for my analyses of the resulting transcripts (e.g. Riessman, 2008). I conducted narrative thematic analysis on the stories that I constructed from my transcriptions and notes, generating common themes and notable differences among participants' experiences (following Goldstein & Flicker, 2020; Riessman, 2008). I followed Braun & Clarke's papers on reflexive thematic analysis, which describe the process as a pattern-seeking cluster of methods best suited to "experiential [and] critical framings of language, data, and meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This format produced rich and complex stories. I heard a deep love for Psychology

bumping up against frustration with the program; a sense that something about it isolated students more than other programs, with or without the COVID-19 pandemic. Students also spent a lot of effort qualifying their complaints, conceding their lack of expertise and elaborating on potential counterarguments and excuses that they might expect from Psychology faculty. It seemed hard for students to get a firm hold on their feelings of alienation, and it was hard for me to make sense of them. I had the feeling we were stuck in Psych-mode: the interviews activated the narratives drilled into us by hegemonic Psychology, and this framing doesn't seem to include a vocabulary for critically analyzing itself.

To make space for ways of thinking other than those drilled into us by academic Psychology, I turned to research-creation, a transdisciplinary process that blends creative making with knowledge production (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015; Springgay, 2021). Research-creation involves constructing, organizing, and disseminating knowledge through processes, forms, or modalities that are intrinsic to the knowledge being produced. Specifically, I tend toward the sub-category Chapman and Sawchuk call "creation-as-research," where the process of making/creating something constitutes research on that same topic, and the thing(s) being made can constitute research findings (2015). Hands-on collaborative creation is especially effective at increasing collaborative engagement and sparking community learning (Barnewitz, 2021; Biagioli et al., 2021; Valli, 2021). One of my preferred modes of research-creation, or creation-as-research, is collaborative zine-making. The process of getting together to make a zine (a small, handmade booklet with roots in DIY, punk, and activist movements) offers a site for embodied and relational learning. As a zine gets cobbled together, complex topics can percolate and produce knowledge within a playful, informal frame that celebrates messiness and incompleteness. The process can help disrupt hegemonic frames of thinking, and raise critical

consciousness (e.g. Barnewitz, 2021). I chose this method to bring together the participants from my original interviews as a way to foster frame-breaking (as in Bermudéz, 2022).

My project was informed by the principles and sensibilities of Fine and Torre's practices of participatory action research (PAR) (e.g. Fine, 2018; Torre, 2009). PAR treats participants as co-researchers rather than simply subjects of research, attempting to minimize the power imbalances inherent in so much human research by giving more agency to those being researched, making research more collaborative than extractive.

My methods of interacting with students are rooted in participatory action research theory, inviting interaction and subverting many common markers of power differentials in standard Psychology research. However, my work deviates from true participatory action research in important ways. In true PAR, co-researchers would define for themselves what central issues need to be addressed, and the inquiry and procedures would follow from those community-led decisions. My role would be less that of a leader or researcher, more that of a facilitator or collaborator. Doing research as a Psychology student on the subject of psychology students' experiences, I might also be counted as a member of the community I want to work with. Somewhat paradoxically, though, my own status as a student has circumscribed my ability to share agency and credit with the students who participated in and contribute to this research project. As a candidate for a graduate degree, I feel compelled to cling to some of the power I simultaneously wish to divest. This thesis project has been approved with the understanding that I will ultimately be able to claim the thinking and knowledge produced as *my own*. To successfully meet the requirements of an MA degree, I was under the impression I'd have to retain more creative control over the research than PAR would require, so that I could be

assessed as an individual thinker rather than as a facilitator or as part of the community I work with.

This keeps me more tightly bound to a more traditional extractive model of research, where I, the main thinker, seek to gain knowledge from the participants in my work. This is unfortunate, as it helps maintain the relationship I am investigating for ruptures, part of the fortress I would like to make more cracks in.

Another “PAR” that I partially emulate in my research is *prefigurative action research*, a traditionally political mode of research that also offers an alternative applied approach to critical psychology using the “cracks” metaphor—working on an interpersonal scale to effect real, larger-scale change (Cornish et al., 2016; Kagan & Burton, 2000). As in prefigurative action research, I hope that what my project reveals or considers will help write new stories about what might be possible within Psychology.

The interconnectedness of all these elements is crucial to the functioning of this project: narrative, framing and frame-breaking, making cracks in a fortress, foregrounding genuine interpersonal interaction over objectivity, using uncommon qualitative methodologies, encouraging the disruption of common power dynamics within Psychology research. My hope is that in combination, the stories I tell and methods I employ can pave the way for changes that, thus far, might not be conceivable within the average North American Psychology program.

One outcome of this project thus far is the zine participants and I created together, included as a PDF in Appendix Z. It is a completed project in the traditional sense (certainly for the purposes of the governing bodies reading this!) but is also part of an ongoing project: the zine is being disseminated across York campuses for anyone to read and share, and has extra pages so that student readers can add in their own experiences as well. Future discussions with the student

contributors will explore the possibility of distributing copies on campus, enabling a wider range of students to engage with and contribute to the project.

This ongoing research provides much-needed insight on student experiences, both individually and as a group, of the Psychology curriculum and its effects on them. In this paper, I demonstrate that these students, and thus, at least some students, want to learn, give, and work more than they are structurally enabled to by their curriculum.

Methods & Results

Although I planned most of my methods in advance, the procedures took shape and changed slightly as I went along, with preliminary results of earlier stages informing later stages. As such, I dip into my results within this section, insofar as they help to explain the move to subsequent steps in the procedure.

Recruitment

I put out a call to students by emailing the undergraduate Psychology listserv at York University. Figure 1 was included in my email.

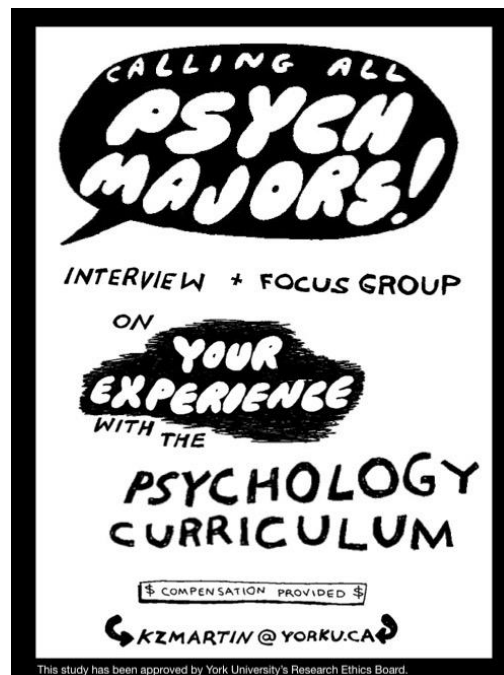


Figure 1.

I required students to be enrolled in (or to have recently been enrolled in) a Psychology major or minor, and have completed at least 15 PSYC credits, as this would decrease the likelihood that their experience of Psychology was overrepresented by a single Psychology class. I also asked that students be comfortable communicating in English. I used self-report and self-selection, taking prospective participants at their word that they met selection criteria.

To sift through a larger-than-anticipated number of email responses, I followed up with an ad-hoc online questionnaire using Google Forms asking about respondents' interest in the project and their relationship to the Psychology curriculum (see Appendix A for a summary of this questionnaire, or Figure 2 for a screenshot of the questionnaire as it appeared to prospective participants).

Participant Recruitment Questionnaire

Hi! You're seeing this questionnaire because you showed interest in participating in my research: a two-part study that involves a short 1-1 interview on the psychology curriculum, and then later a group session with other interviewees where you'll discuss anonymized themes brought up in those interviews.

There are no correct or "better" answers to the below questions. They will just help me get a sense of where you're coming from, and how you found out about my research!

kzoemartin@gmail.com [Switch account](#)

The name and photo associated with your Google account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Only the email you enter is part of your response.

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email

Who told you about this study? (If it's one of your professors, please name the class, just so I can see how many people are from that 1 class) *

Your answer

If there were an option, would you prefer to meet in person or on Zoom for our 1-1 interview? (JUST CURIOUS! Your answer will not affect your eligibility)

☐ In person (outdoors at a place we mutually agree on)

☐ On Zoom

☐ Other: _____

Complete 1 or both of the following sentences:

A. Personally, in my psychology program, I feel/have felt...

B. Psychology classes are too ...

Figure 2.

I received 47 responses to the questionnaire, and followed up with those whose responses suggested to me that they were either interested in my project, disillusioned or frustrated with

Psychology, or both. I left out respondents who seemed simply content with the curriculum, and those who displayed little engagement with the prompt questions. For example, I did not contact a respondent who finished the sentence prompt *“Psychology classes are too ...”* with “interesting for me,” and simply responded “yes” to the question *“Do you think of people who study psychology as ‘your people’? Do you feel that you fit in, in important ways?”*

I followed up with 14 students via email, recording a reason for each for my own records. Below is a sample of reasons I recorded for inclusion:

- “Seems talky”
- “Seems critical of psychology”
- Seemed to be queer, Black, or otherwise dissimilar to other respondents or majority demographic.
- Indicated feelings of struggle, critique, or disillusionment; E.g.
 - “i am trying to fit in the area of my dreams”
 - “While sometimes I do feel like I fit in, often I feel like I do not deserve to be there or am just... playing along.”
 - “I feel that there aren't adequate resources for students to understand what they are getting out of this program.”
 - “I believe we study outdated theory more than anything else”
- Respondents who had lots of questions for me about the nature of my project
- Included memes that indicated ambivalence or strong feelings. For instance, Figures 3 and 4 show a meme showing Simpsons character Ralph Wiggums exclaiming “I’m in danger!” with a vacant smile, and a meme suggesting that psychology education seemed to make the prospect of suicide appealing.

When you didn't do any
reading over reading week



Figure 3.

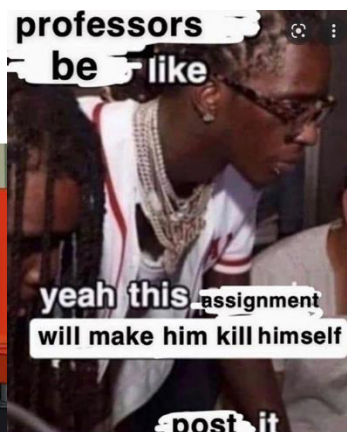


Figure 4.

Phase I: Interviews

Participants

I recruited ten undergraduate students enrolled in York University's undergraduate Psychology program for 1-1 interviews, the first phase of my project. One interview turned out to be irrelevant to my research question, so it was omitted from the study, leaving nine interviews for analysis ($n_1=9$). I asked these nine to choose code names for themselves, so that they could retain some control over their identity and humanity within this write-up rather than being flattened into data upon anonymization, as per narrative methods described in Reissman's textbook (2008) and Allen & Wiles' article (2016). In alphabetical order, their chosen pseudonyms are Alisa, Bailey, Elissa, Iris, Kajal, Lester, Luna, Robin, and Wanda. Henceforth, I will use these pseudonyms to refer to the students who worked with me in this study. I will use the gender-neutral third-person pronoun "they" for each pseudonym, to reduce unnecessary identifiers.

I did not intentionally collect data on participants' gender, race, or other common demographic markers. However, some participants volunteered this information directly, and I inferred some indirectly. Two interviewees were Southeast Asian, one was Black, three were white, and two mentioned experience as racialized minorities without specifying an identity. Participants also mentioned being marginalized in terms of their neurotype, their mental health status, their gender, their sexuality, their socioeconomic background, their family education history and/or culture, and their access needs.

Phase I Procedures

Each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes long, depending on the interviewee's availability and preference. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, except for one which was conducted via phone following internet connectivity issues, and all interviewees consented to their interview being recorded.

I relied on narrative interviewing guidelines (e.g. Gemignani, 2014; Hydén, 2014) to make the interviews open-ended, informal, and flexible. I framed each interview as a conversation, asking students to tell me about their personal experiences within their Psychology program and to consider “the (in)accessibility of the Psychology program, how relevant the curriculum is to your needs, and what you’d change to make it more inclusive.” During interviews, I asked clarification questions and checked for mutual understanding using reflection techniques, rephrasing or summarizing what I had heard in my own words. To encourage a genuine conversation and a trusting environment, I modeled genuineness and self-disclosure by following my own curiosity and interest: I allowed myself to respond naturally, gasping when surprised, sharing my opinion, making jokes, and laughing at students’ jokes when I was moved to. Trusting that personal bias would exist in my analyses no matter how “objective” or controlled I tried to make this interview, I decided that I could help disrupt or at least dilute the usual flow of power and participant bias by being transparent about my own motivations and subjectivity, and by flexibly responding to the directions that each interviewee took the conversation.

In the first few minutes of each conversation, I always asked some variation of these opening questions:

- *Can you tell me about your experience in Psychology so far?*

- *Can you tell me the story of your getting into and getting through Psychology?*
- *What is encouraging or discouraging about your program?*
- *Can you think of ways the Psychology program could fit you better?*

And towards the end of each conversation, I reflected and summarized my understanding of what the student had shared, asked whether that resonated, and gave space for corrections. For instance, I'd ask, *"Is there anything I missed from that story?"* or say, *"I've come to the end of the questions I had prepared. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to add?"*

Appendix B contains a more complete summary of the notes and guidelines I brought to each session.

Apart from the general opening and closing structure, I tried to follow each student interviewee's lead, and encouraged them to share what felt important or relevant to *them* rather than allowing my own expectations to circumscribe the scope of the conversation. As such, I did not have a full script or series of consistent questions for these interviews. Instead, I used techniques such as reflection, summary, and motivational interviewing to follow lines of inquiry that were interesting to me.

After concluding interviews, I sent a follow-up email to the participants along with an e-transfer of \$15 CAD. I reminded them that their participation was voluntary, and asked them to come up with their own pseudonym¹.

Phase I Results

I transcribed the audio recordings of those who responded to my post-interview follow-up email using the application Descript, and then began editing and analyzing those transcripts. I started with basic copy-editing, which already turned out to be an analytic process: every

¹ You can find a list of pseudonyms in the "Participants" section above.

conversation included a wealth of non-verbal gestures and sounds that might be considered important information (e.g. laughter, tone of voice, or hand gestures), as well as what Descript automatically codes as “filler words” (e.g. ‘like,’ ‘um,’ ‘well’), whose semantic value can be ambiguous and relies heavily on context that is easily lost in a written transcript.

I initially had Descript automatically delete “filler words.” When I found that this sometimes left noticeable gaps in the conversation, or slight changes in meaning, I retrieved some, such as colloquial usages of “like” when they indicated approximation or uncertainty (such as when Robin said “*You still hear the same, like, five people’s names no matter where you go*”) or to introduce speech (e.g. when Luna said “*To not have [a professor be invested in your work] . . . makes it be like, ‘ugh, why am I here?’;*” emphases added). When I remembered gestures or sounds that seemed important to the conversation, I included those in parentheses (e.g. “*(flaps hand dismissively)*” or “*(we both laugh)*”). During this first pass of editing, I also began intuitively responding to what I was reading. I left comments recording my reaction to certain ideas and highlighting quotes that I didn’t want to forget about—ones that seemed to me to sum up that student’s experience, to get at an answer to my research question, or to raise an interesting problem.

On my second pass of transcript analysis, I started to draw connections and extrapolate meaning more broadly. I added headings for different stories or topics within interviews, like “Dealing With Heavy Material,” “Prof-student relationship,” “I like to be involved,” “lack of connections,” and “psychology needs more neurodiversity and openness.” I also took notes and made new comments about links my brain had been making between or among participants.

Eventually, the connections I was making began to coalesce into some semi-fluid categories, which I colour-coded. I was able to categorize each chosen quote into one of the categories in Table 1, below:

Table 1

Transcript Colour-Coding Key

Colour	Category
Green	A proposed or desired change for the Psychology program (“Psych”)
Pink	A criticism of Psych
Blue	A statement about one’s own identity
Purple	Ambivalence / Paradox / a conflict / contradiction / interesting tension
Yellow	A story / anecdote / narrative that doesn’t fall into the above categories

Seeing the colours sparked more clarity; students’ voices seemed more harmonious than before. I continued an iterative process of analysis, rereading transcripts in more and more depth at each iteration, drawing more and more connections among different interviews, and adding marginal comments on each pass. I reviewed the parts of each interview that had highlighting and/or comments associated with them and homed in on quotes that seemed representative of the interviewee’s feelings, that seemed particularly interesting or surprising to me, or that seemed to notably overlap with or differ from what I heard in other participants’ interviews. Most of these I had highlighted or commented on in my first pass. I also focused on the parts of each interview that seemed to relate importantly to my central research questions:

- What is it *like* to be in Psychology?
- What would an ideal Psychology curriculum look like?

- What is wrong with the Psychology curriculum?
- How have you felt pushed out or left out of the Psychology curriculum?

Eventually, I gathered a list of 100+ quotes spread across the nine interviews that I felt were important and informative with relation to the above questions and could spark discussion among students. I looked at all these quotes and the comments, colours, and titles that accompanied them, and began drafting narrative themes, with an eye to finding themes that recurred throughout an interview and across interviews.

For each transcript, I chose some quotes and used reflection, paraphrasing, and thematic analysis to stitch them together into narrative analyses or summaries². The purpose of these narratives was manifold: I wanted to remind students of what we had talked about (as it had, at this point, been several months since the interview stage), to ask their permission to share some of their (anonymized) quotes, and to check with them that my interpretations and summary of their stories rang true to them. I wrote in the second person (“you” & “your”) to emphasize the relationality of this project and indicate that I was speaking directly *to* the student I interviewed, in a tone that would encourage active feedback or correction.

To Luna, for example, I wrote, “A central issue you notice with the curriculum . . . is the apparent lack of women in Psychology:” and illustrated this with a quote of theirs: “*The curriculum that we learn is so male-dominated. As a woman, it makes you feel so out of place.*”

I inferred that the lack of women was notable to Luna because “Psychology is often constructed as a stereotypically womanly subject: all about feelings. But that’s not what you’re being shown.” To illustrate, I included an anecdote Luna told me:

² See Appendix D for all analyses/summaries.

“One person in one of my classes went ‘well, were there women in Psychology?’ And my . . . professor went, “Yeah, but that’s not important right now,” and went back to Sigmund Freud.”

It took me more inference to contextualize a quote from Wanda near the end of our interview: *“Like, what is this program giving me? ‘Cause I’m putting everything into it”* (Wanda, E.1.9). First, I paraphrased, referring to contextual knowledge from other parts of the interview, *“Sometimes you feel like all this work that you’re putting in to get good grades, to do what you’re told, doesn’t necessarily mean anything in the real world.”* And then I draw a more concrete connection to an anecdote Wanda had told me earlier in the interview about their first exposure to Psychology while struggling with their mental health in high school: *“Like, what impact does your hard work have on a kid who was struggling like you in high school?”* *“For the Psychology program to be better catered to you,”* I concluded, *“there could be more practical applications and resources for you to be able to do the stuff that you care about in Psychology.”* And later: *“You talk about the possibility of taking a gap year between your undergraduate degree and pursuing graduate school, and your voice brims with curiosity and excitement at the unknown possibilities that await you. That curiosity and openness both sound very important to you in studying Psychology.”* (Wanda, E.1.9)

I emailed each student their analysis/summary along with a message asking them to let me know what seemed accurate or inaccurate, and whether I might have misinterpreted any of their words or misrepresented their experience in any way. Each analysis was preceded by an over-arching explanation and guidelines, (see Figure 5, below) and a list of the themes I constructed that pertained to that particular interview, like *“I love psychology”* and *“I do so much more work than my professors realize,”* framing these as *“some narratives that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.”*

Overview + Guidelines

I want to bring some anonymous quotes from our interview to the focus group session on February 16, organized into themes.

But first, I want to check that I've represented your views in a way that feels comfortable and accurate! So I've summarized the interview and included some quotes that feel important.

The ones I plan to bring to the group session are **in bold**.

How did I choose these quotes?

I've been looking for clues about how the Psychology curriculum tends to push some students to leave the Psychology "pipeline," and what students might need for psych education to be more welcoming and effective for all students.

I have also been thinking about similarities and contrasts across participants' experiences — I came up with a few **narratives** that I've **constructed** to connect your experiences (see the box below)

What are these "constructed" "narratives?"

When I say "**narrative**," I'm referring to a type of story that we tend to tell to make sense of our lives.

According to **thematic narrative analysis** (Riessman, 2008), to **narrative theory**, and to **social constructionism**, any interpretation I make is **constructed**, shaped by my own viewpoints and experiences. So I acknowledge that I didn't simply *find* these narratives naturally occurring in your or your classmates' interviews; I *built* them using my interpretations as well as your words.

What do I do with all this?

As you read, I ask you to do the following:

- Add comments letting me know if there is anything that feels wrong: if there is anything I have written (even if it's a direct quote!) that does *not* represent your point of view.
- Edit things you'd like to change or remove (using track changes so I can see!)
- Let me know if there are any quotes I've included that you would *not* like me to share in the group session.
- Let me know if any of the narratives/themes I've listed below do *not feel right* or do not represent your experience or your viewpoint.

Figure 5.

Importantly, I wanted to convey that what I had written was *subjective*, and its accuracy was primarily evaluable by the student, so if they disliked how I represented them, they were very welcome ask me to remove or reword any part.

