Cultural Safety, Racism & Power in Aboriginal Health

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• My Own Elders and Peoples
Outline

• Story

• Whiteness

• Decolonisation
Story

“Aboriginal people believe that the spirit child comes from the earth... I haven’t seen this belief about the spirit child in any other culture, even Indigenous ones. We come from this earth, we are born from the earth. We believe that the whole of life is a spiritual experience and that we as Aboriginal people are actually more spirit than matter... I really believe that emotions can create chemical reactions in the body. If we don’t face those emotions, it can create sicknesses... So for Aboriginal people, the whole of life is a spiritual experience, and so the whole of sickness is a spiritual process. The spirit can not be in balance if it is out of balance with the body. If you’re spiritually unwell, you can’t help but affect the whole of your being...See, the impact of colonialism has been huge... we Aboriginal people are spiritual people and we are still recovering because of colonialism... There’s not a lot of understanding about the part of white Australia because they have this misguided belief that colonialism doesn’t affect them. Of course it does! It’s made them into the people they are today, which means they cannot hear what Aboriginal people are telling them... Many are trying to run away from their own history... As they get older and more mature [chuckles], hopefully they’ll have a better understanding... You see, that mouth of the snake... our people have retreated into the belly of the snake. It’s our consolidation of our Aboriginality, a renewing of our identity. Only recently have we begun emerging from the mouth of the snake with renewal and consolidation of who we are... You see, it’s the white terms of reference, it’s their misinterpretations that have given definition to Aboriginal illnesses.”

Medical Schools

- Key subject areas/outcomes
- Pedagogical principles
- Assessment guidelines
- Development processes

- The LIME Network (www.limenetwork.net.au)
- AIDA Indigenous Student Recruitment & Support
- Vertical integration

- Endorsed 2004, accredited ’05
- National Review 2012
Key Issues

- Cultural safety and Aboriginal health are not the same thing
- The learning journey
  - Unimelb – students’ emotional reactions (Rasmussen 2000)
  - UWA – the ‘a-ha’ moment (Paul et al 2006)
  - Flinders – transformational unlearning (Ryder et al 2011)
  - More sophistication in:
    - what we teach
    - how we teach it
- Integrated or discrete?
  - Programs - money
  - Structure and governance - power
Definition & Terminology

- **INDIVIDUAL** knowledge, skills, attitudes - cultural awareness, sensitivity, appropriateness, competence, reflexivity, congruence, capability, proficiency
- **INDIVIDUAL & INSTITUTIONAL** knowledge, skills, attitudes - cultural safety, respect, security
- Cultural Safety - key elements (Phillips 2015)
  1. Individual awareness, competencies and responsiveness of and to ‘the other’
  2. Individual awareness, competencies, responsiveness to ‘the self’ - reflexivity
  3. Institutional policies, procedures, procurement - rebalancing of power and money
  4. Continual learning – continuous quality improvement, not content measures alone
  5. Paradigm - ‘Aboriginal health’ is about ‘fitting Aborigines into’ a white health system (deficit & charity)
A Model of Applied Cultural Safety in Australia

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Aboriginal health
‘the business’
3%

Cultural safety
‘levelling the playing field’
97%

‘Aboriginal Terms of Reference’ (Watson, 1990) or Indigenous knowledges - depend on PLACE, sovereignty, context, history, social phenomena, languages, customs, cultures, spiritualities and religions
Health effects of racism & colonisation

• Biological
  • cortisol levels in Native Hawaiians (Keawe‘aimoku Kaholokula, 2010)
  • blood pressure changes in foetal growth (Clayton 2014)

• Psycho-social
  • mental health & well-being (Priest 2011; Purdie et al 2010; Zubrick et al 2005)

• Structural – access to services
  • Education (McDermott 2012, de Plevitz et al 2007)
  • Public sector (Larkin 2014)
  • Health (Robson 2014; Came 2014; Paradies 2014; Bourke 2018; AIDA 2016; Markwick 2019)
  • 32.4% of Aboriginal respondents report racial discrimination in medical settings most or all of the time (Cunningham & Paradies 2013)
  • Sports (Klugman & Osborn 2014; Conor 2015)

• Political & public discourse – ‘white fragility’ (DiAngelo 2011; Nelson 2014; McAllan 2011)
An ethnography of whiteness

The 8 White Identities  By Barhor Hesse

There is a regime of whiteness, and there are action-oriented white identities. People who identify with whiteness are one of these. It's about time we build an ethnography of whiteness, since white people have been the ones writing about and governing Others.

