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[1] I would like to thank Pat Dudgeon, John Fielder, David Fryer, Jan Bostock, and Meredith Green for their feedback that helped improve this paper, as well as the students who have participated in the relevant subjects for their contributions to our evolving critically reflective practice. All correspondence regarding this paper can be sent to Christopher Sonn, School of Psychology, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne City MC, Melbourne, 8001 or email: Christopher.sonn@vu.edu.au

Keywords: indigenisation, cultural sensitivity, decolonisation

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In this paper I explore some of the issues associated with teaching and researching in the context of dominant/non-dominant group relations. The paper stems from observations, experiences and challenges that I have encountered in researching with indigenous Australians including Aboriginal people from the mainland and Torres Strait Islander people, and teaching undergraduate and post-graduate subjects on cultural diversity.

I suggest that guidelines for working in culturally sensitive ways across cultural boundaries are needed and should include issues of power that are implicit in processes of knowledge production (i.e., what we know, how we know, and on whose terms we know) and social identity construction. I also argue that the writing of indigenous authors in Australia, and other contexts, are important resources for promoting critical reflection because it serves to disrupt taken for granted ways of knowing. At a minimum, I suggest, these writings bring into focus the

relationships between power and social identities. I focus on the tensions and challenges associated with negotiating the messages conveyed in Aboriginal authors' writings about self-determination, colonisation and culturally sensitive and transformative practice and research. I locate the reflection within the broader literature base on indigenisation and the development of culturally sensitive psychology.

I conclude that engaging in the explication of power associated with social identities in these contexts can be challenging but it is an important part of creating a culturally sensitive psychology.

Positioning the Author

I migrated to Australia from South Africa. In South Africa, I grew up in a so-called 'coloured' group. This group was politically constructed during the Apartheid era and positioned 'in-between' the dominant oppressing white group and the dominated oppressed black group (Sonn & Fisher, 1996; Sonn & Fisher, 2003).

In Australia, where there are different discourses about race relations, I am positioned as a black person, an outsider to the mostly white community. I recognise that the white community is internally diverse along different dimensions, but with Anglo Saxons as the dominant group (Hage, 1999). Although there are many other social identities that afford me privilege (i.e., male, educator, parent), it is

through my experiences as a racial ‘other’ that I have developed strategies for teaching and research in the area of social diversity. These strategies focus on decentering students through interrogating their own group memberships and taken for granted understandings, assumptions, and benefits associated with those group memberships. One of the principles that inform my teaching is derived from experiences of being ‘othered’ because of my skin colour and being a migrant. This vantage point has sensitised me to the issues of race, ethnicity and other dimensions of oppression by bringing to the foreground how what we know, how we know, and on whose terms we know, can be problematic. From this vantage point it seems that if we are privileged we often do not see the privileges afforded to us because of our group membership and our investments. In my view it is important to make visible different levels of privilege as part of the process of raising awareness about difference and experiences of exclusion. One way I do this is to introduce the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as other black authors about their experiences in different countries.

Student Responses to Indigenous Voices

I have been teaching subjects as part of courses of study dealing with social and cultural diversity for the last eight or so years. Recently, I taught a Master’s level class introducing topics dealing with race, culture,

and ethnicity. As part of the process, I set Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) book, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* as required reading for students in two different years. In both years, those taking the class were mostly white Australians, yet with ethnically diverse backgrounds. In both subjects students were asked to review the book as part of the process. The students negotiated the content in different ways expressing different emotions, some enjoyed it and others found it confronting. Overall, most students felt unsettled, perhaps even upset, initially. Most it seems felt the writer homogenised and merged white with Western and were uncomfortable about being positioned in this category. This discomfort is a form of resistance, not an unusual response to learning about racism and oppression and our often unwitting roles in these processes. As part of the resistance students feel that society is changing towards racial tolerance and at individual levels there is less racism. Some students also commented that they were unsettled by the writing style, which they felt was aggressive and often without support from the literature. Some had difficulty because they perceived the author as assuming to speak on behalf of all indigenous peoples, although it is not necessarily the case that Smith (1999) intended to do this. It seems the responses, in part, pointed to the difficulties associated with perceived categorical and homogenising conceptualisations of culture and ethnic groups, about the apparent imposition of fixed singular identities and

cultures, the power to name and describe the world. In fact, cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Bhatia, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1998) has been critiqued because country is often used as a proxy marker for culture. Through the creation of static categories that position the West in relation to other cultures, research practices contribute to the reification of culturally homogenous 'ethnic' and racial groups. In this situation, student responses suggest that identifying white with Western is overly inclusive and denying of diversity, but also disabling by virtue of the fact that they are members of this group that is seen as colonising.