Phase I Themes

Every student approved of their narrative analysis, with no omissions requested and few edits. One student added qualification and elaboration to some parts, (but still, “*All in all I felt well represented*”) and another student made a small edit to one of their own quotes to ensure they were communicating what they truly believed (their general feedback was “*Everything else looks really great and cool! Definitely feels interesting to be reading about myself this way*”). No other edits were suggested, nor were any omissions requested. After reading feedback from each student (which ranged from “*Yea you can share the quotes, that’s not a problem*” to “*Reading though everything I was really transported back to our original interview! The way you mapped out the connecting concepts was very eloquent and made me feel quite excited for the group discussion!!!*”), I collected all the approved quotes and developed six broad, cross-cutting themes to capture them. In the section that follows, I describe all six themes and illustrate each with a few quotes.³

There’s no map! Students describe the lack of guidance or information about how to proceed through a Psychology program, how to succeed, how to prepare for the future.

IRIS: *They have no problem telling you what you need for grad school, but they have a lot of trouble telling you where you can go to get it. Like, I have . . . looked for research opportunities but I don't know the databases, and I got rejected by two, because I don't know the databases, but I'm like, can we teach me the databases? Where do I learn them? . . . Nowhere.*

³ See Appendix D for a complete spreadsheet of quotes organized by theme.

WANDA: *I didn't even hear about the specialized honors from the university. I heard from a student who was taking the statistics course in first year. I looked through her LinkedIn, and she had that 'specialized honors,' and I was like, "Am I a specialized honors student?"*

LESTER: *Somehow get the students to think about what they want to do with Psychology going forward. And maybe help guide and steer them in that direction. There's so many options out there, right?*

ZOË: Yeah. I didn't personally learn about many options in my schooling. Did you?

LESTER: *No. Not at all.*

The program wasn't designed with someone like me in mind. Students indicate that their personal identity feels at odds with the demands or structure of the program. "Someone like me" included discussions about gender, race, sexuality, neurotype, mental health status, and learning styles/personality.

KAJAL: *It sometimes does suck to not see people who sound like you on paper, in any of the research that you're seeing. It distances you from what we're supposed to be studying. I don't know, maybe that's also just a perception when you're somebody who is part of a marginalized group. . . But sometimes it feels like you are expected to take the position of the white male researcher, and not ever be relating to whatever person is being studied, or whatever individual with a disorder.*

ELISSA: *I see a lot of white folks . . . Their experiences growing up didn't match well with mine . . .*

It's so isolating! Most students I interviewed felt that they were particularly lonely, and less connected than the rest of the student population. This seemed to be more the case in Psychology than in other programs the students had experience with, and although students agree it's been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they indicate that it's both pre-dated and outlasted lockdown and online courses.

LESTER: *The whole process . . . makes you feel very isolated. You feel alone.*

BAILEY: *I definitely haven't had, I guess, the easiest time making friends.*

KAJAL: *In the Psychology courses, it's all quite individual . . . the amount of discussion with peers and the quality of discussion with peers has been something that maybe is lacking, in my perception.*

ELISSA: *I felt I missed out on something by not making a lot of friendships or bonding with my peers . . .*

We have to do so much extra work. Students talk about the work they had to do to make up for teaching that doesn't work for them, problems or oversights in the curriculum or schedule, or expectations that exceed student capacity. A few times, students bring up the concept of having to teach oneself because they aren't getting what they feel they deserve in class. Taken together with other students' accounts, the extra work of teaching oneself isn't merely the fact that independent studying is required, but the sense that there is a limitless amount of work expected and required beyond class time, and the sense that class time itself is underutilized for learning.

WANDA: *I had to ultimately go back to the textbook and just learn all the information.*

IRIS: *We have our own expectations, we have the expectations of the school on an academic level, and then we have these unspoken expectations. And then on top of our*

reading, our own lives, most of us work as well, it can be a lot . . . You get overwhelmed and you think to yourself, do I have to sacrifice the quality of my learning process to get a grade? . . . Do I sacrifice my health to get this grade?

LESTER: *After the course is over, I have to go home and teach myself, right? I have to read the chapters myself, go over notes. I have to do that extra work.*

Reading the textbook and going over notes might seem like a given—nothing to complain about; just studying! And, to be sure, Lester isn't complaining: "*It is what it is. It's part of the process, right? We have to do what we have to do.*" They say that these expectations might be fair, but on the other hand, they might be "*a little unrealistic.*"

LESTER: *The thing about university is, a lot more people have a lot more going on cause the students are also in adulthood now; so they have more responsibilities.*

School is no longer your only concern: Some people have families, mortgages.

Lester suggests that professors might feel entitled to all of students' time, without taking into account that many students are adults themselves, whose time must be divided a number of other ways.

Can I have some mental health with that? Students are disappointed by the tension between the content they learn and expect to learn regarding mental health, and the lack of mental health support they receive, as well as a lack of skills they are taught to support mental health of themselves and others.

BAILEY: *I feel like when we talk about mental health, they don't really talk about what to say to people, or how to help people. I find it strange, honestly, that they don't teach things like that.*

ROBIN: *What resources will you give your students who are maybe trying to cope with these things as they go through your class and learn about them?*

LUNA: *You're in a field of human behavior and you're not being flexible with human behavior! It doesn't make sense . . .*

I love it! (posit⁴ corner). Most students used the word “love” when talking about their relationship towards Psychology; all of them spoke passionately about the subject.

IRIS: *I love it. As much as I'm not a big fan of the structure, the words, the information in the textbook, just speak to me. Sitting there reading my textbook . . . I love it.*

KAJAL: *Pretty much every class was, like, amazing for me.*

LESTER: *It's always been a passion of mine . . . it gives me insight in kinda every area of my life.*

LUNA: *I love it . . . Despite all these problems it has, it's so interesting . . . I keep just wanting to learn more.*

ROBIN: *I loved hearing about it. I loved accumulating information. I'd look up every article I could find about mental health stories and like, you know, . . . new brain imaging technique[s] . . . I just try and absorb as much of it as possible like a sponge.*

Phase I Discussion

What I saw made me excited for participants to get together. They seemed to have so many overlapping interests, complaints, and experiences! They were excited, passionate, and curious. They were fascinated by topics in Psychology and enjoyed many of their classes!

They also felt frustrated, under-served, and often sidelined, like some things were wrong and should be improved — like Luna’s criticisms of the “*male-dominated*” curriculum that

⁴ Short for “positive;” used colloquially

makes women feel “out of place.” Kajal noted “*The lack of diversity in a lot of research is . . . disappointing,*” and that “*In the Psychology courses, it’s all quite individually [structured],*” and Robin had some concrete solutions in mind: “*There should be more classes on the Psychology of sexuality or different racialized groups.*”

The isolation and frustration I heard renewed my interest to bring students together. I was also intrigued to see how students might approach their differences with one another. The goal of gleaning coherent information from a collection of interviews primed me to see similarities, glued together with my own assumptions and perspective, but I could also see glints of difference that I hoped might come alive and clash in interesting and productive ways if students were given the space to share them. In short, I expected students would have a lot to talk about.

Some of those things seemed harder to put a finger on, harder to find language for. Many students felt frustrated at the limits of their own ability to encompass their complex experiences; there was equivocating and stuttering, lots of self-editing and caveats. This is something that I didn’t include in my analyses or themes — the difficulty I felt running through some of these conversations — but which stood out to me.

For instance, when I ask Elissa about the way aspects of their identity impacted their experience as a Psychology student, they replied that it impacted them “*both in a positive and negative way.*” They decide to “*start with positive,*” where they describe how “*a lot of international students*” seem to enjoy the program. “*Uh, what else?*” they say after a pause— “*My mind is going to the negatives right away. So I’m going to go to the negatives.*”

“*I see a lot of white folks,*” they say, changing tack. “*And like, physically, me? I don’t look like them.*” But physical appearance isn’t the central thing, they amend: “*Rather, it was more of a language barrier.*” “*I don’t know,*” Elissa continues,

“A lot of this land, a lot of growing up here in Canada. What were—their experiences growing up didn't match as well with mine. So uh, interacting with someone first time, face to face, I don't know where to go from it. So I would say it was more like a language and a cultural barrier. I didn't connect as much as I would have wanted to in a Psychology undergrad.”

Connection, cultural relatability, language barrier, overwhelming whiteness—all of these are potential negatives, but each seems to supplant the previous one, like Elissa is trying to put a finger on what the issue really is, but it's slippery. When I ask them whether they think the Psychology curriculum is too reliant on assuming a homogeneous student body with similar experiences, their response is nuanced:

“Um, yeah; I do believe they are assuming everyone has a common shared experience, but I don't see it inherently as a bad thing. Cause I know that how you take in information is you seeing yourself in that content. I don't know if that makes sense.”

They offer a hypothetical example: if a professor mentioned eating some “ketchup chips—it's a common thing in Canada, right? . . . I would be feeling left out, disconnected . . . I would not be connected to the content and stuff if the example would be just ... ” Here, Elissa interrupts herself: “—But I do understand, people that feel connected to that would be like, ‘Oh yeah, yeah, that totally makes sense.’ ” and then concludes: “But yeah, I don't know. I don't know if that's a bad or good thing.”

The extra cultural learning required to catch up in a situation like this might prompt them to learn something more than intended. On the other hand, it can also lead to “*feeling disconnected, like feeling lost a little while and not like, uh, taking the class for ...—like, I will be lost, let's say, one, two minutes I will have lost, and all the things I would have potentially*

learned during those minutes I was lost. The first purpose of connecting the content to the students will not have went through me.”

All students’ thoughts are emotional as well as intellectualized, complex and qualified. “[Topics] regarding marginalized groups that aren’t just racism are brushed over so quickly,” Kajal laments, mentioning people in non-heteronormative relationships and people with disabilities in a longer list of examples. They interrupt themselves to acknowledge why it might be reasonable or necessary to rush through these important topics: “*You can understand every professor having their specialization, and feeling comfortable answering certain questions—*” and then resume their argument, with a little more caution:

“I feel like maybe more effort in the Psychology field in general should be made for the topics not to just be the random, one-off kind of discussion. Because, you know, it affects so many people’s lives, and it can be so valuable.”

Frequently, students come across tensions among their feelings while talking through ideas. Bailey starts off gushing about their interest in mental health and therapy, and their almost-entirely-positive experiences in Psychology classes. But things change when they start to compare those exciting experiences with some of the issues they’ve encountered, like their sense that professors don’t take enough responsibility for the impact that their curriculum might have on students, a lack of sensitivity and empathy, a lack of resources or acknowledgment of the possibility of mental health issues within the classroom. Uneasy and uncertain language begins to creep in. The way their professors have dealt with consequential mental health topics strikes Bailey as “*a little bit strange,*” and makes them feel “*a little bit weird.*” The words “strange” and “weird” each recur multiple times, alongside “uncomfortable” and “dehumanizing,” but tentative add-ons like “*a little bit*” are also peppered throughout, as though to soften the blow these

negative words might inflict on a listener. They add “*I think sometimes those kind of weird, uncomfortable kind of feelings can be good. You can see both sides to it.*”

It made sense for me to cut out the caveats and the backpedaling as I transcribed, the sentences that ended in ellipses: they took away from the clarity and confidence of students’ messages. But I was also struck by the similarities across transcripts, and they resonated with me, too. I also felt frustrated and stuck, trying to figure out how to describe certain complaints in a way that would be legible and acceptable to the Psychology professors who would be reading my paper, rather than being dismissed as lazy or unsuitable.

I drew a connection between my own frustration and self-consciousness, and the feelings I perceived in the students I spoke with, and I came up with an explanation: **institutional ways of knowing, like those we learn in Psychology, might be constraining our ability to clearly conceptualize problems and dream up solutions.** Whatever ways Psychology might disable us or push us out were likely to be active during this very project: despite my attempts at informal relationality, students were knowingly participating in a Psychology research project, on the topic of Psychology education, and were expected to bring their psychology experience to bear. Thus, their Psychology frame must have been activated, at least somewhat: whatever ways of learning they acquired through exposure to psychological texts, assignments, program requirements, and other cues.

In our conversations, the students and I were all trying to put our fingers on issues with the very system we were struggling to stay afloat in, trying not to leak out of. I believe the struggles and stuckness I mention above pointed to some knowledge that lurked under the surface, deeper in us than we could access through the mental frame of academic Psychology. If I wanted to get at this knowledge in a rich and full way, I reasoned, I’d have to loosen the grip of

the academic frame of mind, both in myself and in the students I wanted to gather together. To do so, I'd need to create an environment that would counteract the issues that students *were* able to name as making them feel unwelcome or unfit to move through the pipeline of Psychology; or which they thought needed to change.

I needed to *humanize* this interaction, to ensure that students were able to bring their complex, authentic selves to this group session. I wanted to reduce the power imbalance that remained from my proximity to authority as a TA and a graduate student. I wanted to increase focus on process over product and reduce the sense that there was a correct or incorrect way to participate. In the same vein, I wanted to encourage embodied, relational, and intuitive ways of knowing, while discouraging reliance on scientific, objective ways of knowing that might be habitual in Psychology. I hoped to reduce the sense that they were in a classroom and speaking with a teacher, so that any concern about how a professor might respond to them (whether they'd be believed, seen, laughed at, punished) would be minimized as much as possible. In other words, I wanted to create a space where self-consciousness and intellect slipped away.

I decided that a *zine workshop* could foster the type of environment I was seeking. Zines are “quirky, individualized booklets filled with diatribes, reworkings of pop culture iconography, and all variety of personal and political narratives” (Piepmeier, 2008, 214). Zines are importantly “scruffy,” homemade, informal, and chaotic—qualities that could seem accidental and unwanted in other contexts are often central to the appeal of this medium. Max Barnewitz argues that zines can function as an important tool for releasing the “grip” of higher education's hegemony, helping to reinstate the value of lived experience (2021). It is also important that zines are physical, ephemeral, embodied, and relational — most often photocopied and stapled in small batches, and passed around by hand. Alison Piepmeier notes that the presence of physical zines

in a classroom seems to make her students “feel personally invited to enter into the zine discourse, as is evidenced by the fact that they begin creating zines of their own.” “instigate intimate, affectionate connections between their creators and readers, not just communities but *embodied* communities that are made possible by the materiality of the zine medium” (Piepmeier, 2008, p. 214). Zines and zine-making “invite community learning and critical consciousness” (Barnewitz, 2021), resisting conventional forms of knowledge production.

I expected that facilitating a zine workshop would encourage students to collaborate with one another, and help them get out of their heads, so to speak. Making a zine together would require modes of thinking, acting, and engaging that were very different from the tasks required of them in their Psychology studies. Different enough, hopefully, that they would hopefully help students to access concepts that had been unavailable to them when they were attempting to be legible within a Psychology framework. So, after gathering feedback from my narrative analyses, I asked all interviewees to participate in Phase II of this project.

Phase II: Zine Workshop

Phase II Participants

All students I interviewed consented to have their quotes brought to the group session, and five of them were able to make it on the day of the workshop (zine workshop; $n_2=5$). This circumstantial attrition shifted the demographic distribution: a greater ratio of white students participated to students who spoke of whiteness from an outside perspective. More than half of the students present mentioned being first-generation university students, and one was a recent immigrant, speaking English as a second language. A majority also reported having mental illness and/or neuro-atypicality, and others related to the experiences and diagnoses mentioned, but did not specifically volunteer a personal relationship to any labels (labels mentioned and claimed by one or more participants included ADHD, BPD, bipolar disorder, and anxiety). Most of the group chose to share their pronouns. The pronouns shared were she/her, she/they, and he/they. The intersectionality of the identity markers I mention in this section makes for importantly different experiences, but I do not mention these intersections to reduce the chance of participants being identifiable.

Phase II Materials & Set-Up

I booked a spacious, well-lit room with a large, conference-style table, comfortable chairs, and two walls of windows overlooking buildings and fields of York University campus. On the table, I laid large pieces of posterboard, each with a theme written in large letters at the top. I printed out all approved quotes (leaving out names) and grouped them under the themes I thought they pertained to most. Figures 6, 7, and 8 show posters and related materials as they looked shortly before students arrived for the workshop.

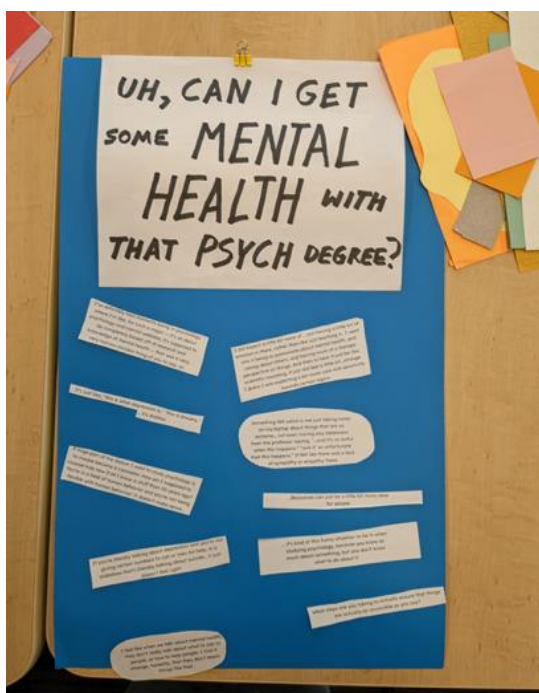


Figure 6.

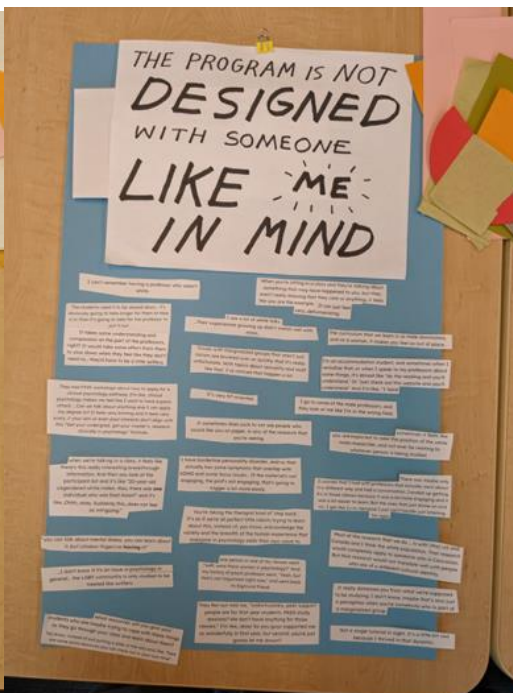


Figure 7.



Figure 8.

I provided tokens for participants to place on certain posters to indicate their preference or support for certain themes (see Figure 9, below—red plastic heart gems scattered across the theme “The program is not designed with someone like me in mind,” indicate that students find this theme particularly relevant or important), as well as markers and scraps of colourful paper to encourage them to respond or react to the quotes.



Figure 9.

I brought six sample zines on various topics and in various shapes and sizes to demonstrate what the format could look like, as well as one sample zine mock-up, along with a slew of collage and drawing materials. On the wall, I pasted the following three guiding questions to help focus the session (pictured in Figure 10).

1. “What would make psych[ology] more welcoming to more of us?”
2. “What would pull more students through psych[ology] instead of pushing them out?”
3. “What would the psych[ology] curriculum look like if it took into account all our experiences?”

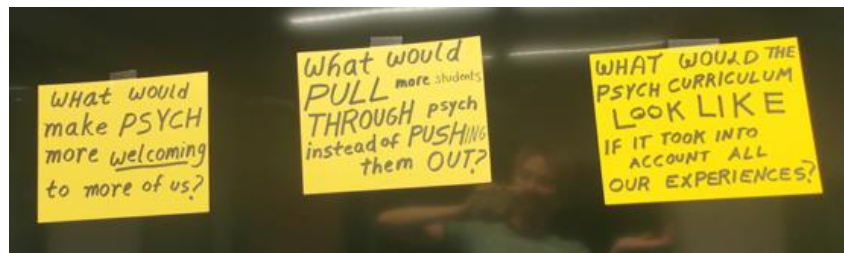


Figure 10.

Phase II Procedures

Participants emailed me their signed informed consent forms (after which I sent them a C\$35 e-transfer) and were offered another chance to sign them by hand upon being reminded of the procedure, confidentiality, and other consent.

We began with an activity to introduce ourselves and activate reflection about the topic: each participant was handed a folded index card upon which they were given three minutes to draw themselves as a Psychology student (see, for example, Figure 11), including whatever name they wished to be called for the duration of the workshop. The participating students and I introduced ourselves and showed the name card, propping it up in front of us to help people remember.



Figure 11.

Next, I outlined the structure of the rest of the workshop (see Table 2).

Table 2

Zine Workshop Agenda

1. Introductions & warm-up - draw yourself
2. Overview + introducing zines
3. Mill around, consider quotes & themes. Read, upvote, comment
4. Discuss & share
5. BREAK
6. Assemble & decorate materials—freestyle, no plans needed
7. Consider guiding questions & conceptualize zine focus/structure

8. Order pages / come up with beginning & end pages or a title
9. Debrief & reflect: *What was this like? What's next?*

I introduced the concept of zines and gave more information about the purpose of integrating zine-making into my project. Then, participants were asked to mill around the room and look at the quotes that lay clustered in different themes across the central table. Each participant was given a handful of plastic heart “gems” that they could place on one or more themes they found particularly important. They were also encouraged to write on the quotes or posterboard itself, and/or to write on scraps of paper left next to each poster.

