Challenging the Monoculturalism of Psychology:
Towards a more socially accountable pedagogy and practice

Damien W. Riggs
The University of Adelaide
Department of Psychology
Adelaide, South Australia, 5005
damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au

Abstract

In this paper I employ Davidson's (1998) notion of a 'socially accountable psychology' to explore the 'whiteness of psychological epistemologies'. I propose that the discipline of psychology within a multicultural society needs to develop an understanding of the ways that white systems of representation shape both practice and pedagogy. To do this I firstly outline the ways in which psychology may be usefully conceptualised as a cultural practice, that is both informed by, and constitutive of, racialised understandings of subjectivity in Australia. I then utilise constructionist and discursive approaches to the study of psychical processes to elaborate a means to psychological practice that values multiple, contextual approaches to knowledge, rather than perpetuating universalist claims that most often subsume diverse experiences within reductive frameworks. I conclude with the suggestion that psychology as a discipline needs to give more attention to the 'politics of therapy', and propose that we as psychologists must continue to examine the privileges that we may hold, and the ways in which we may indeed be complicit with oppressive practices.

Introduction

In this paper I seek to address the monoculturalism of mainstream white psychology, with particular focus on the ways in which this impacts upon psychological practice within a culturally diverse country such as Australia. To achieve this goal, I initially outline the discursive terrain of the areas of whiteness studies and critical cultural psychology, in order to provide a framework within which to understand the 'whiteness of psychological epistemologies'. This framing requires that certain aspects of whiteness are foregrounded, and that the discipline of psychology is located within a specific field of social practices. In doing this I recognise that any framing necessitates the exclusion of other points of view, but my intention here is not to privilege any one account of psychology, but rather to acknowledge the locality of epistemological standpoints. It is because of this that I draw upon social constructionist understandings of psychology as a historically and spatially contingent set of meaning making practices, with the aim of making visible the ways in which psychological writing and practice (my own included) is located within particular (rather than universal) systems of representation. In this way I do not seek to discern between 'good' and 'bad' psychological practice, but instead to engage in a form of 'socially accountable psychology' (Davidson, 1998).

From this starting point, I then go on to outline some of the ways that constructionist and discursive psychological understandings of subjectivity may allow for a 'contextualising' of the provision of services to diverse groups of people. What this entails is a transparency about the practices that we engage in,

and an openness to the broad range of knowledges that may inform the area of psychological practice (Butler, 1998). Such transparency also requires a willingness to engage with the critiques of psychology that have been outlined by diverse groups such as Indigenous peoples (e.g., Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett, 2000), feminist psychologists (e.g., Burman et al., 1996) and people working in the field of social constructionist and narrative therapies (e.g., McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Intimately related to this transparency is a form of critical reflexivity, which seeks to acknowledge the histories of oppression that structure subjectivities within contemporary Australia, and which may often be played out within the field of practice. What this reflexivity requires, then, is an increased role for the sociopolitical within psychology, and a continued willingness from practitioners, academics and the discipline more generally to speak out about oppressive practices, with which psychology is often complicit (Davidson, Sanson & Gridley, 2000).

Naming, Framing, and Setting the *Seen*

In writing about the monoculturalism of psychology in Australia, I firstly seek to locate myself within this contested field. As a white, gay, middle class male I have access to many privileges that accrue to me as a result of my location within these subject positions. Thus my ability to write this paper within this particular forum is the outcome of a life of relative privilege that has enabled me to attend university, study the subjects that I was interested in, and more generally, to take these privileges largely for granted. Whilst at some points these privileges may have seemed negligible (e.g. when I have experienced discrimination due to issues around sexuality), I hope to make visible the ways that white privilege is

always already founded upon the 'economies of difference' that structure subjectivities in Australia. Thus even as it may be pertinent to discuss the many interrelations between varying cultural groups (e.g., heterosexual and homosexual cultures; differing cultures within institutional settings etc.), I choose to focus on the ways that racialised understandings of subjectivity are hegemonic in this country (see also Riggs & Selby, in-press). I therefore give particular attention to the ways in which white systems of representation shape (and indeed construct) our understandings of culture as being closely connected to the concept of 'race'.

