

Chapter 11

Toward an Applied Aboriginal Psychology

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This essay discusses some impediments to, and prospects for, the development of applied Aboriginal psychologies from the perspectives of cross-cultural and cultural psychology. Aboriginal psychologies are said to differ from mainstream scientific psychology in terms of their research priorities, worldviews, problems to be addressed, methodologies, ideological commitments, and perceived usefulness. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's perceptions of mainstream psychology and psychologists and of priority community needs are reported to provide evidence for such differences.

In this essay I discuss some impediments to, and prospects for, the application of psychology in Australian Aboriginal societies. Such an application would normally be associated with the emerging sub-discipline of applied cross-cultural psychology, psychology's "officially" recognised specialisation that deals with things cultural. However, a brief narrative account of the origins of this essay provides useful insights into psychology's general inability to understand and internalise alternative cultural constructions of human behaviour.

Originally, this essay was presented as a much shorter paper to the Silver Jubilee Conference of the Australian Psychological Society as part of a symposium on the psychology of indigenous people (Davidson, 1990). The symposium was a landmark for the Society because it was the first of its kind in which Aboriginal people participated as paper presenters. It is interesting to note that the symposium was sponsored by the Society's Board of Community Psychologists, in keeping with the community psychology tradition of deep concern for the self-determination and empowerment of community groups (Reiff, 1968). It is ironic that previous symposia in 1975 and 1980 (Cross-cultural Psychology), 1986 (Professional Applications of Cross-cultural Psychology), and 1987 (Psychologists' Roles in Aboriginal Communities) which represented the interests of cross-cultural psychology attracted very few Aboriginal listeners and no Aboriginal presenters.

In 1991 the Board of Community Psychologists again sponsored a symposium entitled "Oppression, Stress and Drug Taking in Australian Aborigines" involving Aboriginal psychologists as presenters and discussants. This was followed in 1992 by a proposal to establish an Interest Group on Aboriginal Issues, Aboriginal People, and Psychology. In contrast to these initiatives it would seem that cross-cultural psychology has had little success in encouraging Aboriginal Australians to seriously consider psychology as a course of study or a career, in entering into collaborative research and consultancy with Aboriginal people, or in providing for students and practitioners an Aboriginal perspective on those phenomena that are of interest in general psychology.

These indicators of the discipline's culturocentrism seem common to cross-cultural psychology outside of Australia. Berry, Dasen and Sartorius (1988), when considering similar shortcomings, concluded that there "is little wonder (therefore) that Third World points of view have little chance in penetrating established psychology" (p.301). In the Australian context read instead of "third world" minority Australian cultural views. I argue in this essay that these limitations within the cross-cultural psychology tradition are linked directly to its comparativist perspective which, in turn, controls psychologists' thinking about non-mainstream Western and non-Western cultures.

A simple answer to the question of whether there can be an applied psychology for Aboriginal people and societies is that this depends initially on the development of indigenous Aboriginal psychologies. At present it seems that all that exists is a non-Aboriginal statement of what an Aboriginal psychology should look like. Readers should not misconstrue this statement. I am not saying that Aboriginal thinkers don't have a well-articulated Aboriginal psychology. I am simply saying that psychology at large does not recognise and cannot understand such psychologies unless they are conceptually explicit and empirically justifiable because, as I argue, these two criteria are seen as requirements for a psychology which claims to be general and to have cross-cultural applicability.

Associated with the development of indigenous Aboriginal psychologies (as a prerequisite for an applied psychology) is an opinion that developments depend on getting Aboriginal people actively involved in psychological research. Such involvement in research at the instigative, planning, operating and feedback stages has now been advocated for 15 or more years (Brady, 1981; Callan & McElwain, 1981; Callan, 1988; Davidson, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988) with little effect on the number of Aboriginal people who train as psychologists or as research associates or on the amount of consultancy undertaken by non-Aboriginal psychologists for Aboriginal communities and groups. Instead of accepting the explanation of limited Aboriginal involvement as the reason for the absence of the explicit statements of indigenous Aboriginal psychologies, I argue that the impediments to their development are basic to the theories and methods of Western psychology, including cross-cultural psychology, as ideology. To examine this argument, current views about cross-cultural psychology, particularly about what is now called applied cross-cultural psychology, are considered. Impediments to the development of explicit Aboriginal psychologies, whether basic or applied, are then considered in terms of how Aboriginal psychologies may differ from their non-Aboriginal equivalents. My conceptualisation of these differences is supported by previously unpublished data which provide a picture of what some Aboriginal people think psychology and psychologists are.

Prior to discussing differences between Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal psychology, a comment on my choice of terminology is warranted. Firstly, I talk about Aboriginal societies as an acknowledgement of the diversity of culture and communities in Aboriginal Australia. Similarly, I recognise that such diversity may be associated with not one psychology but many psychologies. After all, Western psychology is not theoretically and methodologically monolithic. At this stage it seems that the question of whether there is an Aboriginal psychic unity - something that is at the core of self-as-Aboriginal as Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) propose - in the same sense that general psychology believes in the existence of psychological universals (see Shweder, 1990) is one that is still debatable. Finally, when presenting data on Aboriginal constructions of psychology and psychologists I have referred to some Aborigines' constructions to indicate that generalisations to all other Aborigines should not be made and to acknowledge the comments of Aboriginal participants that they were speaking for themselves and not other Aboriginal persons or groups. But first, let's consider the straightjacket of cross-cultural psychology as a relevant, representative sub-discipline of Western psychology.