After students seemed to settle, indicating that they had interacted with the posters and quotes all they wanted to, we moved on to a discussion. Students were asked to talk with one another about what they had seen, what surprised them, what struck them as interesting or funny.

We then had a break for about 15 minutes, during which I left the audio recorders running (with participants’ verbal consent), and participants and I continued to chat about experiences in the Psychology program. Once the break was over, I brought out zine-making materials and described how the zine could be constructed: the margins required for things to not get cut off during photocopying, the binding method, etc.

Each student was given one two-page spread (with the option of making more!) and their choice of the materials spread across the table. They then had over an hour’s time to draw and collage, taking quotes from the table and pasting them into their pages.

“What would the psych curriculum look like if it took into account all our experiences?”

I asked students to consider this question, the last of the three guiding questions I had posted on the wall, to try to reorient students from a deficit framework to a desire-based framework (as in Tuck, 2009). We talked about where the zine could go and what we could do next in response to the needs and desires expressed thus far. We then laid out all the pages that

had been made, and discussed the order of the pages, as well as possible titles and covers. We clipped the pages together, said goodbye, and then we cleaned up a bit and each went home.

My next step was to transcribe the audio from this workshop. I also wanted to finish, photocopy, and assemble the zine. I added some pages, including an introductory page and extra pages for future readers to participate, and my friend helped me photocopy, fold, collate, hole-punch (it turned out I needed a drill!), and assembling the zines.

I scanned the finished zine and shared it with all participants, and then began disseminating copies. I am still in contact with some of the participants about the possibility of sharing the zine in different spaces and having the project grow and spread.

Phase II Results

What counts as “results” of a zine workshop? Is it the process? The physical evidence left behind after it’s over? The new insights gained as a result of working together and sharing experiences? I have a wealth of information to choose from: nearly three hours of interaction, reflection, and creation; verbal and non-verbal communication; and multiple modalities of interaction and feedback. I could count the heart-gems participants placed on their favourite themes, describe the comments students wrote on particular quotes, code the notes I took during the workshop, or identify patterns in a transcript of the audio record of the workshop ... and still, I’d be missing so much rich and complex information about the students’ experiences in Psychology, about their relational experiences within the workshop, about the way their ideas sparked, shifted, intersected and bounced off one another in this workshop.

I can only present a small subset of the rich and complex information available to me, which I am certain is only a small subset of what information might have been gleaned from the workshop. I won’t worry about the infinity I’m missing, then. I’ll tell you about what I can get a

handle on, and semi-arbitrarily restrict the scope of my data such that I can at least catch some flickers of the richness I cannot fully encompass. It feels most correct to focus first on the zine, which was produced during the workshop and represents a culmination of the processes that led to and were undertaken during the workshop. I describe the zine below, but I highly recommend you look at it yourself at this point. I include a scan of the zine in its entirety in Appendix Z and encourage you to ask me if you haven't been able to get your hands on a physical copy⁵.

Zine as results. The zine is made from legal-sized paper, folded in half, with a 1-inch margin, bound together by three brass pins. During the workshop, I made a temporary cover page out of one of my guiding questions, “*What would make psych more welcoming to more of us?*” (Figure 12).

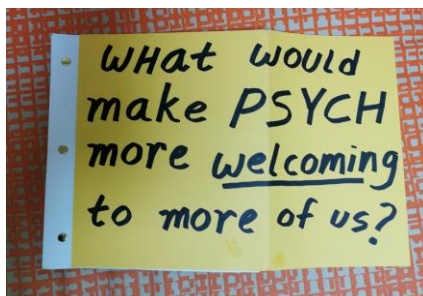


Figure 12.

Later, I replaced this with the title “*Psych!*” and a drawing of a Venn diagram where each circle is a face (one exhausted, the other hopeful), with jagged edges at their intersection (Figure 13).

⁵ See Appendix Z. If you'd like a physical copy of the zine (as I and other zine experts would recommend, e.g. Piepmeier, 2008; Barnewitz, 2021; Vacchelli, 2018), email me at kzmartin@yorku.ca.

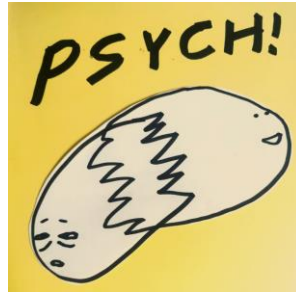


Figure 13.

The students remaining at the very end of the workshop chose one of the themes as the opening page of the zine: “Uh, can I get some *mental health* with that psych degree?” Another student added a small “*Please?!?*” at the bottom, at the request of another, who felt like it would “*add to the sentiment—like, ‘we’re desperate!’*” On the next two pages, I added an introduction describing the project. Most of that information is included here already, so I will copy in only the last portion (see Figure 14 for a scanned image of the page):

[This zine is] unfinished and ongoing ... And now you’re a part of it!

Currently, you are reading this zine. Maybe you can relate?

Also, you can participate. Do you have answers to any of the questions raised? Add your own thoughts; scribble in the blank pages. Or take apart the zine and refasten it with extra sheets of paper left in for future readers. Add your name on the authors’ page!

Next, you can share it. Who do you think should know about the experiences in these pages? Give a copy to your professor or your dean. Share it with a classmate; leave it in a classroom or office. Take it apart and photocopy it using the instructions enclosed. If you’re reading an online version, you can print it out, or just attach it to an email. (See also Figure 14).

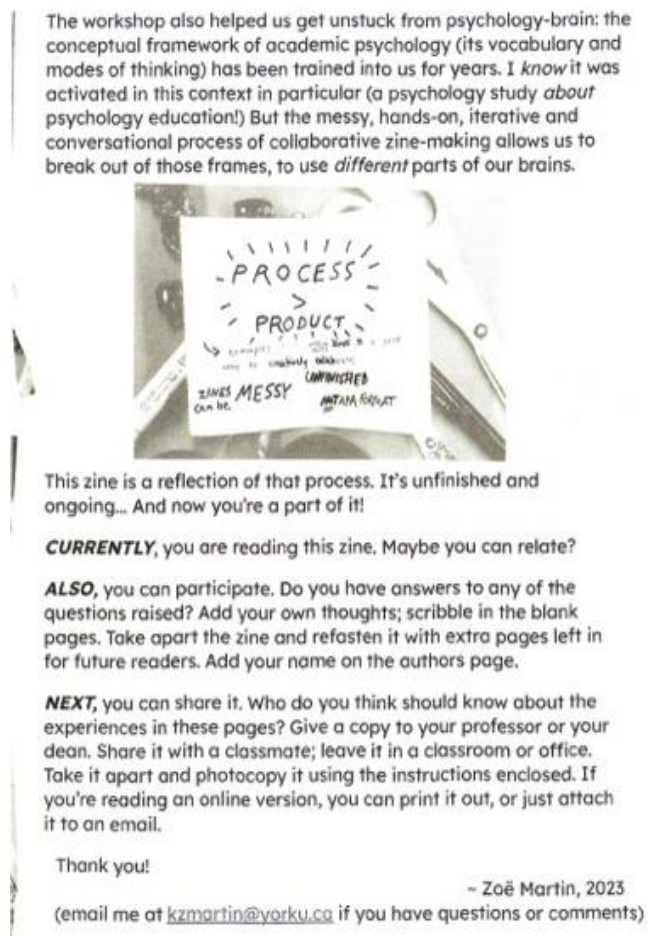


Figure 14.

In the ensuing pages, you'll see colourful collages of quotes assembled from the 1-1 interviews; pleas, wishes, and complaints scrawled in marker and coloured pencil; words and pictures snipped from magazines and scantrons. The pages are cheerful and indignant, hopeful and desperate, practical and dreamy: sometimes alternating between contrasting tones, sometimes inhabiting multiple simultaneously. On the left side of one student's spread (two pages side by side; Figure 15), a collage of three brain scans clink together, with the phrase "*cheers!*" chiming out above.

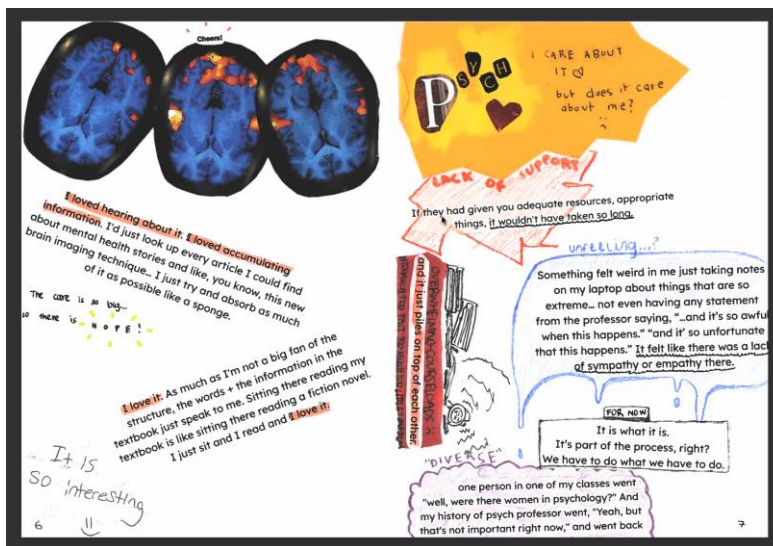


Figure 15.

Below are two long interview quotes from the “I love psych!” section, in which the student has highlighted in pink multiple phrases that include the word “love.” Written in tiny, rounded letters on the left of the page:

“The care is so big ... so there is H O P E !”

The last word shines with small rays of light, the same colour as the brightest nodes of activity in the cheers-ing brains above.

The facing page shifts in tone: “*PSYCH*,” it reads, “*I care about it <3 / but does it care about me? :(*” This page has more jagged edges, a drawing of an alarm clock radiating frenetic noise-lines, and quotes that the artist has corralled into bubbles with different headings: “lack of support,” “Unfeeling ...?” “overwhelming course loads,” and, in heavily sarcastic quotation marks, ““DIVERSE””.

This student describes their spread:

[On the left-hand page] *It's literally just 'good things' and I guess the word that stuck out to me as well was 'love.' Because there was a lot of dimensions of loving the content...*

loving everything other than the structure, and finding it super interesting. But then... I don't know; it's a lot easier to structurally talk about what's wrong versus what's right. And like, I just kind of hit the themes that I saw, I guess... everything that we've already laid out: course load, lack of support, and being unfeeling. Like, I think [NAME]'s page was "dehumanizing." There was this one quote about feeling weird taking notes about really extreme situations, or extreme levels of troubles that people are facing, and then having it be looked at in a really robotic way. But like, I really just let it bounce off the quotes, because ... (shrugs). Like, if I had to write an essay about it, I'm like, I could write an essay! But visually, I'm just like, I would just stick it here and make a face (laughs).

On page 9 of the zine, a pink cut-out heart reads “*I WANT to want to be here*” (Figure 16). Underneath, the student writes “*We are people too!*” in a blue cloud, which peeks out behind a photo of a hiker overlooking a pink and blue sky (Figure 17).

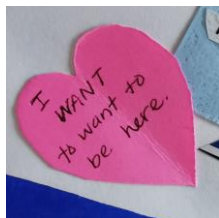


Figure 16.



Figure 17.

Across page 14, a student writes “*What is undergrad psych?*” in rough black letters on a red background (Figure 18). In response, nine quotes are pasted across this spread, all of them

describing exclusionary experiences in psychology, like feeling out of place in a male-dominated curriculum, and being disappointed in class-assigned readings for their WEIRD samples. After all these quotes, the student writes: “*We need to do something about this...*” The ellipses indicate an unfinished thought; a rainbow below is flanked by some possible changes, and, below the rainbow,

... ” *To see bring out the rainbow*”

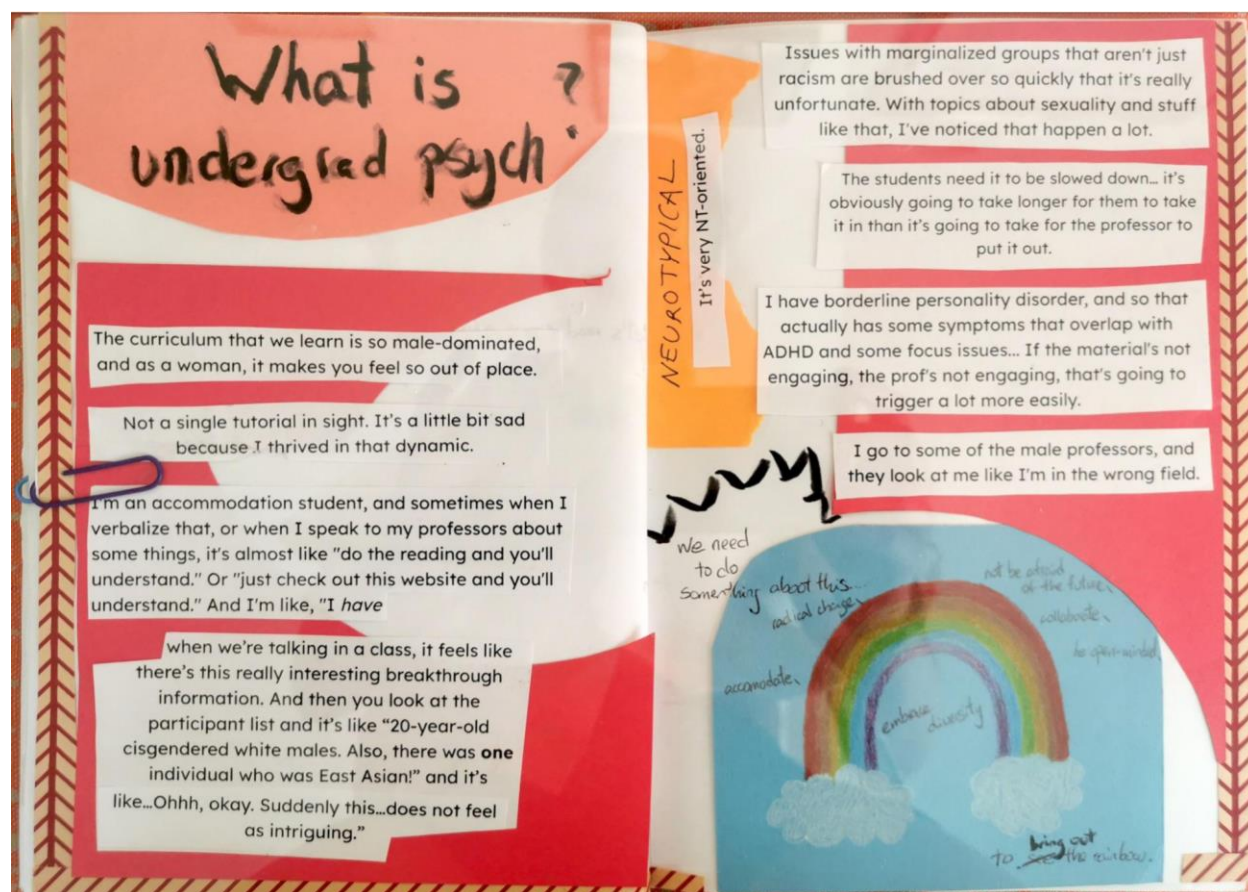


Figure 18.

On page 20, a student has pasted in a background of red ScanTron pages meant for use in multiple choice tests. The quotes pasted across illustrate some students' feelings about Psychology courses:

“When you’re sitting in a class and they’re talking about something that may have happened to you, but they aren’t really showing that they care or anything ... it feels like you are the example.”

“you can talk about mental illness, you can learn about it, but (shakes finger) no having it!”

“I’m not seeing, or I’m not being shown, or there are no resources.”

Summarizing these quotes, *“trying to make psychology not so DEHUMANIZING!”* is drawn out in bold black permanent marker; the last word vibrating, trapped in a bold red downturned half-circle. A number of students in the workshop were animated by the word “dehumanizing,” which was brought up in one of the quotes under the theme “Can I get some mental health with that psych degree?” and reverberated throughout the discussion and zine. Being treated more humanely seemed to undergird or bridge a number of other desired changes. On the facing page (21), the same student elaborates, collecting quotes that come together to illustrate the idea that the Psychology curriculum feels particularly isolating, more so than other programs. On this page, the background is a bold, chaotic black and white pattern, with handwriting in red and black permanent marker.

On pp. 22–23, one student chose to let the quotes speak almost entirely for themselves, simply pasting in quotes that felt important to highlight, grouped into common threads that hung together in their mind, each group demarcated by an undulating pencil line. The first group deals with the titular theme, which most of the students in the workshop deemed the most important: Psychology’s treatment of mental health feels hypocritical and *“shallow,”* favouring *“scientific-sounding”* information at the expense of *“a bit more care and sensitivity.”* The second group of quotes is more hopeful and idealistic, apparently outlining the bits of

Psychology that might carry us through the tough parts. But the last and longest collection of quotes illustrates problems students have with the structure of the program, specifically related to a lack of accessibility and resources in Psychology (see Figure 19).

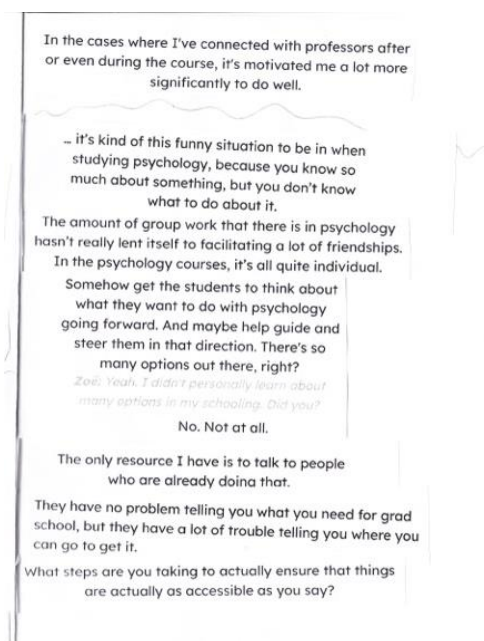


Figure 19.

Phase II Discussion

Now that I've described some of the zine itself, I'd like to discuss how I interpret these "results" in context of the conversations and activities that happened during the zine workshop.

Overall, the content and structure of the zine reflect the energy of the workshop, which was chatty and commiserative, frustrated and ambivalent, validating and cathartic. The layout of the zine—the tension and contrast in colours, shapes, and compositions—mirrors the conflicting feelings expressed in the workshop: hopeful yearning, righteous anger, wry disappointment. The zine promotes big, broad ideas for change, undergirded by a strong sense that the creators of the zine are entitled to a program that accommodates their curiosity, creativity, and dedication to

psychological knowledge, but we also see that desire frequently counteracted by frustration and a sense of helplessness.

In each step of the workshop, I left ample space to observe what students would want to do and say, and to encourage conversation among them without interfering too much with the direction of their interactions or topics of conversation. Students spent most of this time connecting and commiserating, relating personal anecdotes that reinforced what they saw on the table and heard from one another. Having summarized and reflected on many of these stories in the first phase of this project, I was initially surprised. I had imagined that the urge toward narrative and storytelling might have been fulfilled in the first phase of this project, and that the zine workshop might be more oriented towards next steps. At my most optimistic, I had been expecting to see a blueprint emerge over the course of the workshop, indicating what hairline fractures to work at in the undergraduate portion of the Psychology pipeline, or maybe a manual for how to deal with those cracks (to patch them, to keep students from leaking; or to widen them in the hopes of shedding light and contributing to more radical change). Instead, I saw students bringing their stories together, bouncing ideas off one another, chewing on the interesting connections and contrasts that arose in their reading and in their conversations, sitting with the trouble and complexity of their experiences.

ROBIN: *You have years and years and years of experience in this field; you know how to talk to people with mental illnesses, with various disorders; how to help people work through their stuff. And yet you can't like, you know,—*

LUNA: *—talk to your own students!—*

ROBIN: *—even give like a half-assed, sort of positive comment about questions that people have for you. (three people quietly say "yeah") There's a disconnect between the learning side of things and the practical side.*

ELISSA: *I want to add onto that: I had a professor; it was in a motivation class ... (pause) ... he had zero motivation in that class. (participants laugh; excellent comic timing). He was monotone, he was rambling, and I got lost several times during the lecture. I'm like, "you're teaching motivation, but ... you're kind of like the least motivated professor I have ever met."*

I remember this anecdote from Elissa's interview. Repeating it helped students tie together and elaborate on the topic of discordance between the content and form of classes; a professor's factual knowledge and the effective transmission of that knowledge. Bailey carries this thread further, elaborating on an anecdote she had mentioned some moments earlier:

BAILEY: *The professor that I'm talking about—the kind of scary one (laughs)— he started off the course on the first day literally saying to us, "I want you to come here and be anxiety-free" and "we're here to learn, and you shouldn't be stressing!" and whatever. And I was like, "oh, that's like so nice!" ...And then, kind of like what you were saying (to Elissa), he completely contradicted everything.*

Bailey links their story to Elissa's, and this link garners even more recognition and agreement. Luna says:

LUNA: *So many profs are like that.*

Other participants agree. This was typical: relieved and emphatic “Exactly!”s, “Yeah!”s and “Me too!”s rang out throughout the workshop, propelling further discussion. On occasion, one student would trail off in the middle of a sentence, and another student would interject to

finish it — whether or not it was finished in the way the original speaker intended, this suggested to me a *sense* of connection, urgency, and co-involvement. During a break, we were talking about the room where the workshop took place (it's a spacious, glass-walled conference room on the eighth floor of York U's Kaneff Tower, in case you missed my earlier description). I started to remark jokingly that windows were hard to come by in Psychology, and students started laughing and talking over each other before I finished the sentence:

LUNA: *Why does Psychology—?* (laughs)

KAJAL: *You're not allowed sunlight!* (laughs)

LUNA: *—psych buildings don't have windows for some reason!*

ROBIN: *—Shoved in the basement...*

I participated in the cacophony too:

ZOË: *—in University of Toronto too, like, every psych class that I took had no windows.*

And I was in three different labs, and they were all in the basement.