Already I have pointed towards the specific terminology that I deploy within this paper to 'get at' the monoculturalism of psychology. My usage of the term 'white' is here intended to unsettle this most often unmarked category, so as to make visible the practices that shape the pedagogy and practice of psychology. Within the field of whiteness studies, the terms 'white people', 'white culture' and 'whiteness' are deployed to point towards to the many different, and yet interconnected, shapes that white systems of representation take (see for example Ware & Back, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993 Hage, 1998; Haggis & Schech, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2002; Mun Wong, 1994). Following on from this tradition, I do not seek to conflate these concepts, but rather to examine the complex ways in which whiteness maintains its hegemonic position in Australia. It is because of this that I recognise the many differences that exist *within* white cultures as a result of the multiple, interconnected subject positions we enact through discourses of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class (to name but a few). I thus acknowledge that for many people the privilege of whiteness may often not

be a very salient knowledge. Yet I suggest that it is this unawareness that demonstrates the ways in which whiteness privileges certain people through the construction of racialised differences, and the corollary disadvantage that people who are positioned as being 'not-white' experience (Riggs, 2003; Riggs & Augoustinos, in-press). And it is indeed for this reason that I seek to locate whiteness as being an important factor that we need to consider when examining the practices of psychology within a multicultural society.

In this paper I draw upon a social constructionist approach to the analysis of psychical processes. Such an approach seeks to make visible the ways in which social practices inform and make possible understandings of cultural objects such as 'cognitions', 'emotions' and 'the unconscious' (for example). Thus my focus on the socially constructed nature of such categories follows on from work in the discursive tradition, which has focused on the ways in which psychical processes may be understood as enacted through historically contingent understandings of subjectivity (e.g., Hepburn, 2003; Parker, 1999; Taylor, Yates & Wetherell, 2001). Yet whilst I seek to examine the cultural practices that inform understandings of specific social groups, I also look to connect such categories to structures of power and dominance (Mama, 1995). So whilst it is useful to challenge the ways in which the implicitly racialised categories of whiteness are social constructions, this should not be read as suggesting that experiences of racism are in and of themselves constructions. In other words, experiences of racialised power structures underpin many of the ways in which we are implicitly taught to understand ourselves as inhabiting certain forms of subjectivity in white Western cultures (Seshadri-Crooks, 1998; 2000). Thus I find

it useful to hold in tension an understanding of the contextual nature of racialised understandings of subjectivity, alongside a focus upon the ways in which such understandings impact upon the experiences that people have. It is in this way that I seek to challenge approaches that would seem to reify the category of 'race', at the same time as they seek to deconstruct it. By holding these concepts in tension, it may therefore be possible to examine the ways that cultural practices shape understandings of race, particularly within the framework of psychology.

A Critical Cultural Psychology

As I have outlined in the preceding section, understandings of whiteness are necessarily complex and often difficult to work with. However in this paper I rely upon a rather singular understanding of white culture. Whilst I recognise that this is indeed a problematic position to take, it nevertheless provides a useful platform from which to examine the cultural practices that shape the discipline of psychology. Such practices (in the case of the hegemony of whiteness) are reliant upon specific constructions of difference in order to maintain their privileged position (Larbalestier, 1999). Thus whilst *white culture* is indeed a complex set of practices (as is evidenced by the multiple subject positions that shape my experiences), *whiteness* as a form of institutionalised power is reliant upon the (mis)representation of white culture as a homogenous entity. Furthermore, whiteness as a historically contingent network of oppressive practices takes particular shapes according to specific histories of oppression. Thus whiteness in Australia is shaped by ongoing acts of colonisation, and the attendant histories of genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and

cultures (c.f., Moran, 2003). It is because of this that I juxtapose on one hand an understanding of the diverse ways in which culture is expressed (both from within and with-out), and on the other an understanding of the often reductive ways that 'culture' (as a social practice) is used to oppress certain groups of people.