Applied cross-cultural psychology

This exploration of whether there might be an applied psychology that is representative of and relevant for Aboriginal Australians - and why such psychologies have not emerged already - occurs at a time when cross-cultural psychologists elsewhere are independently seeking to apply psychological knowledge to issues of cultural and economic development and to problems associated with such development and change in non-Western (effectively, this means not North American) societies (see Brislin, 1990a; Dasen, Berry & Sartorius, 1988; Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989). Whilst my view of the problems associated with such applications and the prognoses for success differs from the views of those other psychologists, we agree that psychology should be able to address issues and problems of minority Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, as it does in majority Australian society and in other Western societies. There is also the challenge of attracting more Aboriginal students to the study of psychology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels which, in the longer term, may result in psychological applications and services being seen to be more relevant to and meaningful for

Aboriginal Australians. In this regard, these other writers' perceptions of applied cross-cultural psychology are informative.

There is general agreement amongst cross-cultural psychologists about what constitutes cross-cultural psychology. First and foremost, cross-cultural psychology is concerned with the search for psychological universals. I say "first and foremost" because, as Shweder (1990) argues, it is this belief in the existence of psychological universals or "psychic unity of mankind" (Berry, Dasen & Sartorius, 1988, p.306) that is the basis of cross-cultural psychology's incorporation within general psychology. Cross-cultural psychology is next concerned with understanding how culture moderates people's behaviour, keeping in mind that psychological universals exist. This is referred to as cross-cultural psychology's *emic* or culture-specific focus. Such endeavours help us understand how and how much expressions of "psychological phenomena are both meaning and context dependent" (Kim, 1990, p. 143). Through these endeavours we learn to understand how behaviour is mediated by the culture to which an individual belongs. They also help us to understand what we mean by the term *culture* and, especially, what constitutes a cultural difference versus individual and social variations in behaviour (see Brislin, 1990b).

Finally, because cross-cultural psychology is a sub-discipline of general psychology, all psychological phenomena may be studied cross-culturally. Cross-cultural psychology, therefore, is not content-separate but methodologically distinct from other psychological sub-disciplines. Berry, Dasen and Sartorius (1988) say that cross-cultural psychology "provides us with a set of perspectives, procedures and methods ... that are helpful in carrying out our work in other cultures" (p. 299). There is also tacit acknowledgement that cross-cultural psychology provides a better contextual understanding of behaviour in Western cultures.

Why then has applied cross-cultural psychology been so slow to develop within cross-cultural psychology? According to recent publications, there is support for the following views:

1. As a relatively new sub-discipline, cross-cultural psychology has been preoccupied more with "scientific quality" than with "application" (Berry, Dasen & Sartorius, 1988, p. 299). Little effort has been directed at practical applications of basic scientific principles.
2. As a new sub-discipline, cross-cultural psychology is still refining its research methods and procedures which permit a better understanding of the complex relationships between cultural and psychological phenomena that mediate observable behaviour. A limited understanding of the relationships between the cultural context of behaviour and psychological phenomena often results in ineffectual applications of scientific knowledge in real life settings.
3. At their most basic level of implementation, programmes and interventions from one cultural context do not transfer well to another cultural context. Dasen, Berry and Sartorius (1988) saw this as frustrating for practitioners looking for textbook steps for applying basic psychological knowledge in new cultural settings. Cross-cultural psychologists' inability to develop applied guides is due in part to cross-cultural psychology's insistence that cultural and contextual factors influence the behavioural outcomes of interventions, and that the pattern of influence is complex.
4. Cross-cultural psychology's associated change and intervention paradigms are still very "Western" (Berry, Dasen & Sartorius, 1988, p. 301). Alternative change paradigms do not appear to be forthcoming for cross-cultural psychological applications.
5. It is difficult to find non-Western collaborators who, for the purposes of scientific research and application, can work as equals within the framework of the cross-cultural tradition. Consequently, psychologists have to "fly by the seat of their pants" each time programmes of knowledge are adapted and applied in cultures other than those in which they were devised.
6. Finally, Kim (1990) points out that the development of alternative - he calls them indigenous - psychologies depend on the availability of resources.

Presumably Kim means social, economic and educational resources. Where these resources are unavailable for such developments to take place, then cross-cultural psychology's role "from without" (p. 147) is to develop an indigenous psychology in the host society. The indigenisation "from without" contradiction is perplexing, to say the least, but strongly reinforces the point that cross-cultural psychology's major role is to investigate how basic psychological phenomena are manifested as very different or somewhat different behavioural outcomes in different cultural contexts. Used in this fashion, indigenisation and indigenous psychology are terms that have to do with understanding contextual effects on, and expressions of, basic psychological phenomena as determined by general psychology.

Cultural psychology vs cross-cultural psychology

It is mainly this conundrum of developing indigenous psychologies within the traditional cross-cultural framework that has resulted in recent criticism of the sub-discipline. Writers like Shweder (1990) and Cole (1989), from within a re-emerging tradition known as cultural psychology, have dismissed as scientific artefact the psychological universals which cross-cultural psychologists pursue; they have chosen to emphasise the intentionality of persons' behaviour as it constructs their and others' understandings of their worlds and, conversely, as their understandings of themselves are constructed by the contexts of their behaviour. As Shweder (1990, p.22) put it, "cultural psychology presumes instead the principle of intentionality, that the life of the psyche is the life of intentional persons, responding to, and directing action at, their own mental objects or representations, and undergoing transformation through participation in an evolving intentional world that is the product of the mental representations that make it up." Within this framework, indigenous psychologies have to do with people's shared understandings of themselves as psychological beings within worlds (different contexts or situations) on which they act and which, in turn, act on their psychological understandings. We tap into indigenous psychologies, Shweder (1990) suggests, when we study these understandings as systems of meaningful and purposeful behaviour (here no distinction is made between thinking and acting) in the lives of individuals in a group. To qualify as an indigenous psychology, a system must be shared by individuals of a group distinguishable from other groups on national, ethnic and possibly linguistic bases whilst still remaining distinctly personal.