LUNA: *...big lecture halls with no windows.*

ROBIN: *There's a study for you right there: the effects of—*

LUNA: *—not having windows...* (laughs)

ROBIN: *—students not seeing natural light for, you know,*

BAILEY: *—years on end!*

KAJAL: (laughs) *Yeah*

ROBIN: *—half their day! [For] four years, five years...! You know?*

In addition to repeating their own stories and jumping in to finish one another's sentences, students retold one another's stories by incorporating quotes from their co-participants and contextualizing them within the zine pages they created. Next to a quote about feeling

expected to inhabit the perspective of a white male researcher, from the theme “The program isn’t designed with someone like *me* in mind,” a student added the comment “:(100000000%”—expressing an extreme, albeit disappointed, agreement (Figure 20).

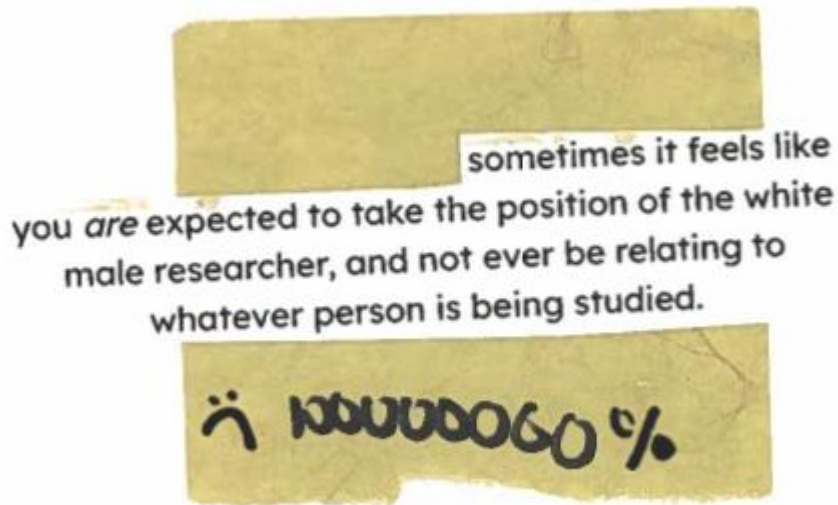


Figure 20.

At some moments in the workshop, I wondered how I could help precipitate a shift towards solution-focused discussion. I asked myself why students were “stuck” “repeating” and elaborating on their frustrations — words that might have been relevant if I had wanted to prioritize something like productivity or efficiency. This framing would be a disservice to the spirit of the research, to the solidarity and connection that was being built during the workshop. Upon reflection, I am glad I did not act on my impatience, and instead allowed myself to be more driven by the motivation to facilitate connection than the urge to produce usable results. A more process-oriented narrative of the workshop provides a richer account of what was created: students passed one another’s experiences back and forth for inspection, turning them over in their mouths and reproducing them on the pages of the zine, drawing and strengthening connections among their ideas.

This process itself was a type of research-creation—knowledge production grounded in relational processes—and an enactment of slow scholarship, giving ideas “a chance to marinate” as Mountz et al. say (2015). I proceed from the strengths-based premise that the pace as well as the content of dialogue indicated something important about students’ needs and desires within Psychology education. The workshop created a space where students could connect, and they made use of this space to share stories with each other, compare notes, make jokes, dream up solutions, and make connections with one another. The form that the zine took, and the direction and shape of students’ conversations, reflected the importance of these connections.

Connection. One of the main ways the students highlighted the importance of connection was by describing the many ways they felt a conspicuous lack of it: isolation, a major theme in the interviews, was also brought up multiple times during the workshop and in the resulting zine. The students shared anecdotes of feeling isolated, dehumanized, and lonely in their journey through the Psychology program (see, for example, Figure 21, below, or page 11 of the zine), with a painful lack of class discussion and time for group work.

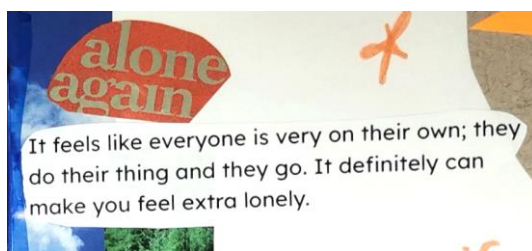


Figure 21.

Ironically, isolation was a major unifying point for them. Consider the following exchange from the zine workshop, in which Robin reflects on the ways that the workshop itself made them feel more connected:

ZOË: *What is interesting or surprising about seeing other people's points of view? I know that isolation was a big one — there's not a lot of crosstalk. What did you notice from talking to each other?... If anything?*

ROBIN: *A lot of the comments that I've seen were pretty validating ... despite a lot of people feeling isolated, we're kind of linked, bound together (laughing) by that isolation. We aren't alone in experiencing these issues. But it kind of... makes me question even more: why are we not able to do something about this?—Like, you know, we don't need like a lonely people club or anything—but like, still, [we need] something. What are they doing to fix this already?*

LUNA: (whispers) *Nothing.*

ROBIN: *Yep! (chuckles; so do others) Nothing. That's the impression I'm getting as well, so ...*

LUNA: *—That's why we're here (softly. chuckles)*

While I may have primed the students by presenting isolation as an important theme across their interviews, the students take the idea further, with Luna going so far as to suggest that isolation is the reason all of them are participating in this workshop. Robin notes that reading other students' quotes validates their own thoughts and feelings surrounding isolation in the Psychology program, and that they feel connected to the other students thanks to this knowledge.

Psychology instructors reading this might be tempted, here, to wonder whether isolation might be an indiscriminate side-effect of the pressures inherent to contemporary academic programs, or a simple artefact of post-pandemic school structure (I researched students in 2022

when many classes were just beginning to resume on campus). Not necessarily: I agree with students that isolation might be an emergent property of *how* the subject matter in Psychology is taught. Consider, for instance, the following interview quote on p. 21 of the zine under the heading “*No Support, Isolating, Lonely*” (Figure 22): “*You hear something heavy [in a psychology class] and then maybe it makes you not really want to talk to people that you’re not even close with.*” Studying emotionally charged topics, like sexual violence and suicide, without the social structures needed to support processing that information, makes it difficult for the speaker to take the initiative necessary to forge connections in their Psychology classrooms (see Appendix C: Narrative Thematic Analyses of Interviews, for Bailey’s, Iris’s, Kajal’s, Lester’s, Luna’s, and Wanda’s takes on how the structure of Psychology poses obstacles to connection.)

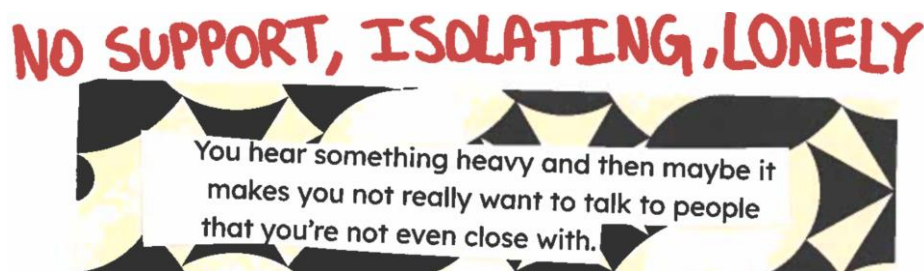


Figure 22.

Quotes on the following spread of the zine (pp. 22–23) indicate that the students *know* that a strong social support system is important to help them feel less isolated, and that these social connections often pay dividends in many ways: a sense of belonging, greater motivation and better performance in class, more opportunities to participate actively in Psychology research, and smoother passage through the pipeline. “*In the cases where I’ve connected with professors after or even during the course,*” one quote reads on page 23 of the zine, “*it’s motivated me a lot more significantly to do well.*”

Nevertheless, the rest of the quotes on this page indicate that students feel discouraged or dis-abled from making connections that would help them move more smoothly through the

Psychology program. Referring to the challenge of finding resources to navigate academic Psychology, a quote names other students, not the university's own resources, as the speaker's only lifeline: "*the only resource I have is to talk to people who are already doing that.*" And yet, meeting other students is a challenge in itself: "*The [small] amount of group work that there is in Psychology hasn't really lent itself to facilitating a lot of friendships.*"

Unrequited Love. The theme of isolation and connection within the program dovetails with something more complex. Students desire support from and connection with their peers, certainly, but individually pursuing friendships doesn't completely solve the problem. The students also express a desire to connect with some personification of Psychology itself: a leitmotif of unrequited love runs through the zine, hearts appearing next to stories of heartbreak, like the "*I WANT to want to be here,*" in Figure 16, desire and meta-desire battling for primacy. On pp. 26–27 of the zine, a flowery pink page proudly proclaims, "*We <3 Psychology,*" followed by a long series of ellipses that lead us to the admission: "*...we just want psychology to love us back...*" this structure paralleled in Figure 23, where a student writes about "Psych": "*I care about it <3 but does it care about me?*"

The idea of unrequited love represents the importance of human connection within Psychology and the resulting rejection that students feel when they sense they are unwanted, whether abstractly by the demands of their curriculum, or interpersonally by classmates or professors. I wonder if such feelings of ambivalence push students toward cracks in Psychology, and whether they might ultimately contribute to their loss from the pipeline. I was not able to speak to people who had been forced out of Psychology —my recruitment only reached students who were actively enrolled in a Psychology program— so all I can say with confidence on the matter is that some students who feel pushed to the margins of this program also feel

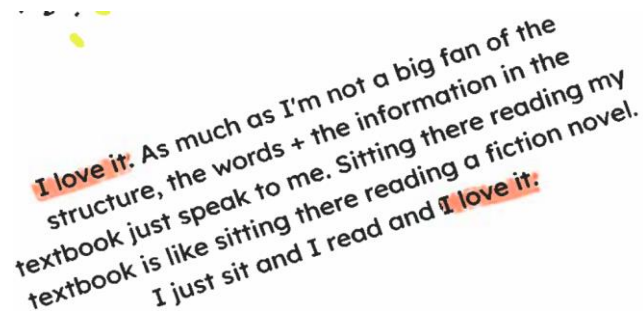
significantly impacted by a care for the subject matter that does not feel reciprocated. These students feel dehumanized and isolated as they make their way through the early portions of the pipeline. If future research could share the stories and experiences of students who have been pushed out of Psychology programs, whether by failing out, dropping out, or switching programs out of felt necessity, that research might allow us to better understand what role if any unrequited love and isolation plays in the leaky pipeline.



Figure 23.

Uh, Can I Get Some Mental Health, Please? Just as the theme of unrequited love reflected a discrepancy between the way the students imagined Psychology would treat them and the reality of their experience, so too did the theme of mental health within the Psychology program— or, rather, a distinct and surprising lack of mental health and care. In the interviews, most students noted incongruities between the content they were learning and the way the content was taught. They then use the zine to call out a perceived lack of consideration for their own experiences, mental health, and neurodivergence, which they saw as contradictory to the ideals of the Psychology they want and expect: a Psychology that responds to the needs of people and improves human well-being.

Framed in pink highlighted “I love it”s, the quote in Figure 24 (page 6 of the zine) illustrates this tension between passion for the content and disappointment with how it’s taught.:
“I love it. As much as I’m not a big fan of the structure, the words and the information in the textbook just speak to me...”



I love it. As much as I'm not a big fan of the structure, the words + the information in the textbook just speak to me. Sitting there reading my textbook is like sitting there reading a fiction novel. I just sit and I read and **I love it.**

Figure 24.

Pages 20–25 of the zine are filled with quotes that illustrate how jarring students found the lack of compassion for mental health needs. As a quote on p. 20 recounts: “*When you’re sitting in a class and they’re talking about something that may have happened to you, but they aren’t really showing that they care or anything... it feels like you are the example. It can just feel very dehumanizing.*” Again and again, students recall the teaching of intensely human, emotional, care-worthy topics as feeling clinical, cold, and lacking empathy, coming off as “*strange*” and “*shallow*”: it feels like “*you can talk about mental illness,*” says Robin, “*you can learn about it, but (shakes finger) no having it!*”

Despite feeling alienated, students resist being pushed out of the pipeline and express clear desires for a more inclusive program: calls for a more humanizing Psychology ring out across the zine (e.g., Figure 17). Notably, the very first line of the zine, which spreads across the first two pages and was one of the main themes I identified in the interviews, is a request punctuated by a large “*please?!* ” added by students. Indeed, on the same page where students point at the irony that undergrad Psychology “*is very neurotypical-oriented,*” they write “*we need to do something about this—radical change*” (page 15 of the zine).

Perspective-switching. In the workshop, students would frequently begin a critique, complaint, or suggestion for change, and then abruptly interrupt themselves to speak from a contrasting perspective, before returning to complete their initial thought. This also occurred in

the interviews. Often, it was to acknowledge a potential counterclaim, temporarily invoking the perspective of an imagined professor who might not initially agree with or respect their complaint. The below quote, for example, reads almost like a dialogue, although Kajal is the only speaker. I note what I perceive to be a perspective switch by changing fonts and inserting em-dashes:

KAJAL: Even if you try to talk to profs after—like, you know, not, not with like, with the ulterior motive of, like, "I want a reference,"—but like, if you're literally just there, and you're like, "Hey, I have a question; can I ask you about this or this?" I think like 70% of the time, profs just seem so inconvenienced by it. They just seem like they—like, I understand that it's a job and like everybody wants to go home from work as soon as possible—But it's also like, you know, if I ask a question, please don't make me feel stupid for it... because I'm, I'm showing interest in your work or in what you're teaching, and then you just get completely shut down. It makes it really hard to make the connections that you need to get to somewhere like grad school. But yeah, I don't know."

Here, I read two or three separable threads of speech: in the first thread, Kajal is attempting to convey their personal experience of feeling dis-abled from asking questions. If I were to splice this thread together, and remove the pauses and equivocations, that first thread would look something like this:

"And even if you try to talk to profs after [class, they] just seem so inconvenienced by it. ...You just get completely shut down. It makes it really hard to make the connections that you need to get to somewhere like grad school."

I interpret this as the meat of the conversation; the core of what Kajal is sharing about their own perspective and experience. It seems, too, that this thread is the part of the

conversation most clearly directed at the other students participating in the workshop; it is connection-seeking and relation-building. The use of “you” rather than “I” implies a more generalized form of storytelling rather than a specific anecdote in which the listener is expected to inhabit a particular moment in Kajal’s life, with a particular professor. Instead, Kajal is speaking to “you,” a general Psychology student, and about “profs”—the plural form precluding reference to an individual professor. This thought is fragmented and choppy in the transcript: Kajal pauses mid-sentence and seems to evaluate their complaint as though from a professor’s perspective. They clarify: “—*Like, you know, not with the ulterior motive of wanting a reference!*” as though they expect to be suspected of having an ulterior motive. “—*But...*” they continue, after another pause, and return to their personal perspective. A similar shift happens again moments later: “—*Like, I understand that it’s a job, and everybody wants to go home from work as soon as possible.*” Once again, Kajal interrupts an account of their own experience of alienation to empathize with the perspective of those who made them feel alienated; to consider why a professor might justifiably “seem so inconvenienced” by their question. This empathizing is especially interesting when considering students’ frequent appeals throughout the workshop and interviews to be treated more humanely by professors.

I identify a third thread where Kajal’s personal perspective and the professor’s merge: “*If I ask a question, please don’t make me feel stupid for it,*” Kajal says, “*because I’m—I’m showing interest in your work, or in what you’re teaching.*” Kajal is speaking in a student’s voice again, but this time using the personal pronoun “I,” and addressing themselves directly to an imagined or abstractified professor.

In the second and third threads, Kajal is attempting to make themselves sound reliable, agreeable, less biased, more balanced, more objective: a kind of steel-man argument. Even

before these interjections, the others in the room (including me) were already nodding vigorously and making sounds of assent, and Kajal's opinion was in line with the previous speaker's, who described the sense that Psychology professors often seemed unwilling to answer their questions. Nobody in the workshop indicated any desire to challenge or question Kajal's experience, which raises the question: to whom did Kajal feel the need to sound reliable and objective, to provide caveats or counterclaims?

Perhaps my proximity to academic Psychology (as a graduate Psychology student conducting research) caused students to be conscious of professors' interests. Although I believe my manner of participating and contributing cast me as sympathetic to their complaints, students might still have felt I was listening critically to their complaints, considering "both sides," or harbouring some of the same interests as professors. They could have been countering *my* potential criticisms by anticipating them and heading them off.

It's also possible that students who did this thought that other students at the workshop would be listening critically to their claims. Maybe the speaker worried the listeners would find them whiny or laugh at their complaints if they didn't reinforce those claims with professor-perspective caveats. Or perhaps the students had an internalized professor's perspective; the voice of a professorial Jiminy Cricket⁶ piping up inadvertently in their heads.

Alternatively, perhaps students invoked a professor's voice as more of a consciously pragmatic strategy. Students might have been conscious of the fact that some of their words would actually reach some Psychology professors, through the zine they made or through the thesis you are now reading. It is likely they wanted these readers to hear them, to listen to their words and perceive them as credible and reliable sources. Perhaps students forced themselves to

⁶ A cricket character in the story *Pinocchio* who follows the titular puppet around advising him in ethical matters, functioning as his externalized conscience.

interrupt their own flow of sharing experiences to check themselves, and ensure that the messages they'd like to send were packaged in a way that could be received open-mindedly. Regardless of where this professor's disembodied voice came from, it was powerful enough to interrupt students mid-sentence.

I can relate — as I write this thesis, I am frequently interrupted by a compulsion to anticipate and pre-empt any dismissive responses from my readers. In moderation, this is an important skill we learn in academic writing: to consider the potential reactions of our readers, especially those we expect to differ from our own. But if we continually call to mind a reader who seems uninterested and unsympathetic, who makes us feel “*dehumanized*,” like “*robots*” or “*animals*” (words used in the workshop as well as in interviews), we risk losing the threads of our *counter*-stories to those feelings.

General Discussion

In the introduction of this paper, I talked about the need for radical change in hegemonic Psychology, referring to efforts to decolonize the field by working at small cracks in the foundations of this “impenetrable fortress” (Pillay, 2014). I set my sights on the “leaky pipeline” of academic Psychology—the educational apparatus disproportionately pushing out marginalized students—and hypothesized that an important point of intervention and analysis would be the experiences of current undergraduate students, who were attempting to navigate this pipeline. I wanted to work with students to explore any feelings of unease, discomfort, or disillusionment in Psychology, as well as any dreams, hopes, or ideas for an improved Psychology program.

I wondered how students would story their experiences. I wondered what cracks we might shed light on, create, or pry open just a bit further... and what exactly might be done with those cracks. Although I have completed the most formal aspects of my research, impacts of this research are still forthcoming: people will continue reading and contributing to the zine, the students plan to share with student groups and professors, etc. What I have seen and heard so far has a harmony to it, although the voices are neither unanimous nor homogeneous. Students with different backgrounds, identities, and experiences told stories that unified them toward a few consistent desires for the Psychology curriculum.

Across all project phases and narrative themes, accessibility stood out as a central concern. An exchange in the workshop, where Kajal describes their experience missing an exam due to an anxiety attack, reflects some students’ feelings on the matter:

KAJAL: I wasn't able to go in and do that presentation. And, you know, I emailed the professor as soon as I felt well enough to, and let her know that, you know, 'I did my best; here's like all the stuff that I prepared; is there any possibility that I could do it on a following week or anything like that?' And the prof was like: No. (Kajal laughs, we all

laugh). *But the reason for it was weird. Because we had enough time . . . I would have been able to do it if that prof had been just a little bit more understanding. . . I don't think it's necessarily unfair, especially in a Psychology program, to accommodate when a student has a panic attack, or like—*

ROBIN: *mm-hmm.*

KAJAL: *—has like some kind of mental breakdown due to a valid mental illness, right?*

ZOË: *Mm-hmm.*

KAJAL: *Or you know, even if somebody doesn't have a diagnosed mental illness, if they are dealing with ... I don't know what to call it ...*

LUNA: *—burnout, stress ...*

KAJAL: *—Exactly!*

LUNA: *—anything, really.*

KAJAL: *Yeah!*

ROBIN: *If it's the symptoms without the diagnosis, you're still experiencing these symptoms; they're very real, regardless of whether or not you have a diagnosis... We're human . . . and they, they drill us like we're robots.*

These students want a Psychology that is more understanding, more human. They naturally look to professors to provide these qualities: they are the central purveyors of Psychology for most students. Despite their relative power and authority, though, professors may also be trapped in an uncaring, dehumanizing system. In a collaborative article on feminist resistance through collective action, eleven geography professors report being harried, hurried, micromanaged and isolated (Mountz et al., 2015). They situate their difficulties within the increasingly neoliberal and capitalist university: its focus on optimizing efficiency, pressuring professors to teach ever-larger classes with less and less support, and to report their achievements according to precise quantitative metrics rather than allowing them to focus on the quality of their teaching: “while we dutifully count and upload our ‘progress,’” Mountz et al. lament, “this counting imperative simultaneously informs our identities and interactions, compel[ling] us to

enumerate and self-audit, rather than listen and converse, engage with colleagues, students, friends and family ...” (p. 1243). For instance, overwhelming time pressures incentivize professors to standardize assignments, which “may hinder student creativity and curiosity,” (p. 1241). Mountz et al. advocate for a shift towards slowing down scholarship, prioritizing care and collaboration—echoing the desires I hear from students.

