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Does the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics work for us?

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Does the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics work for us?

The room was bursting with the energy of people from all parts of Turtle Island. For a moment we could hear the drumbeats from all corners of the earth. In an instant a new community was born perhaps appropriately on the island of Oahu, a place of beauty and a place where indigenous people have been challenged by colonialism and its consequences. On August 3, 2013, at the national convention of the American Psychological Association (APA), representatives from the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), the Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP), the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), the National Latino/a Psychological Association (NLPA) held a panel discussion concerning the current APA Code of Ethics (2010) and its relevance for ethnic minority people. This work was a continuation of the work these four groups have started in collaboration as the Ethnic Minority Psychological Associations (EMPA). For the first time in June, 2013, all four groups met at the SIP convention to work on the APA ethics code (Garcia 2013a, 2013b).

At this meeting ABPsi began by sharing with the audience an overview of their ethical guidelines developed independent of APA and updated in 2006. ABPsi made it clear that their ethical guidelines were rooted in Afrocentric values and reflected historical trauma and psychological consequences of slavery and discrimination experienced by African Americans. Thus their model of ethics is centered on healing through valuing collective community responsibility. NLPA discussed their process as an organization in reflecting about the necessity of developing new ethical guidelines that better reflected their struggles and shared cultural values. SIP discussed their three year process of trying to address the APA ethics code's failure to incorporate important core Native values such as connection to mother earth, and the

significance of relationships, spirituality, and community. AAPA supported and reaffirmed the need to have ethical guidelines that considered cultural values and traditions while dealing with the effects of colonialism. Speakers in the audience, that also included voices from other parts of the world unanimously agreed for an urgent need for processes similar to those being carried out by the four ethnic minority psychological associations. They suggested that psychological societies worldwide would benefit from revised guidelines that more closely reflect their beliefs and values about community, spiritualism, and relationships, as well as consider the effects of historical trauma or colonialism, than the beliefs and values incorporated into the current APA code.

Meanwhile as fate would have it, on the East Coast, the United Nations in New York City, New York, was celebrating the International World's Indigenous Peoples Week. They began the week with a panel discussion titled "Indigenous Peoples Building Alliances: Honouring Treaties, Agreements and other Constructive Arrangements". The panelists included the Deputy Permanent representative of Panama to the UN, The UN assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, and the Chief of the Onondaga Tribe from Onondaga, New York. The audience included scientists, tribal leaders, and members of indigenous groups from around the world. The panelists discussed with the audience the need to consider the effects of colonialism, connection to mother earth, as well as the meaning of community and relationships, the very same themes shared in Oahu when considering the value of the APA code for all people.

A major challenge for Native people in accepting and using the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics is that it reflects Eurocentric values, such as self-focused individualism and personal autonomy, which were derived without concern for Native values and principles. Thus the current discussion about the utility of an APA ethical model developed within a Western colonial model is long overdue and this discussion and review appears to be part of a larger global zeitgeist focused on appreciating the power and wisdom inherent in

indigenous culture. Overall, emerging themes from these forums include the necessity of community-centeredness as a principle for guiding the interpersonal behavior of psychologists, the importance of appreciating and respecting the connectivity of all things in and through nature, and the importance of spirituality (rather than religiosity) in human growth and identity. A viable code of ethics for psychologists working with Native people will be inadequate unless it includes these core values. In addition, Native psychologists will continue to feel excluded from the profession of psychology until their concerns about culturally appropriate ethical conduct are acknowledged.

The principles discussed above are essential elements to ethical conduct on Turtle Island and are currently inadequately represented in the APA code. Because of this, SIP will continue to work with APA to change the code. In addition, the emerging and globally representative community interested in incorporating new ethical values long silenced in APA agreed to carry on the work currently underway with the four ethnic psychological associations.

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