In Shweder's terminology, individuals and groups of individuals behave intentionally. Evidence of their intentional behaviour is what we call their culture. This is different from the view that culture makes people behave in a certain fashion or provides them with systems of meaning. Making intentionality (which between people and their worlds is reciprocal) the basis of people's psychologies is different from the cross-cultural perspective that universal psychic phenomena are the bases of every-day thought and action. Seen in this light, the meaning systems (i.e. the indigenous psychology) of mainstream psychologists are based on a belief that there is a common basic psychological core in all human thought and action, call that core a fundamental law, psychic unity or whatever.

The remainder of this essay argues that other indigenous psychologies, like Aboriginal psychologies, may not be based on the beliefs - and consequently cannot be part of the indigenous psychology - of the cultural world we call "psychology" and the groups who inhabit this world whom we call "psychologists." Applying "psychology" in other cultural worlds when the belief in psychological universals is not a shared understanding of how people are and why they are like they are is likely to be seen as unsuccessful by "psychologists" - Berry, Dasen and Sartorius (1988) have confirmed this about applied cross-cultural psychology - and by individuals in host communities and countries whose cultural worlds are different from the cultural world of "psychology."

The task now is to focus on Aboriginal Australian worlds in order to gauge if and how they differ from "psychologists" worlds. If there are discrepancies in these cultural worlds, those discrepancies may explain why there is no applying of "psychology" in Aboriginal Australian communities and why there are so few Aboriginal Australians who inhabit the cultural world of "psychology." What follows is my way of understanding the differences, which are impediments to applying "psychology."

Different priorities

Following the work of Wilson and Barker (1977), Davidson (1980, 1984) suggested that research priorities identified by Aboriginal researchers and communities may be different from those targeted by applied cross-cultural psychology. This can be taken one step further by suggesting that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians may have different perceptions of what psychology is and what psychologists do. Those differences, in turn, may result in different expectations and uses of psychological services. In order to explore these differences Davidson, Hancock, Izod, Muirhead and Martins (1986) asked some Aboriginal trainee community workers, Vietnamese Australians, and majority-culture Australians to describe their concepts of psychology and psychologist and to rate in terms of their priority a number of perceived community needs. I present these data in some detail because they have not been published previously; to be consistent with the aims of this essay, I present only the Aboriginal and majority-culture Australian (to be called non-Aboriginal) data.

Demographic characteristics of respondents, who were all resident in Darwin, Northern Territory, are shown in Table 1. The Table also contains the percentage of each group who had previously sought help from a psychologist. As I said earlier, it is not suggested that these are the views of all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. However, their views are important because all Aboriginal respondents, including 10 who were previously employed in community work, would be employed as community workers in Aboriginal communities, and because non-Aboriginal respondents held positions in the community which required them to assist others and to make professional referrals. Some people in both groups had had previous contact with a psychologist. However, because of the small samples, Davidson et al (1986) did not look at differences in perceptions associated with having had previous contact. We gained the impression that previous contact did not necessarily result in favourable attitudes toward psychologists.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal psychology and psychologist schemata are presented in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Both sets of schemata suggest that psychologists were construed mainly as clinicians and counsellors within a medical framework, although non-Aboriginal respondents provided a greater range of content descriptors than did Aboriginal respondents.

Respondents were asked to rate as priority 1 (high), 2 (medium), or 3 (low) items in a list of community needs. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ratings are shown in Table 2. For ease of comparison, and keeping in mind the sample size, the Table shows which items were rated by more than 60 percent of respondents in each group as priority 1, 2 or 3. For example, more than 60 percent of each group rated "a fair go on employment" as priority 1. In contrast more than 60 percent of Aboriginal respondents rate 4 "land rights" as a priority 1 whereas more than 60 percent of non-Aborigines rated it as a priority 3. The interesting aspects of these data are that Aborigines' priority ratings of the community needs reflected civil rights and self help community needs, like a fair go from police and employment services, and rights, youth, health and further educational services, political recognition and legal aid. Personal and interpersonal psychological needs like cross-racial respect, neighbourhood integration and counselling services were not agreed high priorities by these criteria. Drug and alcohol services were the exception. Non-Aborigines identified areas like counselling services, neighbourhood integration and increased welfare as high priorities.

Table 1
Respondents' Backgrounds

	Aborigine	Non-Aborigine
Male	7	9
Female	9	11
Age Range (yrs.)	22-50	25-71
Educ. Range	16 Tert. enrolees	10 Sec. & 10 Tert. graduates
Previous Social Contact With Psychologists	6%	55%
Previous Prof. Contact with Psychologists Previously	25%	44%
Sought Help From Psychologists	12%	55%

For Aboriginal respondents, there appeared to be a mismatch between their constructions of psychology and psychologists and what they saw as priority needs in their community. This is further reinforced by looking at reasons given by these Aborigines for why they would consult a psychologist, shown in Table 3. Put simply, psychologists were not seen by Aboriginal respondents as providing the kinds of services that were of high priority for them or their community.