Limitations

Overall, the limitations of this study follow the trends I criticize in Psychology at large: it reproduces systems of oppression such as racism, ableism, and Eurocentrism. The sample had a higher percentage of white participants than expected, given the racial makeup of York University. It’s possible that my screening, which involved some decisions based on my perceptions of student’s attitudes and perceptions, biased me toward choosing students whose linguistic and cultural background more resembled my own (white, North American). The sample size was also tiny, limiting my ability to generalize my findings: all I can say is that the feelings evoked in the interviews, workshop, and zine do exist, and that their existence is reason enough to pay attention to them.

It is possible to have introduced bias in the results of the research at various other stages in the process, as well:

Interviews. I conducted all interviews. Thus, regardless of how open-ended, curious, and informal they may have been, my questions had the potential to be leading, leaning me towards confirmation bias. I tried to counter this lean by allowing students to follow any path they wanted, interjecting as little as possible, and simply reflecting and paraphrasing rather than making value judgements. On the other hand, at the possible expense of keeping myself more removed from the research, I chose to lean on the authentic relationality of the interview

(engaging in genuine conversation, allowing myself to respond naturally), focusing on challenging the power imbalances and objective, disembodied affect that characterizes western hegemonic Psychology research (and could limit students' ability to share their experience). The point of this research process is to break the frame and provide perspectives that are otherwise invisible with traditional, academic Psychology, so I believe my focus is justified, but also severely curtails any external validity and reliability of my finding, to the extent that such labels continue to be meaningful for this type of qualitative research.

Narrative Thematic Analysis. The process of narrative thematic analysis necessitates my emotional and intuitive involvement. This makes it difficult to obviate unconscious bias. I checked in with participants frequently and in a variety of modalities and social contexts, giving them opportunities to weigh in on their sense of the project and on my interpretation of their words. I responded to small corrections, but heard overwhelming confirmation that students felt I was accurately reflecting their experience. Reflexivity practices encouraged me to be aware that my interpretations were, nevertheless, constructed using tools made available to me through my situated point of view. I am wary of the ways I might have prioritized and foregrounded issues I felt were most salient, rather than objectively gauging the relative salience of issues to each interviewee. I used all my interpersonal skills to ensure that my interpretations stayed as close as possible to students' experiences, but I am certain that, at least to some extent, I bent what I saw and heard to fit the shape of my own view of Psychology. While objectivity is impossible in a qualitative study about subjective experience, it's important I acknowledge and consider the ways I might have shaped discussions, and even affected what stories were tell-able in the zine workshop.

Zine Workshop. The accessibility of the workshop might have played an important role in determining those that would be present to tell their own stories. The participants who couldn't attend the session had to work, lived far away, or were sick, among other reasons. All these axes that made it difficult to show up to a late-afternoon weekday workshop on campus are also axes that might make it difficult to get through Psychology, although they are not factors that make one less suitable for a career in Psychology. Thus, it is conceivable that those who were excluded from the workshop might be more likely to be pushed out of Psychology in general. On the other hand, some of those who did come surmounted a number of obstacles: one attended despite having to complete two take-home exams afterwards, for example, and another had to arrive hours early and sat on the floor outside the conference room until it was time to come in. Although I can identify many barriers to accessing the workshop, it is difficult to delineate their consequences on the results.

Focusing now on the materials present at the zine workshop, I also selected and arranged the interview quotes I provided students as raw materials to use in the final zine. I believe I minimized the negative effects of this shaping by speaking with students with the understanding that they were the experts on their own experience throughout all phases of the process, frequently asking them questions like, "Does this sound right? Does this feel true?" I believe students were somewhat more empowered to speak freely and with authority on their experiences, but I also noticed self-consciousness that indicated that students were still impacted by the relational dynamics of an undergraduate vs. graduate student, and/or by the roles of participant vs. researcher.

The social context may have influenced the form or content of the experiences that students shared. I am certain that the behaviour of the five students who did participate in the

workshop was influenced by my own, just as any context is influential to an interaction, and what I heard in the workshop was affected by the social dynamics: some students, for instance, were more comfortable speaking aloud frequently and for long stretches, whereas others might have preferred to speak more if there had been more silence. Students' comfort with contributing and their willingness to be vulnerable may also have been influenced by where they were sitting, or whether they showed up early or late. The stories they heard may have prompted students to foreground opinions that matched, leaving other contrasting perspectives in the background. In any case, we certainly cannot call this an objective representation of students' experiences. I could frame this as disappointing: I want to be able to claim that whatever students are saying is deeply, lastingly important and true! I don't want to believe that the agreement I heard here was just pleasantries, or that the claims made and feelings shared were contingent on the particular relational dynamics of this workshop, rather than reflective of students' true and enduring experiences. But, of course, any representation of students' personal experiences must be subjective! Similarly, none of the feelings or beliefs I'm examining could exist independently of a context—one context could be total isolation (which was an important experience in itself), another is the Zoom "room" in which I conducted interviews (each a slightly different context), another is a zine workshop; other contexts could be in a classroom or on an online course survey. The workshop might bias students towards foregrounding certain aspects of their experience, or remembering more clearly anecdotes and opinions that matched those of their peers, whereas other contexts might encourage different biases. I find no reason to believe, however, that these kinds of responses are more or less artificial than those that would be produced in other contexts. Although the specific anecdotes and events students spoke and wrote about in the workshop

might not be factually verifiable, it is the collective feeling and texture of experience that emerged during the workshop that I have been, and still am, most intent on exploring.

Conclusion

With this project, I set out to explore students' narratives through a desire-based lens, and what I got were love stories and battle stories, stories of survival in a cold and windowless fortress. Students were able to point at some of the cracks in academic Psychology, retelling and commiserating over stories of close encounters in the plumbing, comparing scrapes and scratches, sharing intel on cracks and slips. At every stage of the project, students offered insights into the embodied effects of life in the fortress of academic Psychology. And these insights were nuanced: responses to the recruitment questionnaire included existential memes; interviews highlighted both intense love for and clear disillusionment with the program; the group discussion of the quotes and themes featured particular interest in the complex category of "Uh, can I get some mental health with that psych degree?" pointing to the tension between what they want and expect from Psychology and what they feel they are being given; and the final zine shows contradiction and ambivalence, not just across students but even within pages created by individual students.

The five students in the workshop were excited to chat about the connections and contrasts among their experiences. What does this desire tell us? The very act of sharing stories is an act of building community, inclusion, and belonging — things most of the interviewed students mentioned was missing. That students were talkative and the workshop generative suggests that the process did indeed produce collaborative engagement and spark community learning, (as suggested in Barnewitz, 2021; Biagioli et al., 2021; Valli, 2021), in addition to self-

reportedly making students feel validated, relieved, and connected through the process of speaking with each other and reading one another's quotes.

By telling stories of their encounters in Psychology's fortress and their often-turbulent path through its pipeline, participating students effectively point in unison at cracks in the foundations and pipes of Psychology. This can be interpreted as both a revindication of what Psychology *could* be like, if we work together at small cracks the fortress, and as a warning to others to not slip through the cracks.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Questionnaire

Google Forms Questionnaire

The questions below were sent out to 50 interested participants in a Google Forms questionnaire linked via email:

1. Who told you about this study? (If it's one of your professors, please name the class, just so I can see how many people are from that 1 class)
2. If there were an option, would you prefer to meet in person or on Zoom for our 1-1 interview? (JUST CURIOUS! Your answer will not affect your eligibility)
3. Complete 1 or both of the following sentences:
 - A. Personally, in my psychology program, I feel/have felt ...
 - B. Psychology classes are too ...

[if you prefer to answer this in a different way, skip this question and answer the question below.]
4. Upload an image (meme, drawing, photo, etc.) or sound file that represents your experience in a psychology program so far.
5. Do you think of people who study psychology as “your people”? Do you feel that you fit in, in important ways?
6. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

INTRODUCTIONS

- “Hi, I’m Zoë. Thank you so much for coming to speak with me today!
 - I’m hoping it will feel more like a conversation, because I’m really interested in getting a sense of your experiences & perspectives!”
- Reminder of topic & parameters
 - Re-skim signed informed consent together.
- Logistics:
 - I’ll ask your permission before I start AUDIO recording and then we’ll get into the topic
 - “I want to know just as much as you want to tell me, and I don’t want to shape that too much.”
 - “Please let me know if I ask you anything that isn’t clear, or if you have trouble hearing me.”
 - Also, I want to remind you that you’re allowed to pass on any questions, pause at any point, or tap out if you’ve had enough.”
- **BEGIN** → **RECORD**

QUESTIONS

- Can you tell me about your experience in psych so far?
 - How did you decide to study psychology?
- Can you tell me the story of your getting into and getting through psychology?
 - **Follow-up prompts:**
 - What happened next?
 - Can you say more about that?
 - Can you tell me the story of your movement *through* the program?

Impact:

How did that affect you?

How do you make sense of [mentioned tensions, difficulties]?

Do you feel the same?

What’s changed since then?

Reflexivity:

What’s it like to talk about this?

Follow-up prompts:

- Can you think of an example of that?
- Can you tell me about a time that happened?
- Wow! How has that impacted you?
- How do you make sense of that?
- How does that fit into your story as _____ ? [identity they have brought up]
- Ooh! Is what you’re saying here connected to what you were saying earlier?
- Wow, that sounds X
- It sounds like you’re saying [sum up] — did I miss anything there?

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

- “What is encouraging or discouraging about your program?”
 - → What keeps you going?
 - → what are obstacles for you?
- Can you think of ways the psych program could fit YOU better?
 - Is there anything you wish you were learning about, or learning more about?
 - Is there anything you'd take OFF the curriculum?
- How does this story end?

CLOSING

Reflect & summarize

Present *my* understanding / analysis so far; ask if that resonates

Make space for more

“Is there anything I missed from that story?”

I've come to the end of the questions I had prepared.

Before we wrap up, Is there anything else you'd like to add?” ... THANK YOU

Share next steps.

“I'm going to **stop recording** now. After this, I will write up the transcript of this interview, and I'd like to send you a writeup / my interpretation of your experience, to make sure I'm representing you in a way that feels right to you.”

“Would that be alright?”

E-transfer

“Thank you so much for your time!”

Appendix C: Narrative Thematic Analyses of Interviews

Narrative thematic analyses I sent to each interviewed student are reproduced below in alphabetical order of their chosen code name, from Bailey (Appendix C.1) to Wanda (Appendix C.8). The typeface I use is Lexend, which is designed to be clearer for readers with dyslexia.

Note: Alisa was unable to respond to my request for consent in time for me to write them a full analysis.

C.1: Bailey

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- The program wasn't designed with someone like me in mind
- I feel isolated / it's isolating
- Uh, can I get a little mental health with that psych degree?
 - About us without us: attempted objectivity → dehumanizing teaching; no acknowledgment of the students as humans who are impacted by psychological research & knowledge
- I love psychology!

Interview Summary

You're interested in mental health. You relate your interest to your family's history. You're more interested in mental health and counselling than in other streams of Psychology.

You're also interested in parenting — how people become people! — and you relate these interests to your parents' paths: they both studied at York as well; your mother studying Psychology specifically, and then moving into marketing. You knew early on that you'd like to study Psychology, although your introduction to the topic in a high-school Sociology-Anthropology-Psychology class was a bit off-putting, you went for it anyways. Overall, you love

the Psychology program so far: it's been very interesting, and you've had almost entirely positive experiences in classes and with your professors.

Dealing with Heavy Material

One issue that's important to you is how the Psychology curriculum tends to deal with deep and heavy material, which can have intense impacts on students:

When you're talking about certain mental health things, or things that people do, it can be ... I guess a little bit triggering, for lack of a better word. It can definitely be very heavy topics.

Because of this, you have the sense that the Psychology curriculum *should* take responsibility for the impact it can have on students. Professors should build in care and sensitivity into the curriculum.

But in the Psychology classes you've taken, there hasn't been enough responsibility taken for the heaviness of these topics.

In one class, your professor indicated at the beginning of the course that you'd be going over some emotionally difficult topics. Although you liked that she gave the disclaimer, she didn't end up following through with as much care, emotion, or sensitivity as she initially promised:

If she was talking about anything like sexual assault-related, or certain things like abusive relationships, where it's such a heavy thing to talk about, I feel like it's just a little bit strange how... it just feels so normalized.

*We...get into this...almost robotic state where we're just taking notes. We're talking about things so scientifically— like reading off of a textbook, basically, when it's **such serious things that deserve more than that.***

It made me a little bit uncomfortable, and made me think this is something that could be improved a little bit.

...

Something just felt weird in me just taking notes on my laptop about things that are so extreme... not even having any statement from the professor of just saying, "...and it's so awful when this happens." / "and it's so unfortunate that this happens." It felt like there was a lack of sympathy or empathy there.

You did expect there to be heavy topics in Psychology, but you didn't anticipate how it would impact you to be exposed to these heavy topics as though they were simple, inconsequential facts to be learned:

I did expect a little bit more of ... just having a little bit of emotion in there rather than like JUST teaching it. I went into it being so passionate about mental health, and caring about others, and having more of a therapy perspective on things... and then to hear it just be like, scientific-sounding, it just did feel a little bit ... strange. I guess I was expecting a bit more care and just, I guess, sensitivity towards certain topics.

Need More Resources

You connect this to the concept of accessibility and a lack of resources that force students to do independent work that might be better if it were the responsibility of the curriculum / professors to manage:

I see a lot of emails and stuff, and occasional Instagram posts or flyers and stuff about mental health...and ways to reach out...and ways to get support... But for some reason I feel like it's still something that students really have to look into on their own and take the initiative and responsibility to figure that out.

It's just not enough, sometimes.

Like, I know that on the website, there's ways to find links... but honestly I think that the website is just confusing to begin with... it can get, at least for me, super hard to navigate.

You are talking about a number of types of resources that are necessary for making it through a degree in Psychology:

- Resources for course selection
- mental health resources that are important for any student, but *especially* those who are studying mental health and being exposed to topics that might directly impact their mental health:

If you're literally talking about depression and you're not giving certain numbers to call or links for help, in a slideshow that's literally talking about suicide... it just doesn't feel RIGHT. It's just like, you can do a bit more if you're actually talking about that topic. ...Resources can just be a little bit more clear for people.

You qualify these concerns with an understanding of the difficulties in dealing with things like this:

Obviously so many topics in Psychology are going to be super deep like that, and really heavy...

And obviously it's not something where it's totally black and white. It's so easy for someone to get super triggered over something that other people wouldn't. ... something like racism for example. Maybe that's something that I wouldn't necessarily be triggered by, but that other people definitely could be, and I'm sure were.

But you have some ideas of how the curriculum could be made more caring and sensitive:

Maybe even with course descriptions, and stuff online, they could give a warning about stuff like that. Or at the start of classes, go over the topics that they're going to be discussing...

People Aren't Really Talking a Lot – It's Isolating!

Like a lot of other students, you've had some difficulty with the social aspect of moving through the Psychology program:

I definitely haven't had, I guess, the easiest time making friends. ...I think a lot of people can relate to that... it feels like everyone is very on their own; they do their thing and they go... it definitely can make you feel extra lonely.

You ascribe part of this to COVID:

Maybe because of Covid, it has been a little bit difficult when it comes to making friends and meeting people.

...and part of it to the fact that a lot of non-major students seem to attend psych classes without much investment in the topic.

The Psychology classroom tends to be impersonal even when it is in person:

You don't really see people like, laughing or having their own little conversations ever. Or if we have a break, it's usually just, people are just like going on their phones... people aren't really talking a lot.

This ran counter to your expectations! But you suspect that you're not the only one feeling this way. You acknowledge that this feeling of isolation seems like something that most university students, especially on a large campus, can relate to. But you wonder if this is something that's particularly important or strong in the case of Psychology:

First, because Psychology lectures can bring up very vulnerable, intimate, or emotional topics:

You hear something heavy and then maybe it makes you not really want to talk to people that you're not even close with. Like, I'm not just going to turn to someone and be like "Hi, my name's [Bailey]!" After I'm in this mood. So it definitely makes you feel more lonely and down.

Second, because those topics are brought up in a very impersonal way: in a large lecture hall, in a lecturing format, with little opportunity for students to build relationships or talk to each other, and with little acknowledgement of the impact these topics will have on the students – the student is not acknowledged as someone who might be impacted by the content.

When you're sitting in a class and they're talking about something that may have happened to you, but they aren't really showing that they care or anything, and everyone's taking notes about it.

It feels like ...you are the example...

They almost make it seem like it's just a random thing to put down in your notes: learn, study it, write it on a multiple choice test. That's what your problem is, or that's what YOU are. It can just feel very...dehumanizing.

Third, because you are one of the many Psychology students who is particularly emotionally sensitive.

I would definitely say I'm more on the sensitive side... I feel like after hearing certain things, you almost don't want to talk to people. ...it can be so exhausting.

All of these are reasons that you think might contribute to the sense of isolation you feel in Psychology, despite really enjoying it as a program of study.

We Haven't Gone Over How to Help People: No Practical Advice

There's a lot of knowledge that feels very relevant and pertinent in Psychology: it's very interesting, and very relatable to your daily life! However, it's more about "Ooh, I see what's going on here!" and less about what to *do* with that knowledge.

You went into Psychology hoping to learn how to support people's mental health, but you haven't encountered any classes in therapy or counseling methods. Any coverage of mental illness in your curriculum has been descriptive and analytical, without any practical applications:

If we're having a lesson on depression, it's more like, "what is depression? What can add to it?" But usually not really advice, or what you can do to help, or what they (people with depression) can do.

... it's kind of this funny situation to be in when studying Psychology, because you know so much about something, but you don't know what to do about it. It is a really weird feeling, having this information, totally understanding it... and then you can feel a little bit helpless, because you're just like, Now what? There's not really any good solutions, or any good coping mechanisms...

I feel like when we talk about mental health, they don't really talk about what to say to people or how to help people. I find it strange, honestly, that they don't teach things like that.

You think that more practical ideas and advice *could* fit into the Psychology program, even accounting for the fact that many Psychology students aren't intending to go into helping professions:

Even just having an extra slide at the end that says, "is a loved one struggling with this? Here's a link." "Are you struggling with this? Here's a number."

You also remember a diagram that a therapist showed you once about how to examine one's own cognitive distortions, and how it changed your relationship to your own anxiety:

Just her drawing that little thing on the whiteboard, it helped me so much. And I was just thinking, why don't they teach that in school?

If that's all it took, a little diagram...

And then you get really into it, and begin to sketch out the foundations of a curriculum that would address some of the problems you mentioned earlier:

I definitely think that there are ways to teach a little bit more of the feeling of “you will be okay. There are things to do. We’re talking about such heavy stuff, and, if you can relate to it, we understand. There’s things that you can do. We’re not just going to make you feel like you’re some sort of study, and you’re just like, an example of what we’re talking about.”

I believe this quote indicates the feelings that you think could and should be fostered in your Psychology education. You’re speaking in the voice of an ideal Psychology professor, conveying an ideal curriculum. In short, it seems like your ideal curriculum would offer solutions to the problems that are brought up, would acknowledge how serious some topics are (e.g. sexual assault, racism, abuse, depression), and would acknowledge students’ humanity, and how they might be impacted by these difficult topics.

C.2: Elissa

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- The program isn't designed for people like me.
- It's isolating! / I feel isolated
- Can I get a little mental health with that psych degree?
- I love psychology!

Pre-Interview (Prior to recording; based on my handwritten notes)

As we were going through the consent form, you brought our attention to the Research Purpose section — you asked what I meant in my sentence about people at the graduate and postgraduate levels of Psychology seeming similar:

The people who stay in the academic “pipeline” until they get Master’s degrees and PhDs & professorships tend to seem similar in a lot of ways.

When I mentioned race and gender as two examples, you asked if I thought that was more due to

A) leftovers from historical segregation

or

A) something in the way things are *currently* structured.

I said I didn't want to answer that, and then I said “both.” Then I said “hey, *you’re* interviewing *me!*” and you laughed and reminded me that *I* had framed this as a conversation.

Touché. I am grateful for this reminder!

Interview Summary

You chose to study psychology as a middle ground to becoming a doctor, or to pursuing a philosophy degree. Psychology allowed you to move towards helping people (as would a medical profession) as well as to learn more about what moves people (their motivations, emotions, interpersonal relationships, etc.; as would philosophy), and promised a “better paying job” than philosophy could:

I do want to help people, but I don't have that capacity...that empathy... I didn't have a lot of, I would say... sympathy. I don't know.

I pursued Psychology for that purpose: I wanted to know what move[s] people. ...I was interested in interpersonal relationships; how do they work?

I would have pursued philosophy just for the fun of it, or the sake of it, but... at the end of the day, I have to find a job.

Identity

You say,

I'm a first-generation student, I'm international, I'm a minority, et cetera...