More interesting from my perspective was the uncertainty that students reported about engaging with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. At one level, this is perhaps useful because students are more cautious about leaping in to do good from a base that assumes their superiority and without critically considering their own location. Yet, at another level, there are deeper considerations by the dominant majority about these responses to the messages conveyed by Smith (1999). There are implications for how we engage in intercultural practice that is sensitive and contribute to finding solutions for everyday difficulties while avoiding practice that disempower and continue to colonise because of our lack of awareness about the racism implicit unexamined epistemologies. The challenges for decolonizing practice are complex and

call for the explication and negotiation of epistemological and ontological positions that informs praxis. Thus, as part of the process of reflecting on pedagogic practice it is important to explore some of the issues that flow from this writing and students' responses, and the implications for working towards culturally sensitive, meaningful and transformative practice.

Indigenous Writing: Challenges to Notions of Self and Dominant Ways of Knowing

As part of these broader processes of social change, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors have written about self-determination and the construction of alternative ways of working that are anchored in the culture, worldview and lived realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (e.g., Nakata, 2003; Oxenham, 2000). This writing is part of a growing recognition in different contexts that academia, and in this case, psychology, has had its roots in Western culture and that the uncritical transporting of theory and practices is problematic (Bhatia, 2002; Davidson, 1992; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Moghaddam, 1987; Sinha, 1997). Bhatia (2002), for example, argued that in the past psychology contributed, often unwittingly, to the ideology of colonisation through the construction of Oriental others. He analysed Indian psychology using race and racialism as guiding notions to

highlight the difficulty associated with uncritically transplanting Western psychology into India. Smith (1999) wrote powerfully about the colonising impacts of 'Western' ways of knowing and knowledge production for indigenous peoples. She challenges taken-for-granted ways of knowledge production and calls for different methodologies and approaches that will ensure "research with indigenous peoples can be more respectful, ethical, sympathetic, and useful" (p.9).

Some of the messages conveyed by Smith (1999) and others (e.g., Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000; Nakata, 2003) were also evident in some of my research. In one of my research projects with indigenous students in mainstream higher education it was found that participants criticized psychology and other social sciences as culturally inappropriate and oppressive (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000). Participants commented: "In a sense psychology did not look at groups of people but people as a whole (independent of the group)" and "everything is individualistic, set and structured, but when you're working with Aboriginal people it can't be that way". Generally, people would say that the individualism that underpins much of Western psychology is in conflict with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews and cultural frames of reference, which include different understandings of personhood. There is no simple explanation for these disparities. In part the disparities stem from the different forms of social organization, values and beliefs of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander communities that has been described as collectivistic, the politics of representation in the Australian context, and the ongoing pursuit for self-determination (Dudgeon, Mallard, Oxenham, & Fielder, 2002).

Psychology was critiqued because it is rooted in a different ontology, epistemology and cultural framework and because research has often been conducted in an ethnocentric and exploitative manner – Aboriginal people were the objects of an outsider's gaze. These critiques are about resistance, about claiming a space within the broader discourse of psychology. It is also about redefining and transforming psychology and its relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Davidson, Sanson, & Gridley, 2000; Garvey, Dudgeon, & Kearins, 2000). The different story is rooted in the culture and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and captured in "indigenous ways of knowing" or "Aboriginal Terms of Reference" (Oxenham, 2000). In a similar vein, Gergen et al. (1996) wrote "suppositions about the nature of knowledge, the character of objectivity, the place of value in the knowledge generating process, and the nature of linguistic representation, for example, all carry the stamp of cultural tradition" (p. 497). They and others (e.g., Shweder, 1990) argued that once culture is given primacy in our research and practice a number of problems become evident related to assumptions about universality, individualism, and singular reality.