Figure 1
 Aboriginal constructions of psychologist and psychology (after Davidson et al, 1986)

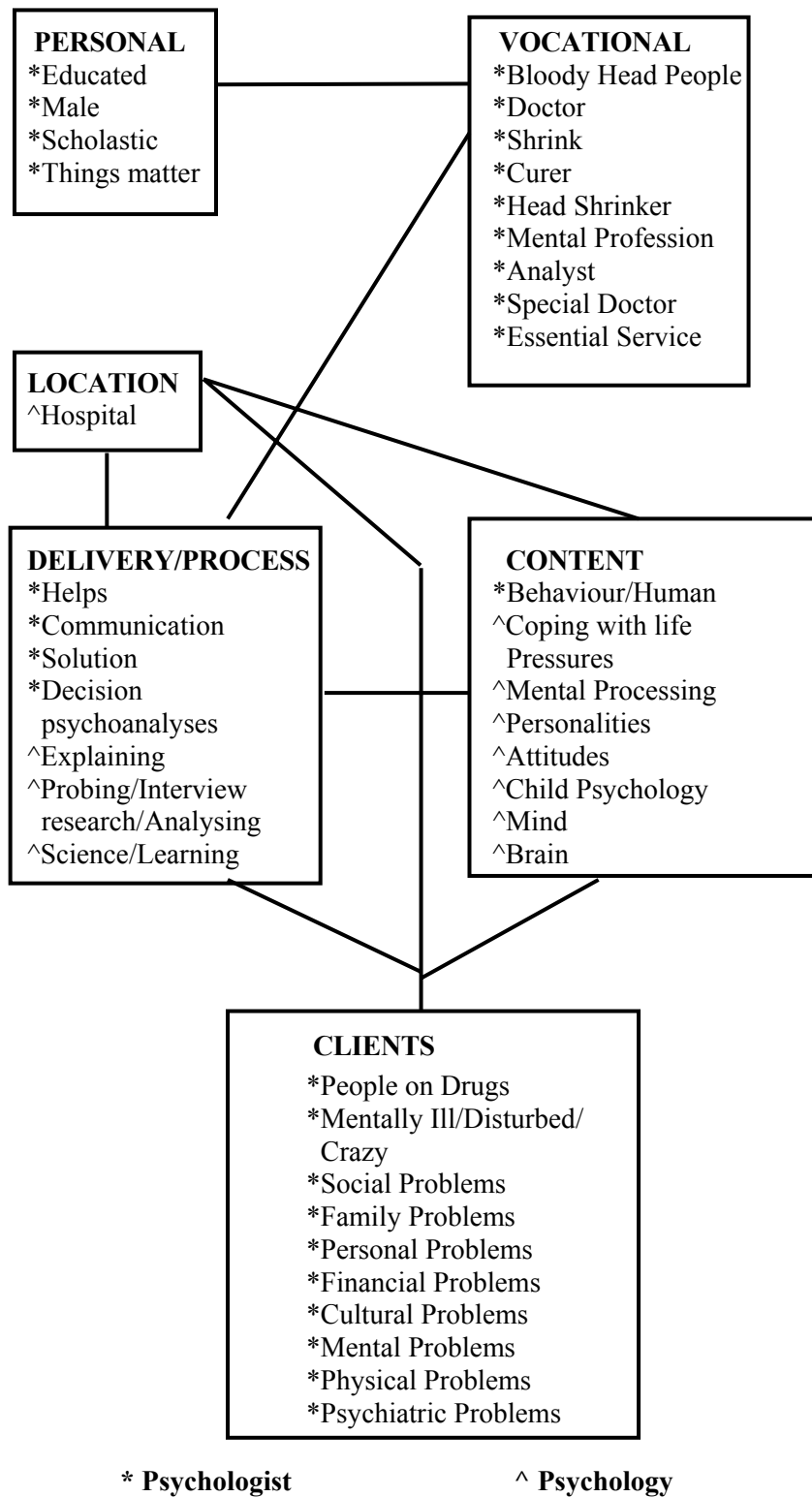


Figure 2
 Non-Aboriginal constructions of psychologist and psychology

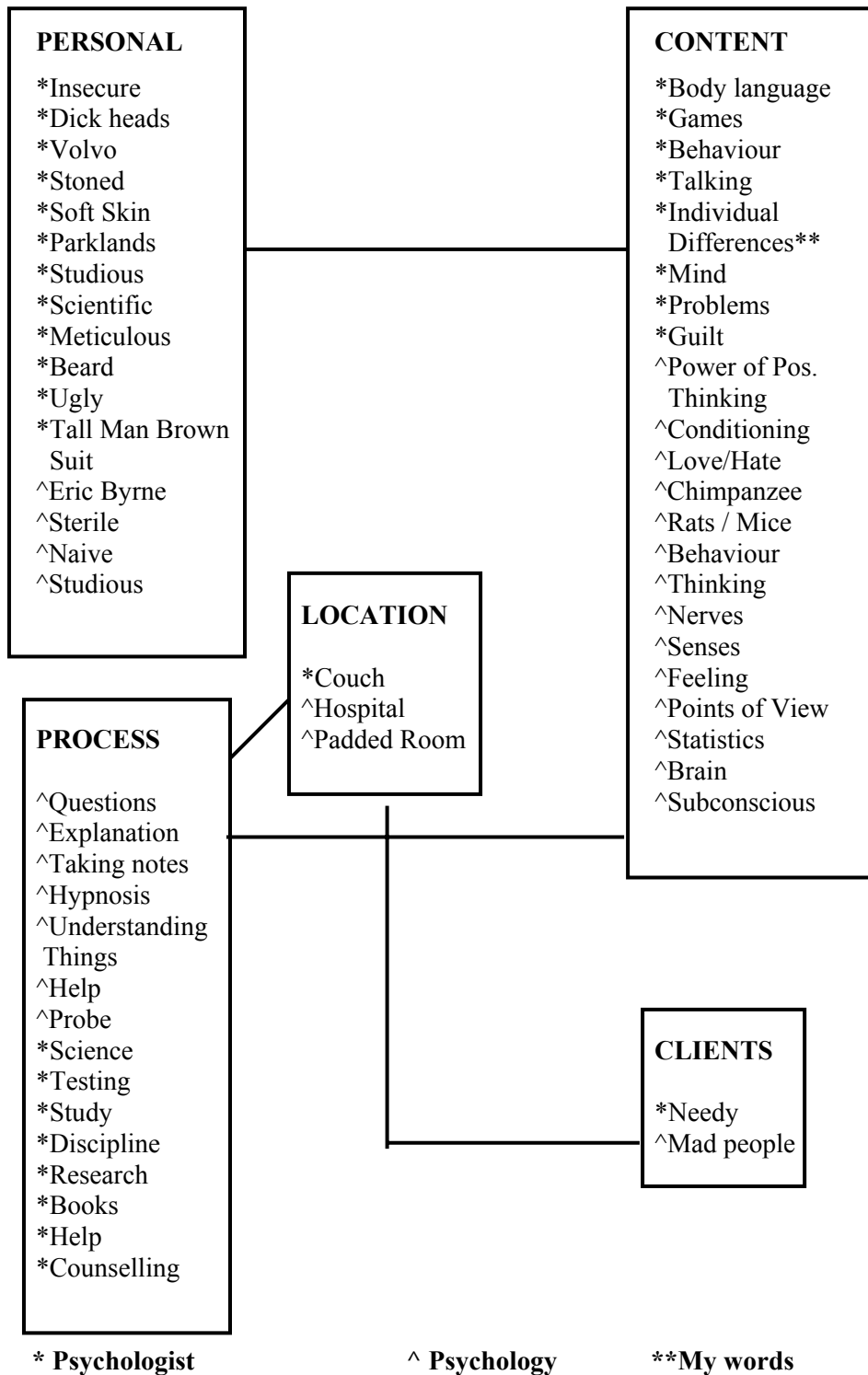


Table 2
Priority Ranking of Community Needs

ITEM (>60% Agreement on 1 Priority)	PRIORITY	
	Aborigines	Non-Aborigines
Fair go on Employment	1	1
Fair go from Police	1	
Youth Services	1	1
Land Rights	1	3
Drug and Alcohol Services	1	1
Health Care	1	
Further Education	1	1
Cross-Racial Respect		
Counselling Services		1
Neighbourhood Integration		1
Ethnic Schools		3
Low-Cost Housing		1
Political Representation	1	
Anti-Discrimination in Housing		1
Legal Aid		
More Jobs for Minority Groups	1	
Increased Welfare		1

Table 3
Reasons for which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Respondents would Consult, or Seek Advice from, a Psychologist (Davidson et al, 1986).

ABORIGINAL REASONS

Drugs; alcohol; marriage; finance; coping with feelings; personal problems; entering elevators; disorders; racist attitudes; child not opening up to people; how to cope; anxiety; stress; other people's problems.

NON-ABORIGINAL REASONS

Old guilt feelings; a child; concentration; relations; stress; coping; feelings; sense of worth; sexual inhibition; learning; behaviour and relations.

These Aborigines' constructions of psychologists as clinicians are not necessarily contrary to psychologists' self-schemata or to non-Aborigines' "psychologist" schemata, but do imply problems for community and other applied psychologies. Reiff (1968) has pointed out that using personal and interpersonal clinical constructs to describe social milieu can result in an illness model of social behaviour and the construction of social problems as consequences of personal and interpersonal factors rather than of other milieu factors. In this sense, the illness model reflects general psychology's emphasis on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. Behaviour symptomatic of illness must therefore be treated by identifying the root cause within the individual and addressing that basic deficiency. Alternatively, there is a need for an understanding of the roles of non-personal social issues (Reiff, 1968) and indigenous belief systems (Misra, 1990) in the psychological

construction of the social and cultural contexts of human behaviour. This is consistent with cultural psychology's assumption that we construct the worlds in which we think and act and which, in turn, provide us with meanings that allow us to understand our thoughts and actions. To contemplate Aboriginal peoples' and communities' problems as separate from their priority needs for a fair go, political recognition, civil and land rights, etc. is to not properly understand what is meant by our worlds being cultural (Shweder, 1990). That leads to my next category of difference.

