On Teaching Decolonising White Psychology

Group of Trainers in Clinical Psychology Conference 2016

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Plan of Presentation

- Rationale for Teaching this Session
- Some personal-professional context
- What was Taught and Why
- What Was the Impact?
- Where Do We Go From Here?
What Brought Me to Teach This?

- Supervised Dr. Snehal Shah’s D.Clin.Psy. thesis at Hertfordshire
- ‘I am tired of having to carry the flag and burden of cultural expertise.’ (One memorable quote from supervision).
- WHY SHOULD SHE?
- WHO’S BURDEN IS IT? (Q to Audience)
- It’s a WHITE Burden!
- And we need to OWN it and DO Something about it!
Additional Reasons to Teach This

- Reading Clinical Psychology Forum Special issue on Racism (2005)
- Incidentally, CPF due for an update on how far (or not) we have come?
- Adetimole, Afuape, & Vara (UEL, 2005) call for:
  - Training lectures where white trainers own & take responsibility for:
  - ‘Deconstructing whiteness’ and the attendant privileges (pp. 13-14).
- UEL have been working hard as a team to address eurocentricity in training!
- Beyond this, my experiences working during State of Emergency apartheid SA
- In South and East London Services (UK) and
- In specialist CAMH Service for Maori & PI children/families in Aoteroa NZ,
- crystallised Psychology as a (largely) Eurocentric colonial enterprise, hence...
Why The Need for Decolonisation?

Q But surely Psychology is backed by science and is thus universal?

Depends on the ‘science’ (which is itself a cultural practice: Kuhn, 1962)

So I teach the history of Psychology in South Africa, including:

HF Verwoerd (one of the major architects of apartheid) as a practicing Psychologist

Arguing for a social engineering system recognising ‘inherent racial differences’ -

One of the foundation stones of Apartheid being IQ studies showing...?

Ask class to apply Occam’s Razor - alternative & more credible explanations?

Essentialism in psychology negates external structures and processes, e.g. cultural bias, inequity, structural systems built on racism etc.

Essentialism is a (Western) cultural practice too.

Many non-western models of identity e.g. focus on interacting systems not ‘I’
Decolonisation is a broad agenda

- Not just psychometrics and Culture bias - AND no such thing as ‘culture free’
- Cultural ‘sensitivity’ to the default (un-marked state) WHITE US.
- The dangers and limits of psychiatric classification in non-Western cultures
- And medicating - not just misery - but normal cultural expressions (examples)
- ...But we must not divert/project blame onto Psychiatry per se
- Psychotherapy too is an indigenous enterprise - if identity and meaning is systemically constructed, what is the relevance of 1:to:1 therapy?
- ‘Socialising to the model’ - as if our clients lack social knowledge, what about
- We socialise to their models? (e.g. NZ = Training in Maori models of MH)
- What do symptoms mean to them - and what is their usual recourse for help?
- Model less important than relationships we build & belief(s) client has (Wampold, 2015)
White is Embedded Too

- Also provide trainees with a brief history of racism and linking to:
- Colonial enterprise - human lives construed as capital units of varying ‘worth’/value
- White as ‘civilised’ bringer of moral and technological salvation - justificatory narrative
- White as intrinsically more valuable - an *enduring* narrative!
- Black = less valuable & can be treated as such & used to generate more White wealth,
- Apartheid & Capital - Racism embedded in capitalist structures, e.g. cheap labour
- Anyone living in SA during apartheid - Whiteness & Male Patriarchy too. (Trump Too?)
- So we acknowledge inter-sectionality and multiple identity markers impacting
- Class, gender, sexuality, disability etc.
Teaching: Building ‘Cultural Competence’?

- Cannot hope to learn all the ‘cultural’ groups in the world
- And within group diversity is often larger than between group differences, so
- Trap of Stereotyping/Racism may increase if cultural knowledge is reified
- What other ways to build ‘cultural sensitivity’ then?
- Becoming aware of YOUR own culture first! (Cultural genograms)
- Decentering the White Gaze - White as the privileged ‘default’ position, but…
- We are ‘Other’ too!
- Aotearoa NZ - embracing the term ‘Pakeha’ (white other)
- Exercise - what is your cultural identity/heritage?
- What does ‘being white’ mean to you? (Nolte, 2007 - White is a Colour Too.)
Exercises 2 - Addressing Racism

- And, if you’re ‘black’, what are your experiences of whiteness?
- Opening up dialogue and discussions
- Second Exercise Further in:
  - How Do you raise the issue of difference and acknowledge the potential impact of racism on mental health with clients?
  - (Group discussion and feedback).
- What about your own (experiences of) racism?
- How is this found and addressed? (Constantly)
- Hierarchies of colour and shades of whiteness
- Implicit association tests - strengths and limitations
- Racism not just a ‘thing’ you have or don’t have, but ‘in the air’ (media, institutions...)
But What About White Guilt?

- What About It?
- Guilt is uncomfortable & inevitably people prefer to avoid this, but...
- It’s there for an (earned) reason, so it needs to be acknowledged and
- 1. ‘Sucked Up’ - discussions and support groups?
- 2. Used as a spur for positive action to ‘Disrupt Whiteness’ (UCT),
  i.e. to challenge racism at a systemic/structural level and to
- Educate white colleagues/friends/family etc. as and if needed.
- Not easy, sure, but did we join the profession because it was ‘easy’?
So What ELSE Should We Do?

- Diversity & Inclusion is NOT enough! (Paulraj, 2016)
- If BME access training but encounter racism and leave?
- Access without *positive* retention is meaningless.
- Supporting the idea of upwards mobility without addressing institutional racism blocking this is fruitless.

*Systemic racism within services and the profession needs to be tackled.*
Doing More

- We also need to engage with our own cultural roots and realise
- We are ‘OTHER’ too - ‘Addressing Whiteness in CP Training’
- But How to Do All of This?? (Q For Audience)
- Team formulations -> including cultural genograms (Lucy Johnstone)
- Mobilise - White (Black?) Psychology anti-racist alliance? (CPF Special Issue?)
- Challenge Psychological structures from within (How?) and
- Ally with critics wishing to transform UK Psychology into
- A Western model of mind care sensitive to learn and engage with other models
Feedback & Key References

- Very positive feedback from trainees with suggestion:
- Bring in earlier, near start of training, so that issues are thought about by ALL AND from the beginning.
- *With thanks to guidance and advice from Professor Nimisha Patel too.*
- **REFERENCES 1**
- Decolonising the Academy #RMF [http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/decolonizing-academy-informal-conference-report](http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/decolonizing-academy-informal-conference-report)
Psychologist Managing Whiteness
References 2