1. White Supremacist
   Clearly marked white society that preserves, names, and values white superiority.

2. White Voyeurism
   Wouldn't challenge a white supremacist; desires non-whiteness because it's interesting, pleasurable; seeks to control the consumption and appropriation of non-whiteness; fascination with culture (ex: consuming Black culture without the burden of Blackness).

3. White Privilege
   May critique supremacy, but a deep investment in questions of fairness/equality under the normalization of whiteness and the white rule; sworn goal of 'diversity'.

4. White Benefit
   Sympathetic to a set of issues but only privately; won't speak/act in solidarity publicly because benefitting through whiteness in public (some POC are in this category as well).

5. White Confessional
   Some exposure of whiteness takes place, but as a way of being accountable to POC after; seek validation from POC.

6. White Critical
   Take on board critiques of whiteness and invest in exposing/marking the white regime; refuses to be complicit with the regime; whiteness speaking back to whiteness.

7. White Traitor
   Actively refuses complicity; names what's going on; intention is to subvert white authority and tell the truth at whatever cost; need them to dismantle institutions.

8. White Abolitionist
   Changing institutions, dismantling whiteness, and not allowing whiteness to reassert itself.
The values of whiteness

- That science is value free
- Asking questions as the basis of knowledge production
- That objectivity is possible – based on western logic – ‘P or not P’
- ‘I think therefore I am’
- Inequality is normal – neoliberalism and money as normal
- Democracy & diversity are the best systems – as long as whitefullas are boss
- Merit measured only by entry scores
- Whiteness as family violence
Trends in Relationship

- Minimal Peace
- Frontier Wars / Extermination / Genocide
- Protection
- Assimilation
- Self-determination
- ‘Shared responsibility’
- Consultation
- Engagement
- Partnership
- Co-design
Role of Government & White Organisations

- **Values**
  Terms of Reference – Whiteness or ATR?

- **Motivations**
  Benevolence or Justice

- **Strategy**
  Objectives or Process

- **Operations**
  Repeatability or Place-specific

- **Evaluation**
  Content (KPIs) or Process (CQI)
  Measure problems or Define solutions

- Government as **supporters/facilitators**, not power/controllers
- Community as **customer owners**, not passive recipients or ‘partners’
Key Lessons: Decolonisation

• Decolonisation really comes down to
  • who owns & controls the land and resources
  • who’s doing the deciding
  • who’s doing the work
  • on what terms?

• 97%
  • Reform values (deal with racism & whiteness)
  • Let go of power and control of the 3% (HINT: share?!)  
  • Share accountability (move from risk/blame to trust/CQI)
  • Share ownership
What’s Possible:
Sharing power and resources

- **Constitutional Recognition**  
  - inclusion in a white state at the state’s whim  
  
  **BRONZE**

- **Treaty**  
  - negotiated self-determination within the state  
  
  **SILVER**

- **Republic**  
  - Negotiated dual sovereignty  
  
  **GOLD**

- **Aboriginal Sovereignty**  
  - Crown cedes the land back to Aboriginal people, and lease it in perpetuity, with rent and ATR  
  
  **DIAMOND**
Solutions

- Transformational unlearning and unconscious bias
- Negotiate values and motivations
- Negotiate shared terms of power and resources
- Negotiate strategy
- Negotiate operations
- Negotiate implementation
- Negotiate the terms of accountability and monitoring
- Strive for the highest quality and safety possible
Summary

• Cultural safety is the elimination of racism
• Racism is the symptom
• Whiteness is the cause
• Decolonisation is the solution
• Why? The survival of the planet depends on it
References


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jump up and travel with the light

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