In addition to this particular understanding of white culture, I seek to outline the ways in which the rhetoric of multiculturalism works to prop up the institutions of whiteness. As John Stratton (1999) suggests, the advent of policies of multiculturalism in this country are closely connected to the ideologies of cultural pluralism, which work to minimise the visibility of the dominance of white systems of representation. Through recourse to notions of a 'multicultural nation', the hegemony of whiteness is downplayed so as to position white culture as 'but one of many cultures' (Larbalestier, 1999). Such rhetoric also promotes the corollary belief that multiculturalism can be equated with equality. What this fails to acknowledge is that systemic forms of oppression and discrimination are perpetuated under the rubric of multiculturalism. Moreover, notions of 'equality' are themselves framed by white systems of representation that privilege certain understandings of what constitutes 'equality' (specifically notions of 'equal access' that are tied to a belief in meritorious action that is constituted within a 'level playing field'. For more on this see Augoustinos & Tuffin, in-press; Riggs & Riggs, forthcoming).

Whilst this special issue is concerned with the practice of psychology in a multicultural society (which *may* be seen as distinctly separate from the rhetoric

of multiculturalism), I believe that a more transparent account of the ways in which the discipline may be socially accountable requires an openness about the social context within which it is located. What this entails, then, is the recognition that psychology itself is a cultural practice. From this perspective psychology does not have any particular warrant to truth claims based on a form of *a priori* knowledge about the processes of subjectification, but rather gains its epistemic authority from the ways in which psychological understandings are taken up within society more generally (Squire, 2001). In this way psychology as a cultural practice informs the ways in which people understand themselves through the reification of particular concepts such as 'identity', 'self' and 'subjectivity'. By acknowledging the ways in which psychology is something that we *do*, rather than something that *is* (in an *a priori* sense), it may be possible to make visible the ways in which psychological practices can be oppressive to a broad range of people (see also Riggs & Augoustinos, in-press). Thus an acknowledgement of the ways in which the discipline is constituted within (and constitutive of) particular frameworks (such as multiculturalism) may be understood as being essential to the development of a critical cultural psychology.

Likewise, it is important that any discipline within a multicultural society pays attention to the ways that the use of 'culture' as a means to discerning between (or indeed constructing) groups of people is a historically contingent way of understanding. In particular, we may conceptualise notions of 'culture' as closely connected to the ideologies of nation, and specifically, national identity. In regards to the formation of various cultural groups, the dominance of one specific group is most often reliant upon an assumption of homogeneity. This is

deemed necessary in order to maintain a form of group coherency in the face of challenges from other groups. In this way culture can be understood as both a uniting force that enables broad ranges of people to share a common goal, but can also result in oppressive practices of exclusion (Larbalestier, 1999). Thus a focus on culture as a practice enables an examination of the means through which particular groups achieve hegemony, and the corollary practices that maintain this status quo. In Australia the discursive practices of culture are deployed in a variety of ways to construct certain groups as belonging to specific cultures, and also to position certain groups as 'lacking' or 'losing' culture (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In this way culture is taken to be a form of moral commodity, where an individuals' membership of a particular culture is defined not by their particular physical attributes (though that is not to say that such characteristics are not intimately related to notions of culture), but rather by their approximation to a particular group norm, which is most often defined in contrast to another group (Stratton, 1999).

Linking together the two previous paragraphs is an understanding of psychology as a cultural practice that is both shaped by, and reproductive of, the specific forms that white nationhood takes in Australia (Johnson-Riordan, Conway Herron & Johnston 2002). In other words, the production of specific racialised understandings of subjectivity (which is a feature of white nationhood, and the corollary construction of who fits inside/outside the category of 'nation') can be understood to be a formative aspect of white systems of representation. For its part, psychology has contributed to understandings of 'culture' as being a subset of the category 'race', in ways that have perpetuated notions of the superiority of

the 'white race' (Squire, 2000). Thus as I have already suggested, whilst culture is often understood as a category that people belong to according to their approximation to certain group norms, it is also intimately related to histories of knowledge that conflate the category of race (which in this context is located within the fields of biology and genetics) with the category of culture. In this way the discipline of psychology has often been involved in practices that reassert the dominance of white systems of representation (for example the measurement of IQ differences 'between races'; the application of Piagetian models of child development to Indigenous peoples. For excellent elaborations of this point, see Anderson, 2000; Davidson, 1995; Dudgeon, Garvey and Pickett, 2000). As I will now go on to discuss, the 'whiteness of psychological epistemologies' may often limit the practical benefits that may be achieved by the discipline.