...and these identities shape your experience in the Psychology program in a number of ways.

One important reason you moved to Canada for university (and chose to study Psychology) was that it seemed more open to considering and exploring emotions and mental life; something that seemed less available in your country of origin:

I saw Canada as a place that is more—I don't want to say forgiving, but it's more appreciative, or more open to talk about mental health, mental issues... When I was growing up, emotions and all of that stuff was not talked about, really, as much. So pursuing Psychology was more of a way for me to enrich myself in that part that I wasn't as enriched when I was a child.

You've seen a lot of minority and/or international students enjoying and benefiting from their Psychology courses:

They found it enriching...and they found it fun. They found that taking those classes open their eyes to a world they haven't seen or learned about before.

On the other hand,

I see a lot of white folks.

Lack of Connections

This whiteness, which also represents Canadian-ness to a certain extent, makes you feel less able to connect to your classmates:

It wasn't like I didn't connect with them just because of how they looked... their experiences growing up didn't match well with mine... So I would say more than a physical standpoint; it was more like a language and a cultural barrier. I didn't connect as much as I would have wanted to in a Psychology undergrad.

This is an experience you mentioned in your intake questionnaire as well:

I felt I missed out on something by not making a lot of friendships or bonding with my peers.

This was true for Psychology and non-Psychology classes alike:

They seemed like cool people. It was just not like I found something like a common ground, (shows fingers interlacing) a shared background, for me to form deep, meaningful relationships.

When I ask, you agree that the curriculum itself seems to assume a shared background; relying on content and form geared towards a white North American upbringing:

I do believe they are assuming everyone has a common shared experience, but I don't see it inherently as a bad thing.

You're saying it's pedagogically important to come up with relatable examples that will allow students to apply the content to their own lives or experiences.

I know that how you take in information is you seeing yourself in that content.

The problem is that those relatable examples are generally not relatable to you; content that's designed to let white Canadian students see themselves in it is content that excludes your experience as a minority, immigrant, and perhaps even as a first-generation university student.

You come up with an example: a professor asks students to imagine themselves eating ketchup chips.

...a common thing in Canada, right? Rather [than] being connected to the topic or the content the professor is giving out, I would be feeling left out, disconnected, and be thinking...

"What is that? I don't know what that [is] ..."

On the positive side, as "the inquisitive type," you mention that you'd probably take the opportunity to learn about any unknown cultural reference from a professor, and come away having learned something extra. The cost of that is, once again, is

all the things I would have potentially learned during those minutes I was lost.

"...But I do understand," you quickly follow up,

that that example might immediately connect a Torontonians student to the content:

...people that feel connected to that would be like, "oh, yeah, yeah that totally makes sense."

The ketchup chips (a symbol of culturally specific content) are intended to make learning a particular topic easier and more direct, but instead they're an *impediment* to your learning, because you don't share the common life experience necessary for it to work on you.

When weighing the potential benefits to "people that feel connected" against the drawbacks to you and those who share your experience, you are ambivalent:

I don't know. I don't know if that's a bad or good thing.

Expectations Vs. Reality: Psychology in A Pandemic

When I ask you if your Psychology education is giving you the things you were looking for, you say,

yes and no.

Your Psychology education has straddled the COVID-19 pandemic, and from this vantage point (August 2022), pre-pandemic Psychology education seems pretty good. But once classes had to move online, things got a little shaky.

All of us being at home, away from social interactions, away from the university setting... you are not just going to your classes, you are also conversing with your peers outside of class. All of those small things, at least I think, are why most people go to university. It's not only just for the class, it's all for those little things that make university life university life.

C.3: Iris

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- There's no map
- The program wasn't designed with us in mind
- It's isolating
- I do more than my professors realize
- Can I get a little mental health with that psych degree?
- I love psych!

Soc & Psych

You started out as a sociology student, but had been interested in Psychology even before you added it as a major. Throughout the interview, you often compare the two; noting that sociology allowed for more critical thinking, engaged discussions, and flexibility.

It was a big change because in sociology, it's: you're reading this book, we've discussed it explicitly in class, and now you give me your thoughts. No borders, no limitations. What do you think about this? Versus Psychology, where I was faced with, "I'm glad you found it interesting, but I only want to know this."

In Psychology, the content is fascinating, but the way the knowledge is shared and tested was unfamiliar:

I would read the textbook, which would be full of all of this knowledge. I'm like, "Wow, I want that! That's incredible. So interesting!" And then in this whole chapter of 30 pages that I would read and meticulously go through and extract all these informations from, it'd be like one tiny little thing...

And that was a big "shock " for me because I had to adjust how I studied, adjust how I think, adjust how I approached it.

You do very much enjoy Psychology lectures:

I'm one of those people that like, lecture is what I love. It fuels me and helps create momentum for my learning.

And you love reading the textbook:

I love it. As much as I'm not a big fan of the structure, the words, the information in the textbook, just speak to me. Sitting there reading my textbook is like sitting there reading a fiction novel. I just sit and I read and I love.

But you find that doing both of them is redundant:

... for the most part, if you've read the chapter, you can completely zone out.

Lectures rarely seem to go beyond recapitulating the textbook,

It doesn't challenge you to be engaged, I find.

And lectures are all you get in the way of teaching:

Not a single tutorial in sight. It's a little bit sad because I thrived in that dynamic.

Extra Work

You talk about being overwhelmed by the amount of work that's required, much of which is not explicitly in the syllabus, but is still necessary for actual learning to happen:

Each class is a textbook. We'll say 25 to 30 pages per ... That's 150, for some students, pages of reading! And it's not just reading. I genuinely believe you can't just read a textbook once and you're done. You have to read it once; if you're reading it, likely highlight, underline, do your thing; then you have to go back again: skim through it, look at all your notes, everything

you highlighted; create your own notes, write them by hand or type them out — that in itself is several hours of work, for one class!

All that extra work adds up in ways that the professors don't seem to realize:

We have our own expectations, we have the expectations of the school on an academic level, and then we have these unspoken expectations. And then on top of our reading, our own lives, most of us work as well, it can be a lot.

The requirements actually seem to hinder learning rather than encouraging it.

You get overwhelmed and you think to yourself, do I have to sacrifice the quality of my learning process to get a grade?

... Do I sacrifice my health to get this grade?

Although you might expect that Psychology professors would be particularly sensitive to fostering mental health in their classrooms, you've found that the opposite is sometimes true:

I've definitely had moments being in Psychology where I'm like, for such a major — it's all about Psychology and mental wellness; it's supposed to be completely based off of research and knowledge of mental health — that was a very, very narrow-minded thing of you to say, sir.

...But No Extra Support

You've mentioned that

mental health has been a huge part of my own journey. Like I, it's been something that I've dealt with since I was very young.

That's something that keeps you devoted to Psychology; you have important related goals:

better understanding my own mental health, being better able to put myself in a position where I could potentially get a career helping others.

Speaking of health, you talk about how you've dealt with accessibility services, and tried to request accommodations or other support from professors for your learning needs.

I'm an accommodation student, and sometimes when I verbalize that, or when I speak to my professors about some things, it's almost like "do the reading and you'll understand." Or "just check out this website and you'll understand." And I'm like, "I have already read, and I have looked at the research, but I need your involvement."

You found some support in your first year, but since then, not so much:

They flat out told me, "Unfortunately, peer support people are for first year students. PASS study sessions? We don't have anything for those classes." I'm like, okay! So you guys supported me so wonderfully in first year, but second, you're just gonna let me drown?

And that lack of support is compounded by the fact that you don't have a social support network of peers to lean on.

It Can Feel Really Isolating

At least personally, I don't really have groups of friends to say "hey guys, is this how you feel too?" Or "Did you find this class to be really tough?" You feel very much alone and in your head.

It can feel really isolating.

Although you say it might be personal, you argue that the structure of Psychology courses themselves are isolating; it's a systemic issue:

I think that there needs to be more engagement and camaraderie embedded within the classroom.

You have seen "very, very little group work and collaboration in Psychology, which I feel like is super important."

You talk about some examples of how the rare professor has done this; creating discussion and group projects that naturally foster collaborative work. Most of the time, though, you've found your Psychology courses to under-value social interaction, and that has important negative effects.

It's because of the way everything's structured that it doesn't allow for, people feel like they don't have time for, or that it's not a priority, and that way it gets missed. But it affects mental health, it affects well-being, it affects academics.

There's No Map!

You talk about how narrowly the Psychology program prepares you for anything beyond each course's requirements. You believe that there are many possible career pathways to be drawn from a Psychology Bachelor's degree, but you feel like you're being shown an over-simplified map that doesn't work for you.

Realistically in my mind, I know I can do anything I want with my degree. [...] But the way it's set up, the way they make it feel and seem, is that clinical research is my only avenue. [...] There's so many avenues! I only know this because I have been anxiously researching these kinds of things. But what do I know based on what York and the professors have shared with me about what I can do? Clinical research, teaching at a university because you do clinical research, lab work. That's really, that's all they've shown and demonstrated about as an avenue of possibility.

They had FIVE workshops about how to apply for a clinical Psychology pathway. I'm like, clinical Psychology makes me feel like I want to have a panic attack. ...Can we talk about anything else I can apply my degree to? It feels very limiting and it feels very scary, if your aim or even your interests don't align with this "Get your undergrad, get your master's, research clinically in Psychology" formula.

There may be resources to help you, but you aren't given access to them as part of your degree. There are...

...all these little things where it's like, if you know about it? Use it. If you don't? Sucks.

They have no problem telling you what you need for grad school, but they have a lot of trouble telling you where you can go to get it.

You Go Looking for the Cheese

You do manage to continually adjust, and that's a big theme throughout our conversation: you talk about adapting to what's in front of you, finding opportunities in the failings you see in Psychology, and figuring out how to roll with the punches while trying to hold on to your values. Above all, what seems to carry you through, even though it also gets you stuck doing more work than is technically required of you, is

My deep desire to learn.

And, despite its structural problems,

Psychology is one of the few fields of study that genuinely do fuel me.

I love it.

C.4: Kajal

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours. If you feel that these narratives / themes do *not* represent your experience or viewpoint, please let me know!

- The program wasn't designed with me in mind
- It's isolating
- I do all this extra work
- I love psych!

Interview Summary

You've been excited about Psychology since you can remember, and despite a felt responsibility to your (immigrant) parents to get a degree in sciences, and/or to pursue a profession in law or medicine, you found a way in:

My parents wanted me to go into medical. So Psychology was my excuse of like, "I'll go into medical ... for psychiatry!" That's why I get to do a Psychology undergrad and not science! It was an escape... along with just like the most interesting, interesting thing ever to me.

Now you're in your fourth year of your B.A., and you're shooting through this pipeline so joyously, enjoying every single class:

Every course I've taken, I'm like, "I don't want my degree to end; I just want to keep taking more psych courses."

Okay, not every single class:

I mean, I will say, stuff with Covid being online made it very hard to focus for so many of the classes. And I will be honest that with some of them, lectures were podcasts (laughs) and I would just read up on the textbook afterwards.

But still, the dominant feeling is that you're thrilled to be studying this topic.

pretty much every class was, like, amazing for me.

The format and style of it very much works with your learning style.

My brain doesn't retain the information for other courses as well as it does for Psychology. Even with a bit less effort, I can still retain more information in Psychology classes than, for example, that biology class.

...

I'm comparing [...] to how I felt in like general education courses... if I was like 110% interested in my Psychology courses, like, every single one, I was maybe 10% interested in the general education. It's such a big gap that it's hard for me to think of "bad" Psychology courses that I've taken.

Even the exams are ideal for you:

The way that Psychology exams are set up are, like, perfect for my brain. I enjoy them so much.

In fact, you would ideally keep doing it *after* you graduate:

I realized honestly just like a month ago that if I could go forward and just do a psych degree and then get certified for practice, licensed, I feel like that is probably the ideal-ideal.

You say that might not happen, not because of any problem with the Psychology curriculum itself, but because of a complicated mix of family expectations and responsibilities.

Family

My parents are both immigrants. They did a lot to end up here and to get here. So there is that sense of owing them doing something that they can, you know, talk about with pride, or that they can be happy with and stuff like that. So doing law or medical school ...or trying to

(laughs)[...] I think that that's at least 50 or 60% or maybe even 70% of the reason that I would be going into law.

It's important to note that your experience doesn't represent any standard experience of a student with immigrant parents; you say your situation is potentially complicated, due to the intersection of a few different factors that affect your decision-making:

- *[My parents] are very strictly Muslim.*
- *A lot of the decisions in our household are affected by the fact that my parents had an arranged marriage.*
- *I'm actually a (whispers) *lesbian*. So that's something that I'm going to have to work out how to tell them.*

Initially you described that stuff as “walls,” but weren't satisfied with the negative, imprisoning connotations that had, and came up with another metaphor:

I'd almost describe it as a very thin mesh. ...I feel like from people looking at it from afar, it looks like a big wall, but it's just that I have to filter through a lot more than what somebody else might.

In the end, I did end up getting to study Psychology like I wanted to; I didn't do pre-med or nursing or something like that. ...It's just that I had to squirm my way through that mesh a little bit differently than just being like, "Mom! Dad! I wanna study Psychology!" And them being like, "Amazing, my child. Go ahead!"

So I guess ... I would think of it as being in a pretty sizable mesh ball and trying to get out of it ... in the least offensive way possible to my family. (laughs)

Zoë: *Like, how to gently squirm your way through without damaging the mesh?*

Kajal: *Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Or to make a forgivable hole in the mesh.*

I don't plan to bring these factors to the group, or the "mesh" in general, but they seem important context for explaining who you are in relation to Psychology.

Maybe If I Study Psychology, Then I'll Figure It Out

Similarly, you mentioned another reason you got into Psychology: as a teenager, you had a difficult time emotionally — *"very angsty teen-isms and all that,"* and chalked it up to Persistent Depressive Disorder, or at least *something* that Psychology might be able to help with.

I've had a lot of friends have similar feelings on the topic of like, there is something in my brain that's not computing how it should be. Maybe if I study Psychology, then I'll figure it out.

And to be completely honest, I'm on my way there, to having enough context to go ask for a diagnosis.

Right now, you're thinking about an ADHD diagnosis. You don't feel alone in that respect:

It's interesting, the amount of people who thought about going into Psychology, as for friends and things like that, that were really wanting to go into Psychology because they were having issues that they thought Psychology could solve.

And so far it sounds like it's been working for you.

One of the Downfalls: Social

The amount of group work that there is in Psychology hasn't really lent itself to socially ... facilitating a lot of friendships. That might be in part because Glendon is a smaller university, so you know, the people you meet in first year and second year, Psychology are the people that you're going to have classes with forever. (laughs)

But some of it seems to be systemic within the discipline of Psychology itself, rather than just an issue with being in a less populated setting:

In the Psychology courses, it's all quite individually... like, you know, you study for your exams. If you go take those study groups, that's an optional thing. But in terms of within the courses themselves, the amount of discussion with peers and the quality of discussion with peers has been something that maybe is lacking, in my perception.

Marginalized Groups Are Brushed Off

Issues with marginalized groups that aren't just racism are brushed over so quickly that it's really unfortunate. Issue is the wrong word, but just topics... regarding people with disabilities or people who are in non-heteronormative relationships or with different gender identities. All those kinds of things. If you ask a professor about it, or even if you're reading a textbook, there's really not a lot. You get two paragraphs or maybe like a few pages and then it's like, "okay, that's enough! We don't need to know more about that; that's it."

With topics about sexuality and stuff like that, I've noticed that happen a lot, which is disappointing, I guess, to say the least.

...Although you can understand every professor having their specialization and feeling comfortable answering certain questions, I feel like maybe more effort in the Psychology field in general should be made for the topics not to just be the random one-off kind of discussion. Because, you know, it affects so many people's lives, and it can be so valuable.

I ask you about how your Psychology classes have addressed racism.

The biggest time I remember it is in social Psychology when stereotyping comes up. Then, the number one thing that's mentioned is racism, which is a good thing, I guess, in a sense, because it's like "yes, that is bad stereotyping. You're right! Good job, textbook!" but at the same time, there's other, maybe less-considered ways that stereotyping can affect other marginalized groups as well. So rather than taking that out, I would just say that there needs to be more of it. It's a start, but it does feel like sort of a late start. But then at the same time, I'm like "oh yeah, Psychology has been like, you know, the white heterosexual male's field for so long that I get that it's going to be baby steps."

But then at the same time, I'm like, "Ugh, I wish it was better in that sense, and on those topics."

I realize I'm maybe biased, because those topics are of interest to me and I already have looked into them a lot. Maybe those baby steps that we have in there right now are what other students need. But then adding baby steps for other issues like accessibility, whether that be visible disabilities or even invisible disabilities, and understanding Psychology of chronic illness, for example – I don't think I've heard that being mentioned at all...

Perceptions OF LGBT People, Not About Effects ON LGBT People

I ask if these are issues that Psychology curricula could just add in an extra module for.

I don't know if it's like an issue in Psychology in general (in the sciences, maybe in general?) ... that the LGBT community in general is only studied to be treated like outliers.

We did research for our experimental Psychology class about associations between trans individuals or LGBT people in general and socioeconomic class. But...rather than studying the effects on them (or like, I, I say them, but like, also "us,") ... It's hard to word, sort of! Are we looking at the effects on them, or are we looking at the effects on [...] what are often perceived as the "normal people"?

You've only seen LGBTQ people studied as a way to look at "normal" people, or in a way that conceptualizes LGBTQ+ people as "other." It seems like the "normal" standpoint created in Psychology, at least in York's Psychology program, is that of a cis white man, even though that's not who is represented in the student body. I say something like "it's like you have to pretend to take that standpoint."

This Weird Interaction Between Objectivity and Subjectivity

Yeah. It distances you from what we're supposed to be studying. I don't know, maybe that's also just like, a perception when you're somebody who is part of a marginalized group,

because, you know, according to some people, 'you are more sensitive to those kinds of differences.'

But sometimes it feels like you are expected to take the position of the white male researcher and not ever be relating to whatever person is being studied or whatever participant there is or whatever individual with a disorder. There's this weird interaction between... objectivity and subjectivity in Psychology, and how that interacts with the fact that it was originally, you know, the cis white men study.

WEIRD — Suddenly This Does Not Feel as Intriguing

On that topic, I really enjoy all of the articles that professors bring in, stuff like that. It's always really interesting to see. And when we're talking in a class, it feels like there's this really interesting breakthrough information. And then you look at the participant list and it's like "20-year-old cisgendered white males. ALSO there was one individual who was East Asian!!" and it's like, Ohh, okay. Suddenly this ... does not feel as intriguing.

The lack of diversity in a lot of research is especially disappointing when you are ... — I mean — when I'm reading up on research, a lot of it is for personal interest, and it sometimes does suck to not see people who sound like you on paper, in any of the research that you're seeing. Like, to the extent where [...] I will specifically put "Pakistani" or "Korean" [...] in my searches; I'm now putting in diversified groups so I can look at diversified research, because otherwise I know that so much of it is just going to be, no offense intended, just literally just white people everywhere.

But I mean, that's, that's just one aspect of identity that I'm looking at, right? There's so many other things to look at, like ability and all that kind of thing.

You have learned about the problem of “W.E.I.R.D.” samples in Psychology, but have been frequently given the impression that

“it's made to seem that it's not something that happens anymore”

...mostly by

Old, white, male professors, unfortunately. (laughs) Not on purpose, I will say.

You consider two conflicting perspectives, echoing your back-and-forth about “baby steps” earlier:

*To them, everything has moved forward a lot, which like, it has! But also not enough...
but maybe to them it seems like enough?*

When I ask how common it is to get a professor like that, you think for a bit, and realize:

I can't remember having a professor who wasn't white.

Prof-Student Relationship

The professor-student relationship is one really motivating factor for you in Psychology.

*in the cases where I've connected with professors after or even during the course, it's
motivated me a lot more significantly to do well.*

*Professors, when they very obviously care about what they're teaching? That in itself —
immediately, motivation's at like, 300%. Like, I want to take seven more courses with this
professor.*

*I remember one professor, he was like, "We need more people like you in family law."
And I was like, "Well, now I'm going into it for sure!" (both laugh) Because like, oh my God. The
fact that I still remember it now and am sort of, I'm not going to lie, still holding onto that kind
of reassurance, speaks to how much more it can motivate, when you have that friendliness with
professors and things like that.*

C.5: Lester

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- There's no map
- I do more work than my professors realize / There's so much extra work to do
- It's isolating / I feel isolated
- I love psychology

Interview Summary

You're a Psychology major with one course left to finish your B.A..

I just like learning about the mind, and human behavior, and the way people think.

I Did Want to Be a Psychologist

Originally, you were thinking about working to become a psychologist:

I did want to be a psychologist at one point. a child psychologist specifically. I wanted to be working with kids.

...but now you're more interested in pursuing a career as a psychotherapist, for a couple reasons:

I don't want to go all the way to my Ph.D. anymore.

And I realized I want to be more a therapist than a psychologist. I think a therapist works more and deals more with the internal person; the care of a person and their emotional needs.

The path to getting that "psychologist" title no longer sounds like the best option to you. It requires working through graduate school all the way through to a Ph.D. in clinical

developmental Psychology. And it requires focus on things that aren't necessarily what you got into Psychology for:

I don't really want to do all that research.