Different perceptions

We cannot assume that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds are similarly intended. Moreover, given the nature of their psychologies, we cannot assume that all Aboriginal or all non-Aboriginal worlds are similarly intended. Thus, if differences exist when it comes to saying what's important and what's not, what's a need that has to be addressed and what is not, what's a professional problem that demands a professional solution and what is not, we cannot assume that the difference is one of degree because it might be one of intention (in Shweder's, 1990, p.26, sense of the word). Simply, the difference indicates that there are different perceptions about why people act as they do.

There are some interesting and highly relevant examples of differences in intent in the recent literature. The first of these has to do with how some Aboriginal people and some psychologists view the phenomenon of Aboriginal suicide generally and Aboriginal suicide deaths in custody specifically. Reser (undated) has attempted to explain what he sees as Aboriginal responses to research into Aboriginal suicide (Reser, 1989a) and into Aboriginal deaths in custody (Reser, 1989b) in terms of different Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attributions of cause and effect and intentionality to "suicide deaths." Aboriginal attributions are based on (a) the traditionally perceived importance of external forces and agencies, including systems of sorcery, and (b) Aboriginal perceptions of their present worlds as hostile and threatening, based on their experiences of poverty and discrimination. Reser (undated) argues that the latter perception reinforces the former perception.

Aboriginal people's perceptions of personal and social phenomena, such as suicide, can be related directly to collective experiences of, and memories about, personal and nonpersonal social factors influencing such phenomena. In what is an exciting redirection of thinking about cognition and memory, Middleton and Edwards (1990, p.1) argue for the need to "shift from a predominant concern with individual memory (research) to a direct consideration of remembering and forgetting as inherently social activities " and to research paradigms that emphasise "the link between what people do as individuals and their sociocultural heritage." Such emphases are not new in psychology. Rather, they are only forgotten from time to time because they use non-standard approaches to psychological research which differ from mainstream, psychology's prejudice for experimentation on and testing of individual humans.