Responding the Challenges: Guidelines for Culturally Sensitive Research and Practice

One of the responses in the Australian context and the United States in relation to racial and ethnic minority groups has been to develop guidelines for the provision of psychological services for and the conduct of psychological research with indigenous people that will aim to promote culturally competent engagement ((American Psychological Association, 2002; Australian Psychological Society, 1996). The guidelines typically combine aspects of self-awareness, knowledge and skills as part of competent practice (Sue, 1998). Vicary (2002; Vicary & Andrews, 2000) developed a model for engaging with Aboriginal people in therapeutic relationships and others have outlined strategies for effective intercultural communication (Davidson, 2000), forensic interviewing with Aboriginal people (Powell, 2000), and research (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000). Vicary's (2002) model includes nine stages ranging from self-reflection about our own motivations, assessment of knowledge and skills, networking, through to evaluating interventions.

Although guidelines are pragmatic and useful in bringing to the fore that our knowledge and understanding is only partial, they can at the same time be problematic. They are problematic because they are

difficult to implement, tend to rely on notions of culture that are fixed and individualised, and do not pay adequate attention to dynamics related to power. These issues of power are often about the disadvantage related to colonisation. Power is implicit in symbols, assumptions, and discourses that are part and parcel of a particular social, cultural, and historical reality. From this vantage point, cultural competence is an important discourse, but it can be limited because it may mask deeper dynamics associated with contested worldviews, ways of knowing, and issues of power related to race relations characterised by oppression.

Smith (1999) reviewed some models that guide how non-indigenous people in New Zealand who wish to work with Maori can conduct research in a culturally appropriate way. The models reflect different levels of involvement, different power relationships, and different processes and outcomes. The *mentoring model* typically involves “authoritative” indigenous people sponsoring and guiding the research, while the *adoption model* is characterized by a sustained life-long relationship in which the worker or researcher is adopted into the community. The adoption model in some ways reflects a resident researcher model (Wicker & Sommer, 1993) - someone who participates in and is considered a member of a community.

The *power sharing* and *empowering outcomes models* are probably more in line with those reported in community psychology literature and

characteristic of action research. In the power-sharing model, researchers seek guidance and meaningful input from a community to support and develop research, practice, and other community initiatives. The researcher is not necessarily seen as a member of the community as with the adoption model. In the empowering outcomes model, activity is typically focused on the sort of outcomes the indigenous community wants to know about. Finally, the *bicultural or partnership* model means both parties are involved in the conception and delivery of programs and projects. This is in line with the model of depowerment advocated by Huygens (1997) who promotes working alongside oppressed groups with a focus on depowering dominant groups. Smith (1999) warns that adopting these models does not necessarily ensure cultural awareness or appropriateness because there are other levels of analysis that need to be considered. These other levels can include considerations of what constitutes knowledge, and on whose terms, and critical reflection on our identities and situatedness. In fact, these other levels are about the deeper suppositions that underpin ‘mainstream’ psychology (Gergen et al., 1996) as well as the multiple ways in which we can be subject.

An essential feature of the models reviewed by Smith (1999) is that it suggests to non-indigenous researchers that cultural sensitivity requires more than knowing the cultures of ‘other’ groups. In her perspective, it requires deconstruction and negotiation of our own identities and

positions and the accompanying power and privilege in our work with marginalised people because this will have implications for how we work. This deconstruction and localization can be viewed as part of the broader project of developing practical psychology that is rooted in different cultural positions and that contributes to social change. In one sense, this is part of the developments referred to as the indigenisation of psychology (e.g., Comas-Diaz, Lykes, & Alarcón, 1998; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra; 1996; Marai, 2002; Sinha, 1997; Sinha & Kao, 1997).

Indigenisation can be seen as part of a decolonisation and empowerment agenda. There are different definitions of indigenisation, but it can be seen as a broader project concerned with disrupting the Western hegemony (yet recognizing Western indigenous psychologies) in terms of psychological theorising and knowledge production and the directions of knowledge flow (Bhatia, 2002; Marai, 2002; Moghaddam, 1987; Sinha, 1997). In part it is concerned with locating psychological research and practice within the social, historical and cultural realities of communities. These processes are important and part of the development of practically relevant, culturally sensitive, and meaningful psychology. In the Australian context, discourses about reconciliation, decolonization, self-determination and sovereignty have important implications for ‘non-

Aboriginal' people working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Here, indigenisation does not necessarily mean the proliferation of multiple local ethnic psychologies and 'Aboriginalising' psychology. It does, however, require that we take seriously the voices questioning knowledge, assumptions and modes of practice and engage in ways of working that will contribute to the development of a socially just and relevant psychology. This may include: 1) research and action strategies that privilege the lived experiences of individuals and their communities; 2) valuing different forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and practice, that is praxis, as part of working against oppression and exclusion; and 3) promoting everyday practices that recognize our embeddedness in sociopolitical realities as part of the process of working for change at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels.