The Whiteness of Psychological Epistemologies

The model of the person typically assumed within psychology views subjects as autonomous individuals who posses discrete intrapsychic processes. Such a model primarily locates mental health *within* the individual, rather than as a product of social practices (Venn, 1998). Whilst these understandings *may* adequately serve those who share this worldview,[1] it falls short when it is used with individuals whose culture presupposes an individual who is intimately enmeshed with both other people and the wider culture (Malik, 2000). The white Western model of mental health care provision also assumes a prescriptive method, where the psychologist (for example) is presumed to be the objective practitioner who can apply various tools to the diagnosis and treatment of

'disorders'. These understandings of subjectivity, and health care more generally, reflect the whiteness of such epistemologies. In this instance, whiteness refers to the institutionalised practices that subsume diverse experiences and understandings within claims to universality. In this sense the white systems of representation that structure psychology as a discipline often work to enact what Todd and Wade (1994) have referred to as 'psycholonization'. In other words, claims to universality may be seen as imposing one culture's beliefs upon another, with the outcome being the suppression of diversity. Further to this, dominant understandings within psychology view the 'autonomous individual' as 'progressing upwards' towards a state of 'good mental health'. Such understandings may thus be seen as closely connected to colonial narratives of 'civilising primitive cultures'. It is in this way that we may understand psychological epistemologies as being intimately related to histories of oppression.

One of the ways in which diverse experiences are reduced to fit within specific white ways of understanding is through the use of the DSM-IV (Todd & Wade, 1994). Diagnoses that are made using the criteria set out in the DSM-IV are seen to reflect an actual entity or deficiency existing within the individual, rather than representing a cultural construction (Cermele, Daniels & Anderson, 2001). Such positioning draws on the previously discussed model of the individual that is assumed within the discipline of psychology. Thus individuals are seen to blame *qua* individuals, rather than being seen as the product of their social interactions. This is not to ignore that some mental health problems may be the result of

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[1] Having said this, I would suggest that this model of the subject as situated within liberal humanism

certain 'biological causes', but that the way in which those symptoms are labeled and problematised (and indeed notions of 'biology' itself) is culturally specific (Parker, 1995; Kutchins & Kirk, 1997).

As I have already suggested, whilst these particular ways of looking at the world may prove beneficial to practicing members of the culture from which they arise, it is the claims to universality that the discipline often makes that work to limit its potential for engaging with clients from a diverse range of cultural groups. What is necessary, then, is not the wholesale dismissal of the discipline and the many approaches within it, but rather an approach to practice that acknowledges the locality of psychological epistemologies (Larner, 2001; 2003), and thus recognises the limits of the ways in which such epistemologies may be generalised across (and indeed within) cultural groups. This incommensurability between/within cultures points towards the need for psychology as a discipline to be reflexive about the historical foundations that it rests upon, and to continually contextualise the claims that it makes (Bendle, 2001). For whilst it may indeed be pertinent to challenge the utility of psychology in *any* form (as has been the work of many critical psychologists – see for example Parker & Spears, 1996), it is important to recognise the purchase that psychology has within Western cultures. For as previously outlined, psychology is a social practice that occupies a hegemonic position within Australia. Thus if we are to simply discard the discipline outright, we lose access to a means of disseminating information that may have the potential for benefiting a wide range of people.

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limits all people who fall under its remit (see also Riggs, 2002).