Some Aboriginal people may wish to respond that there is no such thing as Aboriginal suicide. Deaths that have occurred, particularly those that occurred in custody, are deaths inflicted on Aboriginal persons either directly or indirectly by the system. There are still Aboriginal persons who do not, and will not, accept the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody as to the cause of death of certain individuals. That aside, there is also a difference of opinion about why suicide deaths occur. This is evident in the debate between Hunter (1991) and Reser (1991); their debate concerns the extent to which self and other-directed aggression in Aboriginal communities results from long term, culturally perpetrated crimes committed against Aboriginal people by other Australians (Hunter's sociohistorical account) or from individual persons' inability to cope with the stresses and strains of living in materially impoverished, racially hostile and, sometimes, rapidly changing social environments (Reser's individual psychological approach). Without going into the evidence in detail, it would seem that the two positions demand different solutions to the problem of some Aboriginal persons perpetrating acts of violence against themselves or others.

Should individuals and communities be compensated for cultural crimes and should we work to change the system, or should we work to treat the individual and to alleviate the adverse conditions under which individuals are required to live? Education, care and counselling of an individual are not directly going to effect political changes or recognise and compensate for victim impact. Conversely, systemic changes and political acknowledgement of historical crimes don't directly help a psychologically distressed individual to cope with living on a daily basis. It's reasonably easy to understand why the sociohistorical approach is attractive to Aboriginal people with whom I've discussed this academic controversy if one understands how Aboriginal societies have been oppressed and their high prioritisation of civil rights and self-help needs. Similarly, it's reasonably easy to understand psychologists' preoccupation with individual services given that this is what psychologists are taught to know about and trained to do. Unfortunately, the solution is not to say, "Well, let's do both," because in the cultural world of the sociohistorical things are not intended on the basis of individual psychological thoughts and actions and in the cultural world of the psychologist things are not intended by historical or political forces. These intended worlds are different, as are the problems that are said to exist within them.

Different problems

In retrospect, an assumption I made that involvement of Aboriginal people in the research process would facilitate prioritising Aboriginal community needs and assist addressing those needs through applied research (Davidson, 1980; Brady, 1981) was very naive. The problem is not identifying need priorities per se, but the subsequent "problematisation" of priority areas. Brady (1990) analyses the flaws in the "problematising" approach (Freire, 1974) to applied research by noting that remote community Aborigines who participated in social and psychological health research (a) frequently did not construe "disruptive, counter-productive or stressful" events as problems, (b) provided explanations for these events that were different from the researchers' attributions about the events, and (c) gave reasons why interventions were unnecessary. In general, those reasons were consistent with Reser's interpretation of Aboriginal people's attributions about personal and social behaviour discussed earlier. Brady (1990) discusses the limitations of Freire's psychology in Aboriginal research contexts and cautions non-Aboriginal researchers about assuming that members of Aboriginal communities commonly agree on what problems face them and what solutions are feasible and desirable. Even when some community members identify a problem, Aboriginal participants and non-Aboriginal professionals may construe the problem differently. If the clinical model mentioned earlier is applied, explanations might be framed in terms of personal and interpersonal predispositions. Aborigines may see this approach as victim-blaming (Reser, undated) because they attribute causality to non-personal social and political factors. If we view those attributions as meanings within Aboriginal cultural worlds rather than as individual psychological states of mind, as psychology would have us do, then we are starting to understand something about Aboriginal psychology and how it is different from Western psychology.

Different procedures

Non-Aboriginal psychologists may develop a keener understanding of Aboriginal people's collective attributional framework and phenomenal experience if they are prepared to work within some alternative methodological traditions. Our standard quasiexperimental methods and procedures used in applied research have the effects of (a) disregarding Aborigines' real life experiences as bases for their attributional systems, (b) compartmentalising their performance and denying the complexity of their phenomenal selves, and (c) de-powering them as research respondents and professional clients. After all, the cultural psychologist may say, doing just that is what the business of psychology is all about. We search for fundamental laws, or psychic commonalities, free of the context of our thoughts and actions and not obscured by mundane experience. We isolate and study these basic cognitive processes and de-confound those factors that determine their effectiveness. We know what we are looking for in the laboratory and that is why we don't tell our respondents what it's all about and seldom ask them why they did what they did. Some psychologists would even tell us that people don't and can't know how and why they behave and think as they do.

First, there is a disregard for Aborigines' essential experience. Part of this disregard is a de-emphasise of the non-personal social context of behaviour already discussed. We can find here a parallel in psychology's treatment of women as research subjects and professional clients. Walker (1989, p. 696) says of feminist methodology that it "insists that women's lives are woven in context" and that "it is the synthesis and synergy of the contextual variables that are seen as more important than any one variable." Methods that combine qualitative and quantitative data such as those that Walker (1989) was able to elicit through her eight hour face-to-face interviews containing forced choice and open ended responses gave abused women "the time to perceive the interviewers as interested in them in order to be able to talk about the violence they had experienced." Leaving aside the need to develop this sense of trust between the respondent and researcher, it is doubtful whether classical experimental and quasiexperimental methodologies can provide psychologists with such an understanding of behaviour-in-context because their major role has been to de-contextualise focal behaviour.

Part of understanding "lives woven in context" is understanding the respondent or client as a whole person. Lillian Holt (1988) has commented that Aboriginal learners object to being assessed and judged solely on the basis of a non-Aboriginal test or task. Assessment should instead take into account how the learner participates as well as what the learner produces. The other part of understanding is recognising "lives woven in context" as "intentional" lives, to use Shweder's (1990) terminology. With reference to these learners, this means that both the how and the what - not just the what - have real meaning for self and others, and that performance appraisal requires that both sets of meaning be understood and applied. The methodology of this Aboriginal psychology, in other words, is sensitive to process and context as well as outcome or product. Such a psychology requires us to think about behaviour in terms of positive and negative, strong and weak, and reactive and proactive in context, rather than about people in terms of their having or being problems.