Beyond moving *away* from the process of becoming a psychologist, you've also moved *towards* the idea of "therapist" as a job that is more human and personal. You're interested in working with people as *people*, rather than investigating them or diagnosing them.

I Like to Be Involved

For you, learning is best when it is *interactive*. This is an important word that comes up several times. You learn best when the professor provokes discussion, and fosters conversation:

I like to be involved. I guess it gives more meaning to what I'm learning. Like, I have to interact with what I'm learning in real time, so I'm more engaged.

One course comes to mind in particular that worked very well for you:

It's that it was more interactive, and that we got to actually work with other students. That's the only course, I think, that I got the opportunity to do that. All the other courses were just a bunch of people sitting in a room listening to the professor.

As for the usual Psychology classes,

The whole process ... makes you feel very isolated. You feel alone.

You have a hypothesis for why this happens:

Professor's Perspective vs. Slowing Down a Bit

I think it's just easier for the professor to... kind of regurgitate information and just say what they know and then move on. Whereas if it's interactive, it slows things down a bit.

Slowing things down might seem like a downside to a professor, but to you, it would be a benefit:

Then you can be more in presence, you know? I think presence is very important.

In fact, speed might be a problem with the Psychology curriculum itself:

How can you learn when the material is actively moving by you?

It's like you're always playing catch-up.

But professors don't seem to be affected by their students' overwhelm. You talk about a tension between the way professors and students approach their material:

The professor's at work. Especially if they have been around a couple years, they already know everything they're teaching. It's kind of just going through the motions after a while.

The students, on the other hand, are "approaching the material differently":

They're trying to learn, trying to take in information, trying to perform — because they have to perform on their exams!

It's new for the students, so the students need it to be slowed down... it's obviously going to take longer for them to take it in than it's going to take for the professor to put it out.

In your experience, these two perspectives don't often come together effectively:

It takes some understanding and compassion on the part of the professors, right? It would take some effort from them to slow down when they feel like they don't need to...they'd have to be a little selfless.

It sounds like that doesn't happen so much, which means you are taught at a pace that isn't quite geared towards the student. To deal with this, you need to do extra independent work to learn the material that was supposedly being taught in class.

I Have to Do That Extra Work

After the course is over, I have to go home and teach myself, right? I have to read the chapters myself, go over notes. I have to do that extra work.

Your opinion on having to do that extra work is:

It Is What It Is

It is what it is. It's part of the process, right? We have to do what we have to do.

But 'what we have to do' still strikes you as an unrealistic expectation sometimes. School in general seems to be set up in a way that is somewhat uncaring.

The thing about university is, a lot more people have a lot more going on, because the students are also in adulthood now. So they have more responsibilities.... So it's not as easy or it won't flow as seamlessly as it might have in high school ... Some people have families, mortgages... It's kind of set up in a way where you just gotta figure it out. It's an expectation that's a little unrealistic.

Options Out There

You had a concrete suggestion for how the Psychology curriculum could be more effective:

It's hard to do in university because there are so many students, but somehow get the students to think about what they want to do with Psychology going forward. And maybe help guide and steer them in that direction. There's so many options out there, right?

I mentioned that I didn't personally learn about many options in my own schooling, and asked if you did. You said,

No. Not at all. Some professors were mentioning, in passing, things from their experiences, so that can help. But that depends on who your professor is, right?

It seems like any learning you got about how the pipeline of Psychology schooling to profession functions happened by chance. Nothing was built into the curriculum to guide you or inform you about what your path could or should look like.

But still, you're working through it and want to keep going:

It's always been a passion of mine, to understand the way people think and why they do the things they do on a deeper level. It gives me insight in kind of every area of my life.

C.6: Luna

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- The program wasn't designed with us in mind
- It's isolating
- I do more than my professors realize
- Can I get a little mental health with that psych degree?
- I love psych!

Interview Summary

In our interview, you started by telling me your relationship to Psychology. You're going into your fifth year at York, and you moved into Psychology from undeclared sciences:

I realized it wasn't really for me and I wasn't getting the grades I had wanted, and I really enjoyed Psychology. It was one of my favourite first-year courses and I was doing really well in it, so I ended up transferring to it. And it's been a lot of fun. I definitely enjoy what I learn.

Male-Dominated Curriculum

A central issue you notice with the curriculum, though, is the apparent lack of women in Psychology:

The curriculum that we learn is so male-dominated. As a woman, it makes you feel so out of place.

This is notable to you, because Psychology is often constructed as a stereotypically womanly subject: all about feelings. But that's not what you're being shown:

In almost everything we learn, it's always talked about males. " Oh, male discovered this. Oh, male discovered that. Oh, there's this other thing that a male did." And you're like, "Okay,

that's great, but are there even any women in Psychology?" Like, "do we have any feats? Did we do anything?" And it's "Oh yeah, you guys did a bunch of stuff." and it's like, " Okay, what were they? I want to know!" You don't end up finding out until you do your own research on the topic and like finding your own stuff.

You mention a specific example:

I think one person in one of my classes went "well, were there women in Psychology?" And my history of psych professor went, "Yeah, but that's not important right now," and went back to Sigmund Freud, because that's what we were talking about.

You talk about how the professor could have been less dismissive in this case:

I was like, "Okay, I get that that wasn't the topic we were on...but to take a moment to recognize that there were, and name a few, would have been nice." ...and then go back to what we were talking about! It's not that hard to even just take a moment if someone does have a question about it.

But you reiterate that the curriculum and textbooks have to change, too; it's not just about how responsive a professor is to "off-topic" questions:

Even being able to like, integrate it into what we talk about...like, even in a majority of the textbooks I read, it's all men, which is just sad.

Not a Lot of Discussion

Dismissiveness and lack of engagement is a big thing you notice in your Psychology classes.

A lot of professors prefer the "Oh, I have slides and I'm semi going to read off of them, but I'm mostly going to stand here and lecture you." Which is fine, but it doesn't really give that open dialogue to share things that we know. And it also doesn't bring us an opportunity to question them either.

That's something that comes up a few times:

There's not a lot of time for discussion.

Accessibility Needs

That creates specific problems for you:

I have borderline personality disorder, and so that actually has some symptoms that overlap with ADHD and some focus issues ... If the material's not engaging, the prof's not engaging, that's going to trigger a lot more easily.

You mention that you do best in three rare situations:

- 1) When your professors are flexible to your requests and your needs

This is frustratingly rare. You say, speaking to profs in general:

*You're in a field of human behaviour and you're not being flexible with human behaviour!
It doesn't make sense...*

- 2) Where your professors engage you and other students in discussion

There was maybe only 2 courses that I had with professors that actually went about it a different way and had a conversation. I ended up getting As in those classes because it was a lot more engaging and it was a lot easier to learn. But the ones that just drone on and on, I get like Cs in, because I just can't handle just listening for ages.

- 3) When professors take an interest in you, treating you like another human being.

I always found great connections with profs who treat their students like human beings.

You mentioned one professor who made an impact on you by conveying her interest in your research topic:

She was like, "I have to know how this turns out." And I was like, "Oh my gosh; okay!" I got super invested in my own work.

A prof being actually invested in your work, and actually invested in how you turn out, is so motivational. To not have that in a lot of courses just makes it be like, "Ugh, why am I here? Why am I even listening to you?"

Feeling Lost

You notice some double standards in Psychology that make it hard for anyone to get by:

They don't want you talking in lecture, but they want you to talk to your peers. And so you're like, "How am I supposed to socialize and know the people in my class, but you don't want me discussing and having conversations, and you don't want people working together on this assignment?" ...It ends up making a lot of students lost.

Extra Work

And in addition to making you feel lost and isolating you, the Psychology program gives you a ton more work than what's written down as homework in your syllabi:

Going back to your old textbooks and trying to reteach yourself that one part that you need for that one course because you know it's foundational for the stuff you're learning now, and it just piles on top of each other.

Some of them don't even give out anything. It's just, "show up and do your best." Which makes it difficult for people with learning disabilities because then they have nothing to go off of. Whereas I find it super helpful to have the lecture slides so I can lightly jot notes. But I also like to record lectures or have a recording of the lecture so I can go more in deep and write more detailed notes about it later. But you can't always do that. And so I ended up getting an iPad my second year so that I could sit up closer to the front and record the prof. And then ...you end up

so busy that you don't always have time to review those recordings anyways. You end up having a bunch of stuff to look through and not enough time to do it.

And you believe that extra work is avoidable!

If they had given you adequate resources, appropriate things, it wouldn't have taken so long.

Old News

Another issue with the content itself is that you feel there is too much focus on historical information (again, about those old white men), and too little focus on current Psychology, especially information that will help students become more effective at supporting mental health:

A huge part of the reason I want to study Psychology is to maybe become a counselor. How am I supposed to counsel kids now if all I know is stuff from 50 years ago?

I won't bring this to the group, but I felt that some aspects of your lived experience were important context for your relationship to Psychology:

I grew up in a poverty where I had abusive parents, and I hate knowing that I didn't have any connections to help me through that when I was a kid. So I want to be a resource like that for kids who are in my situation where you're in an abusive home, you're in this poverty situation, and you don't really have anyone to turn to and talk to and to not be told it's your fault.

I grew up in a predominantly abusive home. I was in poverty. [...] and that, overarching, gives you a lot of trauma, obviously. So going into Psychology was very eye-opening, because it gave me a lot of answers to myself, right? It helped me realize, "oh, I should probably seek help for this," "I should probably fix that." "I should probably go get my own therapist and look at some of these things [that] are what are tying me back as becoming a better person."

And so I went to therapy, I went and worked on a lot of those things, and I can be a better person because of it; and I can communicate a little bit better, and I can seem extroverted even when I'm quite introverted. That, overall, just made me love Psychology more, and made me want to learn more and be able to help other people. If I can look at this and fix myself, then I can help someone else see it and fix themselves.

This gives me important context for your experiences in Psychology, so I thought they might be helpful to reflect on!

It's Just Really Freaking Interesting

So, despite the problems you've noted with the Psychology curriculum and teaching, there's a lot that's keeping you here:

I love it. I look at any other degree and I can't imagine doing it. Despite all these problems it has, it's so interesting. It has to do with how our minds work and how we work as people. That in itself is so interesting, and I keep just wanting to learn more.

When you talk to people, you can understand a bit more of why they may do something, or why they may think a certain way, or why a certain tone of your voice may be interpreted in a certain way just because of how someone's brain works. It's just really freaking interesting.

And to make the most of this difficult program that you love so much, you've done a ton of extracurricular work and activities to stay up to date around campus, to ensure you're making the most of every possible learning resource available to you.

I started participating in workshops and figuring out, "Okay, this is how university is supposed to be."

C.7: Robin

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- Uh, can I get some mental health with that?
- The program wasn't designed with someone like me in mind
- I love psychology!

Interview Summary

You started Psychology because of personal relationships that were important to you; within your family and within high school.

I was like, I wish I could help other people —...either be true to themselves or like, trust someone else enough to open up to them about issues that are weighing on them.

Your first time taking introductory Psychology was in the military:

I can just remember the excitement that I had for that class, and the interest that I had there. That was the part that still stands out to me after these years.

And you loved the topic!

I loved hearing about it; I loved accumulating information, I'd just look up every article I could find about mental health stories and like, you know, this new brain imaging technique, or this all, like, other stuff that, you know, I just try and like absorb as much of it as possible like a sponge.

But a number of things interfered with your trajectory through Psychology.

When you left the military and went to university, you weren't able to get the funding you deserved, for silly bureaucratic reasons:

It was hard to get the student funding there because I lived a little too close to home,

...and then you had to re-take a class you'd already taken:

I had to retake Psych 101 again, and I'd already taken like a Psychology class in the military/ at one of the military colleges. That one was even considered a higher level for transfer credit stuff. They didn't count that one as a psych 101, so I had to retake it, essentially, a second time. I had some trouble keeping concentration on it, and interest, because it was just all already stuff that I'd learned before and done before. It wasn't really much updated since just learning about it like a year or two prior.

And then you had to take it a *third* time when you got to York!

Luckily, you encountered some new ideas and interesting updates in that third round of introductory Psychology.

... And that did keep me interested enough to pursue, for the years of study with it, which that was kind of what I always wanted to do. I wanted to be the therapist. That was kind of my main goal.

You noticed some issues with the curriculum in all three schools:

You still hear the same, like, five people's names no matter where you go.

You argue that Psychology focuses on the same few cis white men from "a little too far in the past" at the expense of covering more important, contemporary, and diverse subjects, and of acknowledging the problems embedded in the history of Psychology:

They don't really recognize or acknowledge that like, Hey, you know, this guy did some messed up stuff. This guy slept with a bunch of his patients.

Etc.

You have the sense that the structure of Psychology classes (or at least introductory ones) are geared towards legitimizing or justifying Psychology as a science, which doesn't seem right to you:

You can't just be like, "Alright, so we're going to walk back 200 years just to make sure that you know we've been thinking about Psychology being a science for a long time!"

Instead, you talked about an ideal curriculum where students are first introduced to current knowledge and problems within Psychology, and then introduced to history only insofar as it helps us understand why certain practices or theories are no longer supported or recommended. Your emphasis seems to be on transparency and usefulness; getting students up to speed so that they can be effective practitioners in the world.

A Step Back

When I ask you if Psychology is taught in a way that works for your brain, you say:

Sort of. It's very NT⁷-oriented.

You talk about the sort of impersonal way that things like depression, anxiety, or neurodiversity are taught about:

*We learn about them, but you don't really learn how to solve them, more, I guess?
...That's not quite what I'm trying to say. You're more taking the therapist kind of 'step back'
here...*

You frame the "step back" as the way Psychology is taught implicitly: students, as future psychologists, are meant to throw off any personal perspective or individual reaction and be totally objective and omniscient:

⁷ Short for "neurotypical"

It's like you're not in it, you're just looking at it.

It's like you're not dealing with it from that standpoint.

This is weird!

It's as if we're all perfect little robots trying to learn about this instead of, you know, acknowledge the variety and the breadth of the human experience that everyone in Psychology adds their own thing to.

...and this step back might be forcing us to miss some things that are important or even inherent to Psychology:

There's something to be said for being able to have your objective view of things, and that will benefit people in some situations, but others... you know, that's a person you're dealing with! You gotta put some humanity into it.

You're not 100% certain that this "step back" is always realistic in a field that deals with people. But in your experience, Psychology doesn't give space for its students to be impacted by many of the things it teaches us about:

It's like, you can talk about mental illness, you can learn about it, but (shaking finger) no having it! That's not allowed!

You emphasize that psychologists and therapists, not to mention Psychology students, aren't immune to psychological issues,

They will continue to do so whether we ignore it or not.

So...What resources will you give your students who are maybe trying to cope with these things as they go through your class and learn about them?

You know, instead of just putting a slide at the very end, like "here are some extra resources you can check out in your own time."

In your opinion, empathy is a crucial aspect of Psychology:

that's almost like the, the foundation of Psychology, it seems like: being able to empathize with others and help either you, or them, or both understand and process either emotions that are potentially too complex handle on their own, or just help you work through things.

The way your Psychology programs have taught you about mental illness and neurodiversity tend to tack on resources at the end if they give any at all. They give you facts without providing insight on how to help manage one's own mental health or to help others.

Your opinion on this practice:

It's shallow.

But you still have hope that Psychology can give you the tools you want and need to be an effective therapist.

Psychology Needs More Neurodiversity & Openness

One important step is for professors to ensure that what they're attempting to convey gets across to their students and is usable:

What steps are you taking to actually ensure that things are actually as accessible as you say?

Another is to create more classes that represent the diversity of psychologies that exist; the breadth of human experience; the perspectives that show up in classes:

I feel like there should be more classes on the Psychology of sexuality, or different racialized groups, and how they experience things and how they're psychologically affected in different ways.

Like, there's just different experiences that people go through, and you can't ignore that to have a narrow focus of your Psychology, when it's everyone that is affected.

So, you know, make sure to acknowledge and have theories and information on all of these different groups that are affected here.

People who are more outside of that main core group of things; their experiences—you'd want to make sure that everyone there is supported, because they're the ones who probably have more difficulties than your "average viewer."

The resources invested there should be proportional to how much, or who needs it.

I guess it'd be hard to quantify any group of like, needing more than another, you could say. But they can still acknowledge that, you know, some people will struggle with certain things more. Being able to give that focus where it's due and make sure that this is understood, it's supported, we got a process there, is important.

I ask you what type of person you think Psychology "puts undue focus on, or like, centers most."

Well, kind of similar to the medical world: your straight white man. That's kinda the baseline for a lot of things there.

And as with medical research, as it progresses, we find out that medicine will affect different people in different ways: what might be a heart medication for men has different effects and symptoms in women. Things like that.

You can't only focus on the one group; you gotta acknowledge and consider every different point here. Sure, it can be a lot of work. That's kind of the beauty of it. Like, we don't, you don't need to rush it. Just make sure that you're thorough with everything you do.

C.8: Wanda

Cross-Participant Narratives:

Below are some preliminary **constructions of some narratives** that seem to connect some of the other interviews to yours.

- I do more work than my professors realize
- There's no map
- The program isn't designed for people like me
- Can I get a little mental health with that psych degree?

Interview Summary

After a period in high school where you were feeling lost, down on yourself, and didn't know where to turn, your teacher and school counselor helped you immensely, and thereby led you to discover your interest in Psychology as a helping profession. You shifted your newfound energy towards studying Psychology in university, rather than biotechnology or another hard science.

You decided to apply to York for an undergraduate degree, first taking online classes you're your home in India during COVID, and then moving to Canada on your own as an international student. This move allowed you to hone in on more subject-specific coursework than you would have been able to in your home country:

The best thing about York and just studying in the US or Canada is that you get to make your own schedule and you have so many courses to choose from.

In India... if you go to a public university, they will tell you what courses you need to take... You don't have the opportunity to learn Psychology until, I think, your third or your last year of studying Psychology. I really wanted to just get into the meat of the subject, so I decided to come here.

You were prepared for, and interested in, all sorts of Psychology — you got excited about writing research, and even found yourself enjoying statistics, which you hadn't expected! You enjoy the opportunity to explore and plan out many possible avenues of Psychology education and the professions it might lead to:

I am not completely set on what I want to pursue. My mind keeps jumping around these new things that come along. Like, I think in the beginning of summer, I was obsessed with neuropsychology for some reason...

I like that about me. I like jumping around, thinking about different things ...

I'm also looking at things that are related to Psychology — like, they use skills that someone who graduates from a Psychology program had, and can be used in a completely different setting from a traditional psychologist or counselor.

There's No Map → You Feel Lost

In my first year, I think I was a little lost in terms of what I can do during my years— like, what I'm studying and how I apply it somewhere else.

For example, in my first year if I've completed my statistics course, what do I do with it after? Like, volunteer stuff? Or do you participate ...— like, enroll myself as a research assistant, you know, things like that. I didn't know that.

*And I never came across—right now I *have* come across it, because I enrolled myself in the specialized Psychology program. But before that, I didn't know that you [could] do an independent research study or...you could volunteer your hours for a professor in their research lab. I didn't know all that in first year. I think if I had known that, I'd've planned better for these upcoming years, because now I feel like I'm being rushed into the whole thing. Like, I didn't know that I had to be in the specialized Psychology program for doing the thesis.*

You developed a skill for finding out important information about how to navigate the pipeline of academic Psychology, but it seems like you had to do a lot of extra independent work to find out important information!

Stumbling Across Specialized Honors

I didn't even hear about the specialized honors from the university. I heard from a student who was taking the statistics course in first year. I looked through her LinkedIn, and she had that 'specialized honors,' and I was like, "Am I a specialized honors student? Or is there some other application?"

You figured it out, although you had to do so entirely by yourself, and managed to enroll in the specialized honors program with no help or guidance from within the Psychology program.

The Only Resource I Have

So this fact, like this whole journey thing: Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD, I learned that in one of the webinars that were held, it was a Clinical Pathways in Psychology webinar that was held last year. In that, I got to know what are the different streams and what are the requirements to reach that level.

I've still not gotten it to the T, but I will get there, I think.

... the only resource I have is to talk to people who are already doing that.

I found LinkedIn more resourceful than the university website...

Real-world Impact

You have some ideas for making the curriculum easier to navigate and more relevant:

I think it's important that you connect anything that you're teaching to how it applies to the real world.

If these courses had like a practical component...any kind of practical component! ...the skills that we gain...would be very important once we get out of school.

You expected your Psychology education to give you more of a map of how to move through it in a way that would allow you to *apply* your education to your real life and/or your career. You were hoping to be able to make a difference, but your experience has disillusioned you a bit:

... I'm not saying Psychology does not have transferable skills ... it's just that ... it's hurt me because I've realized I will not have a direct impact right after I graduate.

WEIRD Population, Race, Etc.

Because you mentioned US and Canada, my personality course actually touched upon that: Most of the research that we do ... is with [the] US and Canada and I think the white population. That research would completely apply to someone who is Caucasian. But that research would not translate well with people who are of a different cultural identity. And that's what the professor said: that we need more people to push that kind of thinking; to think in diverse ways and to make research more culturally diverse.

Just because then we would be able to help people who are from that different cultural background.

You said you agreed with your professor “completely” on this front. You connected the notion of cross-cultural and diverse Psychology to your experience in India, where you found that much of your family and people you know think less of Psychology; that it’s less relevant or less respectable than other fields.