In addition to this point, is the 'reality' of the hegemony of whiteness. Challenging white systems of representation is not going to result in the immediate abolition of whiteness/white privilege within Australia. What is called for, then, is an approach to psychology that recognises the discipline's privileged status, and seeks to be accountable for this privilege. In other words, the worth of psychology as a form of social practice may be measured by the ways in which the discipline engages its privilege to challenge the systems of oppression with which it is often complicit. One of the ways in which this may be achieved, is by paying particular attention to the local ways in which mental health is experienced and constructed. Such a focus has been given considerable attention within the fields of discursive and constructionist psychologies over the past two decades. And it is to these approaches that I now turn to outline some of the ways that psychology as a discipline may engage in more socially accountable practices, paying particular attention to the needs of clients within a multicultural society.

Contextualising Practice

Alternative approaches to therapy have in varying ways paid attention to the contextual and constructed nature of mental health. Closely connected to this has been a desire to engage more actively with the 'politics of therapy', which has resulted in an examination of the power relations that are endemic to the counselling environment, situated as it is within a social network that valorises professional knowledges over everyday understandings (Bruner, 1990). Approaches such as narrative and systemic therapies, along with broader applications of social constructionist thought, have built upon the 'turn to

language' that is exemplified by early work such as the seminal publication 'Changing the Subject' (1984/1998). Running through these approaches is a commitment to challenging the ways in which the dominance of particular systems of understandings impact upon the experiences of people who utilise mental health services. Following Larner (2003, p. 21), it is important to envisage a critical therapy as being one that 'deconstructs its own institutional violence and engages with the modern institution of therapy in order to preserve its own critical values of social justice.' And it is this perspective that I suggest points towards ways of working across cultures that whilst still allowing a place for 'white psychology', also challenges the hegemony of particular psychological practices.

What is required, then, is an approach to practice that a) locates individuals within a social context, and b) understands this context as formative of the specific experiences that an individual may have. What this entails is not an either/or approach to the psychological/social nexus, but rather a commitment to understanding the complex ways in which contexts are both constitutive of, and constituted by, their enactment by particular people (Riggs, 2002). Such an approach makes possible a reading of individual 'mental health issues' as a thoroughly social, and yet particular, occurrence. It is in this way that I suggest a social constructionist approach to psychological practice may offer a way of understanding the individual other than in individual terms (Gergen, 1997; but see also Probyn, 1996). More than simply understanding the individual as a social being; more than recognising that the constructs we take as truths are not

simply reflections of 'reality', constructionism provides a way of talking about the subject without reifying that subject as existing outside of historical context.

In regards to historical context, a key issue in relation to psychological practice in a multicultural society is for the (generally) white practitioner to develop an understanding of their own positionality within a range of cultural locations. In this way, when we consider working with 'diverse groups of people', we should include ourselves as white people within this framework. The acknowledgment of our own location may indeed be an important step towards recognising the interplays of power that structure the counselling environment when we work with people from a culture different from our own, and may also engender a form of honesty with clients that values their experiences and ideas. In making visible our own whiteness, we may indeed take a step back from a position of being so-called 'objective experts', and instead recognise the ways that our own subjectivities are embedded within particular cultural frameworks.

So what does this mean for the discipline of psychology, and the potential for working across differing cultures? I would suggest that primarily it necessitates that we pay particular attention to the ways that people talk about mental health. Thus in varying ways people may talk about the problems they face as being inherent to themselves, as located within a broader social context, or as being the result of a myriad of spiritual, religious or other such forces. What a constructionist approach may focus on is not the privileging of any particular approach in a universalistic sense, but rather to acknowledge how such factors work to create particular local understandings of mental health (Larner, 2001).

What this allows for is that particular clients may well value a directive, individualistic approach to 'therapy', whilst another client may prioritise an approach which engages in social critique, or works with a broad range of people (eg family, friends, spiritual healers etc) to work through a particular issue. This approach in some ways is informed by the narrative approach to therapy, which requires the therapist to take a 'not knowing approach' (White & Epston, 1991. Yet at the same time it acknowledges that there may well be time when a therapist *does* have access to particular knowledges that the client may find useful (Paré, 2003). What this suggests is that instead of either the client or the therapist being 'in control' of the counselling environment, the particularities of each context are negotiated *between* the participants.