Finally, feminist psychology has argued that traditional psychology, in constraining the study of women within a phallogocentric conceptual framework, removes from women a sense of control over their experiences and fixes their understanding of their experiences within that framework. Both Holt (1988) and Ludwig (1988) make a similar claim about Aboriginal people being de-powered by eurocentric educational and scientific practices and procedures. Methods like memory work (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1990) return that control over the interpretive process to women and transform the meaning of their experiences to reflect their collective understanding of common experiences and feelings.

It has not been my intention to suggest that feminist psychology and Aboriginal psychologies are substantially the same. Obviously, they are different because their cultural worlds are not the same. As psychologies that are different from general psychology (which is patricentric and eurocentric) they may share, nevertheless, non-mainstream methods for elaborating and organising their systems of meaning.

Different politics

Any consideration of the role that applied psychology might assume in indigenous societies would be incomplete without some discussion of its cultural origins (Misra, 1990) and its ideological affiliation. We know or should know about its Western cultural origins and we know of instances when it has been used for seemingly political and ideological purposes, like in war propaganda, educational selection in Britain, immigration selection in the United States and Peace Corp training, to name some. Indigenous psychologies should also aim to be aware of their cultural, educational and political worlds, and by this I mean who in a society get to be psychologists, what kind of psychology they study and who then pays them to apply their knowledge. The concept of the "independent" psychologist is as much a contradiction in terms as the concept of de-contextualised behaviour. Just as actions have contexts in which they are intended, so psychology is political even if political influence is limited to there being financial support of one kind or another to do some things but not to do other things. There are plenty of examples of psychology bending its interests to accommodate new ideologies. The cross-cultural work of psychologists like Vygotsky and Luria (Luria, 1976) in

central Asia is a well-documented example of such an ideological affiliation. Put simply, the sociohistorical school of psychology to which Luria belonged was not a cause of but a response, in part, to the Russian revolution. The banishment of psychologists in China during the Cultural Revolution (Stevenson, Lee & Stigler, 1981) is an example of an ideological mismatch between a psychology and its political milieu. Thus, it's not just a matter for psychologists of responding to said needs in communities. Whether needs are set by Royal Commissions into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Departments of Environment or Education, tourist operators or even by Aboriginal communities themselves, there are political agenda in which the said needs must be contextualised to be properly understood.

Overseas, some psychologists have tried to understand better the first-world/third-world distinction as a basis for these agenda. Connolly (1985) discussed the development of third-world psychology by highlighting a number of pressing social issues to which psychologists could contribute with research and practice and by drawing on a number of examples of cooperation between Western and non-Western psychologists to highlight priority needs and cooperatively meet them. The alternative view (Moghaddam, 1987, Moghaddam & Taylor, 1986) is that Connolly's position is a colonialist one that fails to separate the parallel, often competing, perceptions of indigenous cultural needs and those of Western economic and political structures, and does not address the current state of psychology in many non-Western countries. Using the colonialist construction of psychology, it might be argued that psychology's continued focus on personal and interpersonal models of behaviour through counselling and welfare services, along with its de-emphasise of political, civil and human rights issues (Davidson et al., 1986), is evidence of its colonialist intentions and mentality. Terms like academic colonisation and idealistic helpers (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1990), however galling to some non-Aboriginal psychologists, serve a purpose of emphasising the mismatch between the above sets of needs and psychology's focus on the set that is politically and professionally safe. In politically sensitive areas like impact assessment, Ross (1989) has claimed that social and environmental impact assessments in Aboriginal communities have already established the need to recognise (a) "contemporary Aboriginality" and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal/Aboriginal politics, and (b) Aboriginal user-friendly impact assessment methodologies. The reality is that so little of this politically sensitive work has been done by Australian psychologists that we still have not had an opportunity to properly understand how these political agenda operate.

Different potentials

Davidson et al. (1986) reported that 12% of Aboriginal respondents compared with 55% of non-Aboriginal respondents had sought some form of psychological assistance. There was little difference, however, between reasons given by the two groups as to why they might consult a psychologist (Table 3) with most of these reasons being associated with personal and interpersonal needs. Given those Aborigines' prioritisation of civil rights and self-help needs, there is little likelihood of them making greater use of professional or applied research and consultancy services in psychology. Formal and informal Aboriginal support services and other research and consultancy services that are user-friendly and user-controlled will continue to be used.

Personal constructions of psychology

To return briefly to my narrative, I have been interested since formulating this essay for that 1990 Conference audience in testing whether my construction of these differences between Western psychology, particularly western cross-cultural psychology, and a possible Aboriginal psychology corresponds to how some Aboriginal persons may view the former psychology. In order to study those views I have used a personal construct approach which relies on the methodology of George Kelly (1955). This approach was trialed by Davidson et al (1986) without much success. Subsequently, I have used two tasks: one that seeks to compare psychologists as a class of person with self, other classes of person and other classes of occupation, and one that seeks to compare psychology as a profession with other professions. Because the procedures for both comparison tasks are similar, I will combine the description of them into one description.

It is important to know that Kelly’s approach to studying people’s constructions of themselves and their world is an idiographic approach. Respondents’ data are treated individually so that relationships between elements (what one is making judgments about) and constructs (the kinds of judgments one makes) are analysed separately for each respondent. Data from respondents are not usually combined, certainly not under circumstances where respondents are not representative of the larger group from which they are chosen. As one may imagine, this technique may generate a lot of information for one respondent, let alone a large number of respondents. The selection of a small number of respondents, so that data analysis is manageable, obviously gives rise to questions about representativeness. So far I have data from an Aboriginal person employed in a professional capacity who has not studied psychology, one employed in a similar capacity who has studied psychology, and two students studying at I undergraduate level, one of whom has commenced studies in psychology and one of whom is not studying psychology.

