



Aboriginal and African Psychologists Talk

Kurunna Mwarre “Make My Spirit Inside Me Good”

ABORIGINAL THINKING

Cultural insights provide guidance on sexual abuse by Vicky Hovane-Aboriginal psychologist- in INpsych- APS 2012-10-22

The biggest barrier to developing, implementing and delivering more appropriate services and programs to our people that I have experienced is non-Aboriginal professionals and public servants not willing to create space for Aboriginal voices and perspectives to be heard. The landscape has changed in terms of the presence of Aboriginal professionals-there are more of us available but we are tired of having our participation trivialised and tokenised and this has got to stop if we are to respond appropriately.

One of the keys is “looking backwards to the future”. Which comes from looking at our cultures to search for answers to the issues we face today and as we negotiate the modern world into the future-staying strong in culture and identity.

Fundamental to this is a need to draw on “Aboriginal core values and principles” (ACCVP) approach for ways of responding to this problem in a culturally secure and effective way.

This approach acknowledges that culture is not static. There is a need to more explicitly reinforce the values and principles that are central to our cultures and what we stand for as Aboriginal people.

Observing these is not inconsistent with living in the modern world-and they remain relevant as fundamental guidelines for living today-such as observing reciprocal obligations and responsibilities, being respectful and above all, behaving in ways that fulfil our role in ensuring our survival of our people and cultures into the future.

Sexual abuse

There is a prevailing culture of fear in Aboriginal communities. We have to make sure the right person is held accountable for the abuse. The perpetrators make threats and use actual violence toward anyone who discloses abuse. We have to turn this around and the ACCVP approach may remind families about the obligations and responsibilities for bringing up children so they have the best chance of reaching their potential and in turn can fulfil their rights and responsibilities in relation to cultural maintenance.

In instances of sexual abuse, typically breakdowns in family and community functioning maybe observed such that family and kinship structures do not provide environments of care, protection and belonging.

We need to work out the tension between what is private and what is public in a cultural context. Our traditional ways of sorting out problems was quite public so everyone in the community knew what was going on and was reminded of standards of behaviour and punishment for

transgressions. Feelings of shame were used as a means of deterrence. However western ethics and guidelines emphasise privacy and confidentiality which means that culturally embedded ways of reinforcing behavioural standards have been removed.

The reality is that we as Aboriginal people have not sat down yet and had a dialogue about our cultural values, principles and practices and how these fit in with a contemporary context and importantly how these fit in with ethical current principles and guidelines if at all.

Non-Aboriginal professionals/people must be willing to step aside to create space for us Aboriginal people to take our place in driving change within our families and communities.

Associated with this is the need for some kind of protocol which require non-Aboriginal people /professionals who wish to comment on such issues they understand they are doing so as outsiders looking in; in that even though they may try to walk in our shoes it is still their own feet they are feeling.

AFRICAN THINKING

Dr Christopher Sonn-Apartheid Archive Project The psychology of racism and colonialism: reflections from the international Congress of Psychology in South Africa.

Dr Sonn is a lead researcher on the International Apartheid Archive Project which aims to examine the nature of South African's experiences of racism under the old apartheid order and their continual effects on individual and group functioning. He attended the recent conference in Cape Town on Psychology serving humanity. Among the delegates were a number of founding members of The Black Psychology Association based in the US and numerous presentations signalled a range of African oriented psychologies emerging in different African nations. These psychologies like Latin American liberating psychologies reflect broader de-colonial efforts.

Reclaiming psychology for humanity involves making explicit its past role in colonialism and showing how it can continue to work in harmful ways and creating new ways it can be used to promote the well being of people and communities.

Indigenous psychology is a necessary part of the decolonisation process. In recent times there have been significant efforts to challenge the mono-culturalism of psychology as well as the dominance of certain models of knowledge production and practice.

Sonn speaks of how indigenous people in Australia have sought rights to self-determination and on the complexities of reclaiming and reconstructing identities in an era where "people are struggling to reconnect with family and a broader sense of Aboriginality after the fragmentation, dislocation and disintegration of assimilations policies".

As an immigrant to Australia this has meant for me navigating Australia's race relations history, which shares much with South Africa in terms of land dispossession, racialising people of colour, criminalising asylum seekers, economic exclusion and exploitation, and paternalising and victim blaming responses to the plight of vulnerable people.

The challenges in South Africa may appear similar to the challenges of peace building and reconciliation in Australia.

The Apartheid Archive Project is a memory project concerned with the telling of stories of growing up in an Apartheid era. It is argued that these stories, told by everyday South Africans, need to be surfaced and accounted for so they can be processed (emotionally). Without this telling and processing and legitimising many people realities will continue to be denied or silenced.

There is a dynamic of silencing or telling those who have suffered the brunt of racism to “move on”. And this is evident in responses to Australian indigenous peoples’ claims to self determination. Importantly this project has highlighted the many ways in which everyday exclusion continues and how race and gender intersect and work together in oppressive practices. This project is firmly based on a transformative and liberation-oriented praxis engaging psychological notions for social critique, for contesting the denial of racism and for opening spaces for people to reclaim and own their histories-in fact have a say in the making of a country’s history.

Psychology serving humanity is cultural, anchored in local and global realities and fully aware of histories of slavery, colonialism and other processes of domination.

This psychology is necessarily political.

If it is truly to serve humanity- it is to document the sprawling historic and contemporary stretches of injustice and contestation, the circuits that link privilege and marginality, structure history and lives, dispossession and resistance.

This resource and further information about Creating A Safe Supportive Environment is available to download at www.casse.org.au/resources.

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