To consult with a client from a culture different to our own is also to take into account the ways in which the world that they experience alters the ways in which they experience themselves. An individual's mental health will depend on the context in which they live and the nature of their relations with other people (Morgan, Slade & Morgan, 1997). To ignore their lived experience is to miss a large part of the information that may be relevant to providing them with assistance[2] (Sue, Ivery & Pedersen, 1996). For example, an individual who is positioned as being from a cultural group that is different to the mainstream white culture may experience many forms of discrimination in their everyday life, ranging from lack of services in their language, to outright hostility from members of other cultures. If the client presents as 'depressed', and these factors

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[2] And of course we need to question the very notion of 'assistance'. If we are to conceptualise psychology as a culturally located way of understanding subjectivity, then it may well be of no use (or

are not taken into account, then the outcome may be medication, and thus internalisation - that the cause of the problem is the person. Alternately, the client's 'depression' could be seen as the result of harassment, or inability to achieve goals due to institutional barriers. Thus the understanding of 'depression' that is used in this context may be more closely related to a critique of institutional racism, rather than presuming the issues as located at an intrapsychic level (see Sanson, Augoustinos, Gridley, Kyrios, Reser, & Turner for more on the effects of institutional racism).

Whilst acknowledging experiences of discrimination (for example) may not mean that the world will change for that person, it may mean that the practitioner can help the client to access more appropriate services, and develop other ways of challenging discrimination. Such an awareness of the client's lived experiences may also help the psychologist to develop connections with practitioners from differing cultures, and to be more proactive in their approach to mental health care. This may entail the psychologist advocating for social change, and encouraging other people to be involved in such actions. Thus the aim becomes not simply to modify white psychological practices so as to be more inclusive of other cultures, but rather the discipline needs to focus on the ways in which psychologists can challenge the epistemologies that contribute to structural inequalities. In a similar way, the focus on language that is a feature of constructionist approaches to therapy may be usefully employed to examine the inequalities in the counseling environment. Thus the (most often) white psychologist may examine the ways in which the language that they use may

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indeed a hindrance) to people who do not share the same world-view. Thus the utility of psychology-

indeed be shaped by histories of oppression, something which will impact upon the counseling environment. The challenge may then be to find alternate ways of talking that make visible the processes of oppression, with a particular focus on the clients' experiences, and the ways that such experiences shape their health. Such an approach may thus engage with Larner's (2003) suggestion that we need to deconstruct institutional violence (such as that perpetuated through oppressive language), in order to work towards the aim of social justice.

Towards a Socially Accountable Pedagogy and Practice

Psychology as it is taught often encourages us to be the objective practitioner – to believe that we can stand outside of the situation and make a rational judgment as to what the problem is. What this can mean for a client, particularly one who does not share our cultural beliefs, is that their experience is devalued (as previously discussed). The same can be said for the pedagogy of psychology, which is based on the 'empirical evidence' found in textbooks, rather than in the lived experience of the student (Bradley, 1999, Bradley & Selby, 2001). It is because of this that students of psychology often lack knowledge of the cultural location of psychological epistemologies, and the ways in which this impacts upon, and constitutes, the discipline. Such a critical understanding of psychology as a white Western construction should thus be central to the teaching of psychology (Davidson, 1993). By acknowledging the epistemological foundations of psychology it may be possible to engage other forms of knowing that work from differing starting points. This is not to suggest an additive model of psychology, where white Western values are taken as the norm. Rather it

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as-assistance can only be determined in the context by the individual consumer.

suggests a collaborative approach to knowledge construction that recognises the ways in which power dynamics may impact upon which voices are heard within institutional settings (Ivanitz, 1999; Todd & Bohart, 1999).

Another point in relation to pedagogy is the need for *all* students to be encouraged to locate themselves as members of cultural groups, rather than solely seeing minority group members as 'having culture' (cf. Sonn, Garvey, Bishop & Smith, 2000). In this way the category 'white' may be made more salient, and thus allow for the challenging of the ways in which unearned white privilege is accrued. Such an approach need not result in process of 'white blaming', but rather may generate productive discussions around colonisation, genocide, and the possibilities for the reconciliation movement. By locating ourselves within systems of power, we as white people can thus work on making visible the racialised structures of whiteness, and therefore move towards a recognition of the histories of disadvantage upon which our privilege is built.

