



Features

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Decolonising Psychology: Moving from developing an inclusive social psychology to centring epistemic justice

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WHAT SHOULD A social justice oriented social psychology look like? At this year's BPS Social Psychology Section conference, Professor Shahanaaz Suffla, Professor Kopano Ratele, Dr Nick Malherbe, Dr Annabelle Osei-Tutu, Professor Glenn Adams, Dr Clare Coultas, Dr Johanna Lukate and Dr Geetha Reddy contributed to a symposium titled 'Decolonising Psychology: (moving) from developing an inclusive social psychology to centring epistemic justice'. Epistemic justice is a key, but often glossed over, component of social justice. The symposium was an invitation for social psychologists to reflect deeply on what inclusion means for our field and how social psychology can move towards centring epistemic justice. The panel speakers proposed actions that we, as social psychologists, can take to alleviate inequalities and unjust practices in our field, such as the exclusion and silencing of researchers and researched from marginalised groups; lack of commitment to anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-transphobic speech and actions; and hegemony of Western knowledge production, ethics, and methodological standards.

To centre epistemic justice, we must first understand epistemic violence. Coloniality, seen in the habits of mind, ways of being, strategic relations of power and systems of knowledge, represents epistemic violence inflicted upon colonised peoples around the world (Suffla et al., 2021). Coloniality endures in social psychology in many forms, and as scholars in the field, we continue to perpetuate epistemic violence. The pursuit of psychological universals has left a significant mark on the fabric of social psychology (Reicher, 2004). Historically, results that did not conform to existing Western theories and models were considered exceptions that unfortunately left the theoretical bases unchallenged (Sinha, 1998). The naming of WEIRD (western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic)

psychology (Heinrich et al., 2010) has made visible the uncritical application of theories that were created based on a small minority of the global population to the global majority.

As a response to the epistemic violence of exclusion, psychologists have appropriately advocated for greater inclusion of the majority world of people outside WEIRD settings. However, prevailing forms of inclusion can perform their own forms of epistemic violence. Inclusion practices within Social Psychology often focus on finding commonalities between the Self and Other to foster group cohesion and solidarity, as well as ensuring representation from communities that have been systematically excluded in academic spaces. However, by focusing simply on the inclusion of different identity categories (such as increasing the hire of non-white psychologists), we are at best inviting people to the table of whiteness. We are not changing the white supremacist institutional structures that continue to alienate and Otherise scholars from marginalised communities. Whilst the emerging recognition of the whiteness of our field is important, we have far to go to alleviate the inequality in the access to and participation within academia (Dupree & Kraus, 2021). When inclusion takes the shape and form of building commonalities, neo-liberal diversity practices become bad faith measures that perpetuate the inequalities in academia. Such practices fail to account for a core principle of justice - the acknowledgement of harms and violences inflicted upon peoples Otherised across the globe. For example, the move to make psychology less *weird* has driven an increase in outsider-led research in African contexts that contributes to the West's continued monopolisation of knowledge production about the continent (Coultas, 2021). Such inclusion practices are incomplete solutions to the injustices that are experienced by minoritised and marginalised folks around the world.

In contrast, adopting a decolonial perspective proposes that we centre local ways of knowing and being not only to better include the experience of Others, but also as a means to reveal and resist the naturalization of Whiteness that standard practice renders invisible in hegemonic knowledge of our field. For example, hegemonic conceptions of wellbeing that do not resonate with the more relational understandings that are prominent outside WEIRD settings invite us to re-think supposedly 'standard' conceptions in hegemonic psychological science and develop more sustainable ways of being and wellbeing that are more appropriate for globally relevant science (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). Hegemonic psychology also does not allow us to carefully hold the complexities of the human experiences that cannot be encompassed within singular (colonial) categories (Lukate, 2021). When we centre epistemic justice, we are inviting a more decolonial framing for finding solutions to the incredible challenges experienced by many communities around the world. This lens forces us to reckon with how these social inequalities were created in the first place, and promises more sustainable, long term and long-lasting solutions. Naming racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia as underpinning the way many societies are structured allows us to face the realities that many marginalised folks experience daily. Adopting this lens is uncomfortable and Dr Reddy's (2021) paper invited social psychologists to embrace the discomfort that comes along with challenging able-bodied, cis-hetero patriarchal, white supremacy in our daily work. In their presentation on developing anti-racist practices, Dr Malherbe and Professor Ratele (Malherbe et al., 2021) shared that a decolonial Africa(n) centred psychology does more than direct attention to settings and social actors that have been neglected by mainstream psychology. It is a transformational rethinking (or an unthinking) of hegemonic WEIRD science. A decolonial psychology requires us to not only appreciate Other ways of knowing as legitimate sources of understanding about the embeddedness and relationality of life but also recognise the violence

that whitestream psychology has wrought via investment in and refinement of modern/colonial individualist lifeways as a model for human life (Suffla et al., 2021). When we move from developing an inclusive social psychology to centering decolonial epistemic justice, we transform social psychology so that it is truly global and serves all of us and not just the privileged.

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