

The Implications of the SIP Commentary on the APA Code of Ethics are many, broad and deep.

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After a three-year community wide process, the Society of Indian Psychologists published a comprehensive critique of the APA Code of Ethics in June, 2014. It is only 96 pages, but the stories and comments contributed by the membership illustrate the serious gaps within American psychology when it comes to understanding and addressing culture effectively. While the existence of these gaps is not news to the readers of *Communique*, the way that the SIP Commentary is written helps readers of all ethnicities to understand how painful the gaps are to Indigenous people and by implication, to all ethnic minority populations.

This is the first of a three-part series that will highlight the important findings of the SIP Commentary.

- 1) Indigenous people communicate best by hearing and telling stories. This is in direct contrast to the style in academic journals. A conscious decision was made to write the Commentary using the language of story. This makes the points made by the Commentary immediately understandable.
- 2) In direct contrast to the APA Code of Ethics, the SIP Commentary presents the values of the authors clearly and directly at the beginning of the document. These values are referenced and illustrated throughout the Commentary. The assumptions embedded in the APA Code of Ethics, but never made explicit, are *that: a) behavior can be best studied as discrete units to understand the whole; b) compartmentalism is helpful in promoting the understanding of how humans function; and, c) that it is best for individuals to be autonomous and self-reliant.* (p. 13)
- 3) It is not possible to understand ethics separate from culture. *The abuse of power, whether intentional or unintentional, plays a major role in the harm experienced by Indigenous people as well as other marginalized and stigmatized people. While the APA Ethics Code encourages psychologists to be aware of their own biases, values, and sociocultural framework, in actual practice, this kind of awareness is rare.* (p.15)
- 4) The community, whether tribal or urban, is considered an entity in addition to individuals. There are many stories throughout the Commentary that illustrate the tension between American individualism and Indigenous community.
- 5) In line with an inter-relational view of harmony and balance in life, in health, and in communities, the SIP Commentary proposes that Respect (currently Principle E) be the very first Principle, as none of the other Principles can occur in an environment in which Respect on the part of both parties is missing. Two additional Principles are proposed and defined: Cultural Relevance and Humility. (p.15).

6) SIP members did not have confidence in the efficacy of the process to resolve ethical issues outlined in Standard 1. *The group expressed overall concerns with several aspects of Standard 1. First is the conflict that Native psychologists often experience between the Ethics Code, the organizational demands of the workplace or funding agency, the culture of the identified client, and the culture of the psychologist. Second, there was a concern that the model to resolve ethical issues be dynamic as opposed to static. That is, the development of questions such as those found in the Guiding Principles for Engaging in Research with Native American Communities, (2013), to help guide ethical decisions would be helpful.*

7) Most of the stories in the Commentary refer to a lack of Competence (Standard 2). These stories illustrate that it is not possible to be competent as a psychologist without cultural competence. This is significant because “multicultural” is considered a fringe specialty in many graduate schools and research in this area does not have the prestige of “non-cultural” areas. The process of recalling and writing these stories was painful for the participants. The stories occurred last year and 30 years ago. The over-all lack of Competence in the field of psychology is a constant.

8) In response to Standard 3: Human Relations, the SIP Commentary states: *This Standard may be the least enforced Standard in the Ethics Code. Which types of discrimination are fair? Discrimination by psychologists often comes from implicit and unacknowledged biases that are expressed as micro-aggressions. While the term is called “micro,” the effect on the receiving party is profound. This Standard only represents lip service or window dressing towards the idea that psychologists should seek out and demonstrate multicultural competence skills. (p. 42).*

The areas addressed by the stories illustrated the importance of dual relationships, the importance of respecting communities as well as individuals, and the importance of culturally relevant forms of informed consent (“bad things happen when Indians are asked to sign papers”).

In summary, through discussion and illustrative stories for each section of the APA Code of Ethics, the SIP Commentary demonstrates a profound need for change in the culture of American psychology in order for psychologists to “first, do no harm”. SIP community members dug deep in order to offer their experiences as a way to cut through abstract, academic ideas of what constitutes a competent psychologist. Effective psychology is contextual and relational. Competent psychology is honest. Honest psychology recognizes culture.

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