Reflecting on Practice

The predominant epistemology informing traditional psychology, including in Australia, is positivism and accompanying assumptions (Gergen et al.1996; Shweder, 1990). As part of the process of reflecting on practice both in terms of teaching about difference and researching into this area, we have started to articulate what we term iterative generative reflective practice (Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2000;

Bishop, Sonn, Fisher, & Drew, 2001). An iterative generative reflective methodology is based in contextualism (Biglan, 1993) and is relational. Within this orientation, the various contexts such as history, culture, and social class are acknowledged as sources that give meaning to social and psychological experiences and structure social realities. Primacy is given to the substantive domain of research and practice and recognizes the multiple ways in which meanings are negotiated and constructed in relations. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on explicating power and being vigilant to how power is expressed and reproduced in ideologies and discourses about culture, race, gender, age, class and other social dimensions can extend this orientation. By incorporating power, cultural sensitivity is shifted from an understanding that equates culture with lifestyles, food, dress, and country. There is a shift to a different epistemology that sees research and knowledge-making processes as situated in power relations that are historically constructed and that inform intergroup relations. Cultural sensitivity is about praxis, not a trait or end state; research and knowledge production in themselves become processes of self and social transformation.

Negotiating identities with an emphasis on making explicit the discourses that position people as insiders and outsiders is central to cultural sensitivity. Selby (1999; in press) theorized the discomfort that arises in the context of working across indigenous settings. She noted that

guidelines and methodology textbooks are useful, but do not make explicit some of the challenges experienced and felt that can dissuade one from engaging or prevent you from continuing research. For me, this negotiation is about identifying how social roles of immigrant - a black male and being an educator - contributes to the nature of my engagement with Aboriginal colleagues. The discourses about psychology as colonizing and about black people as 'other' has prompted a renegotiation of ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An important part of the renegotiation involves critically reflecting on psychology's and my own role in colonizing practices. This can mean feeling defeated at times and wanting to give up on psychology, disrupting the connection with psychology (Bond & Pyle, 1998). However, it is through the process of reflection with colleagues that we reframe how to engage with psychology in a culturally sensitive and practically meaningful manner. Thus, being uncomfortable and challenged is an important part of the process because racism and oppression are embedded in societal arrangements and different groups' benefit, while others are disadvantaged because of group memberships.

In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, we have endeavored to engage differently. A key principle of this work relates to creating awareness about our own positions of privilege and our power to engage in research and action that is

potentially transformative at individual, interpersonal and institutional levels. Basic activities include the development and incorporation of subjects that deal with cultural issues from a critical perspective into mainstream psychology curricula, mentoring students from dominant and minority ethnic groups to undertake research that deals with topics that are of relevance to them and their communities, writing about the impacts of oppression, and collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to promote their research and action agendas, and encouraging students to engage in research challenging dominance as well as focusing on minority issues.

For the students participating in these subjects, the feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity that arise out of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stems, in part, from the challenge to taken for granted knowledge and an increased awareness about our own group memberships and dominance within particular contexts. Through engaging with the writing of black authors, conceptual and epistemological tools become challenged. The discomforts reflect challenges to identity and related transformations in the context of negotiating boundaries and borders. Importantly, the negotiation of identities does not necessarily mean that our cultural rootedness becomes undermined, but the uncertainty and ambiguity of not knowing, can be productive. It forms the basis from which we can rework our socialized

ways of knowing and working and engage in research and change activities and processes that are vigilant to issues of power and ideologies of colonisation.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, I identified some of the criticisms of research by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. I suggested that these challenges have important implications for community psychology research and practice and that the development of guidelines for culturally sensitive engagement is appropriate. However, I suggested that this is not sufficient because it does not necessarily require deeper level transformations in terms of knowledge and power. I argued that part of the creation of effective and meaningful practice could be construed as indigenisation. Part of this process requires negotiating across cultural boundaries and developing meaningful and affirmative praxis. An iterative generative and reflexive orientation has been helpful to consider multiple ways of knowing and can be extended to specifically consider issues of power as expressed in research contexts. At the most basic level, we can utilize the writing of black authors, and other groups to begin to make visible manifestations of dominance and power as a critical part of negotiating culturally sensitive and transformative practice.

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