Being from India, no one has heard about like —I mean, people know about Psychology, but they think it's more of a way to get out of studying the classic, like, engineering or being a doctor or something ... And I think even my extended family... they didn't say it, but I know that they think that studying Psychology here is just nothing.

You emphasized that your parents supported you a lot, and you felt good about choosing Psychology, despite the sense that your extended family might have tried to subtly discourage you:

All those little doubts that they put in you... I stood up against all of that.

Social Psychology

In social Psychology, you found that the professor taught in a way that made you need to do a lot of extra work in order to keep up:

It was very interesting, but the lectures were very long and ... the textbook was much more clear on what it was saying. I mostly studied from the textbook, but the professor also included some additional information in his lecture videos. So I had to watch those. And it was just his presentation, and him talking over the presentation. Sitting through that just to jot down a few special information that he said he was going to include? That wasn't productive. Because then I had to ultimately go back to the textbook and learn all the information.

I'm not sure whether social Psychology was the only class where you experienced that, but I hope so!

Pushout / Disillusionment

However, there's some frustration and disillusionment creeping up on you throughout these years, despite your best efforts, and despite all the passion and energy you have towards Psychology:

Somehow, going into the program, as I'm going through the years...I won't say I'm pulling away from it, because I'm still interested and I'm trying my level best to keep my interest constant—like, pursuing this straight path to going through the Master's or doing a Ph.D., or sticking with counselling, things like that — but the more I go into these courses, the more I realize that the work that I'm putting in is just not ... I feel like it doesn't count for something after I graduate. It scares me.

Like, what is this program giving me? Cause I'm putting everything into it.

I'm not seeing, or I'm not being shown, or there are no resources.

I do not see my direct impact... it's getting lost in keeping up with the courses.

You're working on keeping up focus, keeping up your interest, and also, sometimes you feel like all this work that you're putting in to get good grades, to do what you're told, doesn't necessarily mean anything in the real world. Like, what impact does your hard work have on a kid who was struggling like you in high school?

Summary

Overall, for the Psychology program to be better catered to you, there could be more practical applications and resources for you to be able to *do* the stuff that you care about in Psychology. You're very vocal about your passion for Psychology and for learning in general. You talk about the possibility of taking a gap year between your undergraduate degree and pursuing graduate school, and your voice brims with curiosity and excitement at the unknown possibilities that await you.

That curiosity and openness both sound very important to you in studying Psychology, and in considering your future pathway through academia and towards an eventual career, whether or not it's a career that is squarely within the realm of Psychology.

Appendix D: Quotes and Themes

The tables below contain the portions of interview transcript that were printed out, organized by theme, and brought to the zine workshop. Each speech bubbles marks the beginning of a separate utterance. Icons in first columns represent themes.

Table D1

Theme: *There's No Map* ☒

Student ⁸	Quote(s)
Iris ☒	☒ The way it's set up, the way they make it feel and seem, is that clinical research is my only avenue. There's so many avenues! I only know this because I have been anxiously researching these kinds of things. ☒ They have no problem telling you what you need for grad school, but they have a lot of trouble telling you where you can go to get it. ☒ All these little things . . . it's like, if you know about it, use it. If you don't, sucks.
Lester ☒	☒ . . . Somehow get the students to think about what they want to do with Psychology going forward. And maybe help guide and steer them in that direction. There's so many options out there, right? ☒ Zoë: Yeah. I didn't personally learn about many options in my schooling. Did you? ☒ ☒ No. Not at all.
Wanda ☒	☒ In my first year, I think I was a little lost. I didn't know that you [could] do an independent research study, or you could volunteer your hours for a professor in their research lab... I think if I had known that, I'd've planned better for these upcoming years, because now I feel like I'm being rushed into the whole thing. ☒ I didn't even hear about the specialized honors from the university. I heard from a student who was taking the statistics course in first year. I looked through her LinkedIn, and she had that 'specialized honors,' and I was like, "Am I a specialized honors student?" ☒ The only resource I have is to talk to people who are already doing that. ☒ I'm not seeing, or I'm not being shown, or there are no resources.

⁸ All names are self-chosen pseudonyms

Table D2

Theme: *The program wasn't designed with ME in mind* 🙄

Name	Quote(s)
Bailey 🙄	💬 When you're sitting in a class and they're talking about something that may have happened to you, but they aren't really showing that they care or anything...it feels like you are the example. They almost make it seem like it's just a random thing to put down in your notes: learn, study it, write it on a multiple choice test. That's what your problem is, or that's what you are. It can just feel very... dehumanizing.
Elissa 🙄	💬 I see a lot of white folks . . . Their experiences growing up didn't match well with mine . . .
Iris 🙄	💬 I'm an accommodation student, and sometimes when I verbalize that, or when I speak to my professors about some things, it's almost like "do the reading and you'll understand." Or "just check out this website and you'll understand." And I'm like, "I have already read, and I have looked at the research, but I need your involvement." 💬 They flat out told me, "unfortunately, peer support people are for first year students. PASS study sessions? We don't have anything for those classes." I'm like, okay! So you guys supported me so wonderfully in first year, but second, you're just gonna let me drown? 💬 Not a single tutorial in sight. It's a little bit sad because I thrived in that dynamic. 💬 They had FIVE workshops about how to apply for a clinical Psychology pathway. I'm like, clinical Psychology makes me feel like I want to have a panic attack. . . . Can we talk about anything else I can apply my degree to? It feels very limiting and it feels very scary, if your aim or even your interests don't align with this "Get your undergrad, get your master's, research clinically in Psychology" formula.
Kajal 🙄	💬 Issues with marginalized groups that aren't just racism are brushed over so quickly that it's really unfortunate. With topics about sexuality and stuff like that, I've noticed that happen a lot. . . . I don't know if it's like an issue in Psychology in general (in the sciences, maybe in general?) . . . that the LGBT community in general is only studied to be treated like outliers . . . ?

Kajal, cont'd.	□ I'm like, "oh yeah, Psychology has been the white heterosexual male's field for so long that I get that it's going to be baby steps." □ I realize I'm maybe biased, because those topics are of interest to me and I already have looked into them a lot. Maybe those baby steps that we have in there right now are what other students need. □ It distances you from what we're supposed to be studying. I don't know, maybe that's also just a perception when you're somebody who is part of a marginalized group. ...But sometimes it feels like you are expected to take the position of the white male researcher, and not ever be relating to whatever person is being studied, or whatever individual with a disorder. □ When we're talking in a class, it feels like there's this really interesting breakthrough information. And then you look at the participant list and it's like "20-year-old cisgendered white males. Also, there was one individual who was East Asian!" and it's like...Ohhh, okay. Suddenly this...does not feel as intriguing. □ It sometimes does suck to not see people who sound like you on paper, in any of the research that you're seeing. □ I can't remember having a professor who wasn't white.
Luna	□ The curriculum that we learn is so male-dominated, and as a woman, it makes you feel so out of place. □ I think one person in one of my classes went "well, were there women in Psychology?" And my history of psych professor went, "Yeah, but that's not important right now," and went back to Sigmund Freud. □ I go to some of the male professors and they look at me like I'm in the wrong field. □ I have borderline personality disorder, and so that actually has some symptoms that overlap with ADHD and some focus issues . . . If the material's not engaging, the prof's not engaging, that's going to trigger a lot more easily. □ There's not a lot of time for discussion. There was maybe only 2 courses that I had with professors that actually went about it a different way and had a conversation. I ended up getting A's in those classes because it was a lot more engaging and it was a lot easier to learn. But the ones that just drone on and on, I get like Cs in, because I just can't handle just listening for ages.
Robin	□ "you can talk about mental illness, you can learn about it, but (<i>shakes finger</i>) no having it!"

Robin, cont'd. 	It's very NT(<i>neurotypical</i>)-oriented. You're taking the therapist kind of 'step back'. It's as if we're all perfect little robots trying to learn about this, instead of, you know, acknowledge the variety and the breadth of the human experience that everyone in Psychology adds their own voice to. What steps are you taking to actually ensure that things are actually as accessible as you say? I feel like there should be more classes on the Psychology of sexuality, or different racialized groups, and how they experience things and how they're psychologically affected in different ways.
Wanda 	Most of the research that we do . . . is with [the] US and Canada and I think the white population. That research would completely apply to someone who is Caucasian. But that research would not translate well with people who are of a different cultural identity.

Table D3

Theme: *It's Isolating* 

Name	Quote(s)
Bailey 	I definitely haven't had, I guess, the easiest time making friends. It feels like everyone is very on their own; they do their thing and they go. It definitely can make you feel extra lonely. You don't really see people like, laughing or having their own little conversations ever. You hear something heavy and then maybe it makes you not really want to talk to people that you're not even close with.
Elissa 	I felt I missed out on something by not making a lot of friendships or bonding with my peers ... They seemed like cool people. It was just not like I found something like a common ground, a shared background, for me to form deep, meaningful relationships. I didn't connect as much as I would have wanted to in a Psychology undergrad.

Iris ☺	☞ It can feel really isolating. ☞ I think that there needs to be more engagement and camaraderie embedded within the classroom. ☞ It's because of the way everything's structured that it doesn't allow for, people feel like they don't have time for, or that it's not a priority, and that way it gets missed. But it affects mental health, it affects well-being, it affects academics. ☞ Very, very little group work and collaboration in Psychology, which I feel like is super important.
Kajal ☺	☞ The amount of group work that there is in Psychology hasn't really lent itself to facilitating a lot of . . . friendships. ☞ In the Psychology courses, it's all quite individual. Within the courses themselves, the amount of discussion with peers and the quality of discussion with peers has been something that maybe is lacking, in my perception.
Lester ☺	☞ The whole process . . . makes you feel very isolated. You feel alone.
Luna ☺	☞ They don't want you talking in lecture, but they want you to talk to your peers. And so you're like, "How am I supposed to socialize and know the people in my class, but you don't want me discussing and having conversations, and you don't want people working together on this assignment?" . . . It ends up making a lot of students lost.

Table D4

Theme: *We do so much extra work* 

Name	Quote(s)
Iris 	☞ You get overwhelmed and you think to yourself, do I have to sacrifice the quality of my learning process to get a grade? . . . Do I sacrifice my health to get this grade? ☞ We have our own expectations, we have the expectations of the school on an academic level, and then we have these unspoken expectations. And then on top of our reading, our own lives, most of us work as well, it can be a lot.
Kajal 	☞ I will say, stuff with Covid being online made it very hard to focus for so many of the classes. And I will be honest that with some of them, lectures were podcasts, (laughs) and I would just read up on the textbook afterwards, depending on the professor and, you know, how their tone meshed for my brain.

Kajal, cont'd. 	□ I will specifically put "Pakistani" or "Korean" . . . in my searches; I'm now putting in diversified groups so I can look at diversified research, because otherwise I know that so much of it is just going to be, no offense intended, just literally just white people everywhere.
Lester 	□ It's like you're always playing catch-up. □ After the course is over, I have to go home and teach myself, right? I have to read the chapters myself, go over notes. I have to do that extra work. □ The thing about university is, a lot more people have a lot more going on, because the students are also in adulthood now. So they have more responsibilities... Some people have families, mortgages . . . and It's kind of set up in a way where you just gotta figure it out. It's an expectation that's a little unrealistic. □ It is what it is. It's part of the process, right? We have to do what we have to do.
Luna 	□ In almost everything we learn, it's always talked about males. " Oh, male discovered this. Oh, male discovered that. Oh, there's this other thing that a male did." And you're like, "Okay, that's great, but are there even any women in Psychology?" Like, "do we have any feats? Did we do anything?" And it's "Oh yeah, you guys did a bunch of stuff." and it's like, " Okay, what were they? I wanna know!" you don't end up finding out until you do your own research on the topic. □ Going back to your old textbooks and trying to reteach yourself that one part that you need for that one course because you know it's foundational for the stuff you're learning now, and it just piles on top of each other. □ I ended up getting an iPad my second year so that I could sit up closer to the front and record the prof. And then . . . you end up so busy that you don't always have time to review those recordings anyways. You end up having a bunch of stuff to look through and not enough time to do it.
Wanda 	□ I had to ultimately go back to the textbook and just learn all the information.

Table D5

Theme: *Uh, can I get some mental health with that?* 

Name	Quote(s)
Bailey 	 I guess I was expecting a bit more care and sensitivity towards certain topics.  Something felt weird in me just taking notes on my laptop about things that are so extreme . . . not even having any statement from the professor saying, "...and it's so awful when this happens." "and it's so unfortunate that this happens." It felt like there was a lack of sympathy or empathy there.  If you're literally talking about depression and you're not giving certain numbers to call or links for help, in a slideshow that's literally talking about suicide... it just doesn't feel right.  I feel like when we talk about mental health, they don't really talk about what to say to people, or how to help people. I find it strange, honestly, that they don't teach things like that.
Iris 	 I've definitely had moments being in Psychology where I'm like, for such a major—it's all about Psychology and mental wellness; it's supposed to be completely based off of research and knowledge of mental health—that was a very, very narrow-minded thing of you to say, sir.
Luna 	 A huge part of the reason I want to study Psychology is to maybe become a counselor. And how am I supposed to counsel kids now if all I know is stuff from 50 years ago?  You're in a field of human behavior and you're not being flexible with human behavior! It doesn't make sense ...
Robin 	 What resources will you give your students who are maybe trying to cope with these things as they go through your class and learn about them? You know, instead of just putting a slide at the very end, like, "here are some extra resources you can check out in your own time"  It's just like, "this is what depression is," "this is anxiety," you know, like ... it's shallow.
Wanda 	 I do not see my direct impact ... it's getting lost in keeping up with the courses.

Table D6

Theme: *Posi Corner / I love it!* 😊

Name	Quote(s)
Bailey 😊	💬 I've always like really had positive experiences. 💬 All my classes, they've done a great job at mixing between reading something from a textbook, writing on a chalkboard or whiteboard, showing like certain movies or certain clips from YouTube videos ... I think they do a good job at just explaining everything. 💬 It's enjoyable to study, and it's entertaining. And obviously it's real life stuff, which I love. I like how a lot of the time when teaching certain things the professor might say " if this has ever happened to you, or if you've ever seen someone react like this," ... it's just so real and relatable and it feels like just an easy thing to talk about, because it's like something that like I see every day in myself and the people around me. I feel like it just keeps you connected to people. even if you're not talking to anyone, it's still cool that while studying I'm learning about people. 💬 I feel like it just helps you understand everything better.
Elissa 😊	💬 I see, at least in the undergrad setting, a lot of minority peoples, a lot of international students either taking Psychology undergrad or have taken Psychology courses . . . And they like it. They found it enriching and they found it fun. They found that taking those classes open their eyes to a world they haven't seen or learned about before.
Iris 😊	💬 I'm one of those people that like, lecture is what I love. It fuels me and helps create momentum for my learning. 💬 I love it. As much as I'm not a big fan of the structure, the words, the information in the textbook, just speak to me. Sitting there reading my textbook is like sitting there reading a fiction novel. I just sit and I read and I love it. 💬 Psychology is one of the few fields of study that genuinely do fuel me.
Kajal 😊	💬 Pretty much every class was, like, amazing for me. I was surprised (because I don't love math), but even statistics was interesting to me!

Kajal, cont'd. 😊	💬 The way that Psychology exams are set up are, like, perfect for my brain. I enjoy them so much. 💬 Recently I've been looking into ADHD diagnoses . . . And Psychology has helped me get to the point where I feel ready to ask my doctor and everybody like that for diagnosis. 💬 Every course I've taken, I'm like, "I don't want my degree to end; I just want to keep taking more psych courses."
Lester 😊	💬 It's always been a passion of mine—to understand the way people think and why they do the things they do, on a deeper level. it gives me insight in kinda every area of my life. 💬 I just like learning about the mind, human behavior, and the way people think.
Luna 😊	💬 I really enjoyed Psychology. It was one of my favorite first-year courses and I was doing really well in it, so I ended up transferring to it, and it's been a lot of fun. I definitely enjoy what I learn. 💬 I love it. I look at any other degree and I can't imagine doing it. Despite all these problems it has, it's so interesting. It has to do with how our minds work and how we work as people. That in itself is so interesting and I keep just wanting to learn more. 💬 It opens a whole new understanding and a whole new world... when you talk to people, you can understand a bit more of why they may do something or why they may think a certain way or why a certain tone of your voice may be interpreted in a certain way just because of how someone's brain works. It's just really freaking interesting. 💬 I went to therapy; I went and I worked on a lot of those things and I can be a better person because of it, and I can communicate a little bit better and I can seem extroverted even when I'm quite introverted. That, overall, just made me love Psychology more and made me wanna learn more and be able to help other people because I'm like, "If I can look at this and fix myself, then I can help someone else see it and fix themselves."
Robin 😊	💬 I loved hearing about it. I loved accumulating information. I'd just look up every article I could find about mental health stories and like, you know, this new brain imaging technique . . . I just try and absorb as much of it as possible like a sponge.
Wanda 😊	💬 I like that about me. I like jumping around, thinking about different things

Table D7

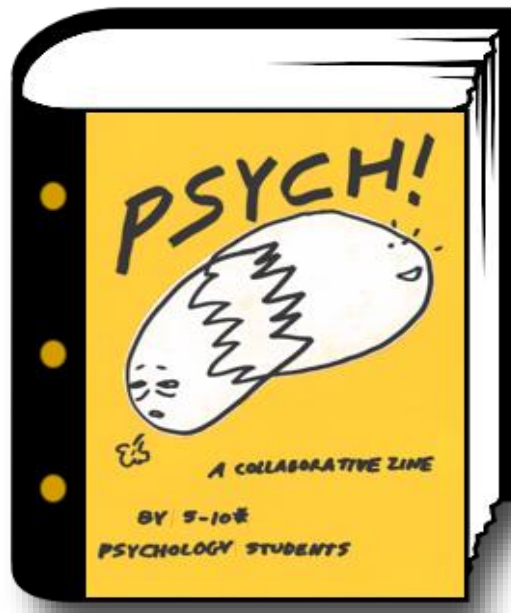
Unsorted Quotes

Name	Quote(s)
Bailey	☐ I would definitely say I'm more on the sensitive side...
Elissa	☐ I do believe they are assuming everyone has a common shared experience, but I don't see it inherently as a bad thing. I know that how you take in information is you seeing yourself in that content. ☐ I'm a first-generation student, I'm international, I'm a minority, et cetera...
Iris	☐ For the most part, if you've read the chapter, you can completely zone out. It doesn't challenge you to be engaged, I find. ☐ Mental health has been a huge part of my own journey. Like, it's been something that I've dealt with since I was very young. ☐ So I guess it's kind of geared me towards Psychology—better understanding my own mental health, being better able to put myself in a position where I could potentially get a career helping others. That's always been a huge point of fulfillment and of aspiration for me.
Kajal	☐ A lot of friends have similar feelings on the topic: "there is something in my brain that's not computing how it should be. Maybe if I study psychology, then I'll figure it out." ☐ There's this weird interaction between objectivity and subjectivity in Psychology, and how that interacts with the fact that it was originally, you know, the cis white men study. ☐ My parents are both immigrants. They did a lot to end up here and to get here. So there is that sense of owing them doing something that they can, you know, talk about with pride. ☐ In the cases where I've connected with professors after or even during the course, it's motivated me a lot more significantly to do well.
Lester	☐ I did want to be a psychologist at one point. A child psychologist specifically. . . I don't want to go all the way to my Ph.D. anymore. And I realized I want to be more a therapist than a psychologist.

Lester, cont'd.	□ The students need it to be slowed down . . . it's obviously going to take longer for them to take it in than it's going to take for the professor to put it out. It takes some understanding and compassion on the part of the professors, right? It would take some effort from them to slow down when they feel like they don't need to . . . they'd have to be a little selfless.
Luna	□ A lot of professors prefer the, "Oh, I have slides and I'm semi going to read off of them, but I'm go mostly going to stand here and lecture you." Which is fine, but it doesn't really give up that open dialogue to share things that we know. And it also doesn't bring us an opportunity to question them either. □ A prof being actually invested in your work, and actually invested in how you turn out and what the work you're doing is, is so motivational. To not have that in a lot of courses just makes it be like, "Ugh, why am I here? Why am I even listening to you ?" □ I always found great connections with profs who treat their students like human beings.
Robin	□ You still hear the same, like, five people's names no matter where you go. □ You can't only focus on the one group; you gotta acknowledge and consider every different point here. Sure, it can be a lot of work. That's kind of the beauty of it. □ People who are more outside of that main (<i>gestures a circle with hands</i>) core group of things; their experiences—you'd want to make sure that everyone there is supported, because they're the ones who probably have more difficulties than your "average viewer." □ That's almost the foundation of Psychology, it seems like: being able to empathize with others and help either you, or them, or both understand and process either emotions that are potentially too complex handle on their own, or just help you work through things.
Wanda	□ The more I go into these courses, the more I realize that the work that I'm putting in is just not... I feel like it doesn't count for something after I graduate. It scares me. Like, what is this program giving me? I'm putting everything into it.

Appendix Z: Zine

The zine is a hand-made, hand-photocopied object, importantly three-dimensional and tactile. A physical photocopy of the zine should be appended to this thesis with a paperclip or staple, to be engaged with manually, but I haven't figured how to recreate these experiences on a screen, where you are most likely reading this. If you email me⁹ an address, I'd like to mail you a physical copy, so you are not at a disadvantage. You can also find a scanned representation of the zine by clicking the following linked image:



⁹ kzmartinhtc@gmail.com