A general comment about Kelly’s approach is that it demands a certain level and kind of linguistic and intellectual sophistication in order to make the required comparisons between elements on the grid, whether one is using self-generated constructs or experimenter-imposed constructs. The elements for the two grids, along with the imposed constructs for the second grid, are shown in Figures 3 and 4. The “self” and psychologists grid was completed first, in the following fashion. Respondents’ attention was drawn to the elements at the top of the grid and they were asked to write in the initials for persons and occupations they did and didn’t like. Their attention was then drawn to the three circles in each row of the grid and they were told that they would be required to think of words that described those indicated by two of the circles but not the third. As investigator, I then did the same on a practice grid and demonstrated the choice of a construct and its contrast (I chose thin and fat) and identified two of the three circled (using a x) as thin. I then indicated that the third (not marked x) could be described by the contrast, fat. I then made a judgement about psychologists, demonstrating how I would not include them in the thin category. Respondents were told that they could use any word that tells about two but not the third of the circled elements and that they could use a word and its contrast more than once, but they should try to use as many words as they could. They were then invited to complete the first and subsequent lines.

Figure 3
First REP Test Using Self, Others, Occupations and Psychologists.

Self	A Person I Like	A person I Don't Like	Occupation I Like	Occupation I Don't Like	Psychologists	Words
O	O	O				
O	O				O	
		O	O		O	
O		O			O	
			O	O	O	
	O			O	O	

The second grid was administered in the same fashion. As with the first grid, after each construct and contrast was elicited and the two elements corresponding to the construct identified, respondents were asked to judge whether the third element corresponded to the contrast and, if it was not a circled element, whether psychology corresponded to the construct or contrast. In this regard, the procedure differed slightly from Kelly’s traditional approach in that all other (uncircled) elements were not judged in term of the elicited construct and contrast. The aim here was not to look at the organisation and structure of respondents’ personal constructs in the traditional fashion. Departure from Kelly’s traditional procedure did not permit this. The aim was to look at constructs that were used to describe psychology and I will simply report these data. (The emphases are mine.)

Respondent 1 was a first year female Aboriginal university student studying psychology. She constructed psychologists as “friendly, keeping to themselves, caring, earning a lot, normal day to day people, and dealing with people.” She, herself, was “mad (at a person she didn’t like), sociable, and doesn’t earn much money.” As a comparison with other professions, psychology was “sympathetic, helpful, familiar, important, interesting, empowering, comprehensible, credible, and compartmental.”

Respondent 2 was a second year male Aboriginal student who has not studied psychology. For him, psychologists were “boring, unhappy, interesting, open-minded, and approachable.” Psychology was “individual, about controlling people, interesting, helpful, and important.” In contrast, he was “open-minded, fun loving and happy.”

Respondent 3 was a male Aboriginal academic counsellor and tutor who had studied psychology. For him psychologists were “male (like him), social sciences, measurable, and predictable.” Psychology was “individual, sympathetic, familiar, interesting, unsympathetic, controlling people, depowering and integrative.”

Respondent 4 was a female Aboriginal academic counsellor and lecturer who had not studied psychology and for whom psychologists were “honest but ignorant (in the sense of not knowing), non-Aboriginal, helpful, professional, and not necessary.” She was “honest (and knowing), Aboriginal, and helpful.” She construed psychology as “individual, sympathetic, depowering, compartmental, controlling people, and unfamiliar.” She commented further, in relation to the supplied contrasts, that psychology was “credible for Westerners, but not for understanding Aboriginal thinking.”

Figure 4
Second REP Test Using Psychology and Other Professions

	Medicine	Anthropolog	Linguistics	Law	Psychology	Education	Social Work	Sociology	Nursing	Managemen	Words/Contrast
	O	O			O						
		O					O				
			O		O				O		
	O					O				O	
			O					O		O	
				O		O			O		

O			O		O					
				O		O		O		
		O				O	O			
				O						

Word / Contrast

individual	community
helpful	unhelpful
sympathetic	unsympathetic
normal	abnormal
compartmental	integrative
empowering	depowering
familiar	unfamiliar
controlling people	controlled by people
credible	not credible
important	trivial
interesting	uninteresting
comprehensible	incomprehensible

When one looks at the range of constructs chosen to describe psychologists and psychology, there is considerable agreement amongst these respondents that psychology is sympathetic, helpful, caring and sometimes interesting. On the other hand, it was also said to be de-powering, controlling, individual and compartmental. These kinds of constructions are consistent with earlier mentioned constructions of psychology as individualistically oriented, compartmentalising, controlling and de-powering as part of what one respondent described as its measurable and predictable nature. Like the respondents interviewed by Davidson et al (1986), these respondents did not view psychology negatively. They viewed its clinical and caring role positively but, in not too many words, clearly emphasised its Westernised role and character.

Prospects for an applied Aboriginal psychology

The utility of applied psychology, according to Thorngate and Plouffe (1987), is dependent on its comprehensibility, credibility, importance and interest. These characteristics will be socially and culturally predetermined. The preconditions for an applied Aboriginal psychology will include (a) the extent to which an indigenous Aboriginal psychology reflecting Aboriginal worlds is developed by trained Aboriginal psychologists, and (b) the extent to which there is change in non-Aboriginal psychology to allow for the recognition of indigenous constructions of Aboriginal lives in cultural and historical context, and of alternative methodologies which pass interpretive control from non-Aboriginal psychologists to Aborigines. In other words, psychology needs to be more client or user friendly. Such a change must allow Aborigines' perceptions of psychology as a profession vis-a-vis other professions to determine how psychology can reflect Aboriginal cultural values and how psychology can work for and in Aboriginal communities.

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