At the same time it is important to recognise the ways in which power is multidimensional (Sparks & Park, 2000). To suggest that clients from 'non-white' cultural groups are always already subjugated by whiteness is to ignore the ways that white culture is engaged with and challenged (Riggs, 2003). There is a long history in Australia of various cultural groups challenging the hegemony of whiteness, and in a similar way, white ways of knowing have been adapted and developed to 'fit in with' other cultures (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett, 2000). For it would be naïve to adopt the position that all cultures (as social practices) are static objects. Because of this it is important to

understand the ways that people have both resisted white systems of representation, and also reworked their relationship to whiteness in ways that benefit their own cultures (Akinyela, 2002). What this means for psychology within a multicultural society, is that we must aim to recognise the impact of context upon individuals, and thus be willing to challenge the shapes that oppressive social practices take.

Conclusions

The intention of this paper has not been to provide a detailed overview of what a critical psychological practice may look like, nor has it been to outline the specifics of any one approach. Rather the hope is that the reader will be encouraged to consider the ways in which their own practice may benefit from a broader range of approaches, and also to challenge normative assumptions about what can be considered 'psychological'. What this may involve is a willingness to explore the interrelations between social practices and local contexts, with the aim being an expansive inclusiveness, rather than simply resorting to an exclusive focus on either the local or the universal (Paré, 2003). This willingness to explore should be intimately connected to a critical reflexivity about both individual practice, and the discipline more generally (Butler, 1998). Thus whilst I have suggested that the counselling environment should be negotiated between the participants, practitioners must be mindful of the histories that shape the relationships we have with people. Thus the privilege that a white practitioner holds may prove to be a barrier to 'negotiation' – it may shape negotiations in particular ways, and only serve to reinforce inequities.

My suggestion has also been that psychological practice is often viewed as separate from political context. Yet as many of the alternate approaches outlined above suggest, psychology as a cultural practice needs to pay particular attention to the truth claims that it makes, and the practices that it engages in. What this requires is a willingness to engage with the critiques that are made of psychology, with the aim being a critical analysis of the epistemological foundations of the discipline, rather than assuming a defensive posture (Davidson, Sanson & Gridley, 2000). In this way we may be better equipped to challenge the epistemic violence that is often enacted in the name of the discipline. I refer specifically here to the claims of universality that are often attached to psychological knowledges, and the subsuming of diversity within a simplistic white model of subjectivity. Thus rather than perpetuating the absolutist claims to truth that shape Western binaries of self and other, we may acknowledge the relative utility of a range of approaches to psychological practice, and value the experiences that clients bring to the counselling environment (Larner, 2001).

In many respects, within this paper I have argued for the worth of what may be termed a 'critical psychology of whiteness'. Yet a key aspect of such an approach is an ongoing commitment to the deconstruction of the categories that render whiteness normative (see also Riggs & Selby, in-press). Thus as Michelle Fine and her colleagues (1997) so rightly point out, there is always a danger that *any* study of whiteness will result in the reification of the category as a universal norm, thus perpetuating the hegemony of whiteness. With this in mind, I have hoped to outline an approach to psychological practice, pedagogy and research

that is engaged in a constant critique of its own practices. In this way a critical psychology of whiteness should not have as its aim the cataloguing and describing of white subjectivities. Rather it should work to make visible the practices that shape whiteness, with particular focus on the ways in which the discipline of psychology is complicit with white systems of representation. And it is through such a focus that psychology may have some utility within a multicultural society – neither as an arbiter of 'culturally appropriate practice', nor as a disseminator of specific cultural knowledges, but rather as a thoroughly cultural practice in itself. The task ahead is therefore a continued engagement with the 'politics of therapy', and a commitment to developing ways of working between cultures that acknowledges the location of the discipline both historically and contextually, and an openness to a broad range of approaches in working towards a 'socially accountable psychology'.

Acknowledgements

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