

The Interrelationship Between the Society of Indian Psychologists and Counseling Psychology

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Abstract

Over the past four decades, the Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP) has grown from a small network of indigenous psychologists and students to a well-established network among the ethnic minority psychology organizations. SIP embraces both Western psychology and indigenous values of cooperation, group harmony, respect, generosity, careful listening, and observation—values shared by the field of counseling psychology. This article examines the interrelationship between SIP and counseling psychology, given their shared beliefs in social justice and culturally competent research, training, and service. Some of the early history of SIP is presented as well as the landmark moments for the organization.

Keywords

American Indian, Native American, counseling, network, history, organization

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Brief History

The Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP) was born of two groundbreaking groups that had first established indigenous¹ professional organizations in the psychology field. One of these groups was the Network of Indian Psychologists (NIP), which was originally formed in the early 1970s. In 1975, through the early efforts of Carolyn Attneave, the network evolved into SIP (Trimble & Clearing-Sky, 2009). This group was eventually joined by the American Indian Interest Group, which originated in Oklahoma in 1971 and was closely tied to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), Division 9 of the American Psychological Association (APA). Once the two groups came together, the name NIP was discarded, as its members were concerned about its association with alcohol consumption—a prevalent stereotype. Indeed, some still believe that SIP may be identified in the same manner (Trimble & Clearing-Sky, 2009).

SIP operated under the leadership of its founder in the early years and a general understanding of the membership that it was for life, although Attneave would have disagreed (D. V. Foster, personal communication, September 27, 2010; J. E. Trimble, personal communication, September 24, 2010). The networking aspect of the organization that was a key part of Attneave's work has continued to be an overarching principle of the organization. SIP began to meet as opportunities to gather were presented at Indian Health Service (IHS) sponsored meetings and APA conventions (Trimble & Clearing-Sky, 2009; see Photo 1). As SIP moved toward more formal organization, the first order of business was to craft a new mission statement, formulate by-laws, and elect officers. This occurred in the mid-1980s. During these early years of SIP, there was a significant lack of interest, resources, and membership involvement and efforts to develop would be high for a couple of years and then drop off. This waxing and waning of SIP development was due in part to several factors: (a) the lack of consistency in leadership; (b) the lack of ability to connect and maintain continuity with individuals who were interested or recruit new or young professionals (if they were unknown to the organization, there was no mechanism for identifying them); (c) the limitations of not having a visible identity at a national level (no funds or vision for a central office, stable location, etc.); (d) very small numbers of members working somewhat independently to accomplish major efforts (gaining non-profit status, getting the website built, establishing an electronic mailing list, hosting conferences); and (e) Indian Health Service (IHS) including clinical psychology programs in the Indians into Psychology programs and IHS scholarship programs, but excluding counseling psychology programs.

In 1987, American Indian psychologists and psychology graduate students at Utah State University held their first conference. The difficulty identifying attendees of that conference in the photo illustrates how little we know of those early years (see Photo 2). This conference was attended by some of SIP's members and eventually became the primary gathering place



Photo 1. This photo was taken at one of the very first Society of Indian Psychologists gatherings at the American Psychological Association in 1984 (L to R: Art Blue, Jeff King, Joseph Trimble, unidentified man, Dolores Subia BigFoot, and Candace Fleming).

for SIP. It was here that SIP as a group solidified; attendance at the annual business meeting and retreat grew. The retreat preceding the conference allows for informal exchange of ideas, sharing about family, and connecting with nature at Bear Lake and at the Horse Camp up the mountain from the retreat center on the lake, a gathering time that members looked forward to each year. The conference also became a place for sharing research, teachings, and practices coming from the clinicians working in tribal communities and indigenous students wanting their research to relate to their community needs. Because publishing in peer reviewed journals was a difficult and lengthy process and not the priority of many clinicians, the annual

conference became a place to share promising practices and the most current research relevant to indigenous mental health.

NIP and SIP newsletters from over the years helped members stay up to date on others' activities and developments within the organization. Responsibility for writing the newsletter rotated among various editors. In 1998, SIP's growth was accelerated when their first electronic mailing list was created. Hosted at Michigan State University, the electronic mailing list helped



Photo 2. First meeting of the Annual Conference of American Indian Psychologists and Psychology Graduate Students at Utah State University, 1987. (Back row: Art Martinez, Paul Dauphinais, Steven Byers, Ed Starr, Mary Nordwall; Next row: Rebecca Crawford, Carolyn Barcus, unidentified woman, unidentified man, Art Blue; Next row: Beatrice Medicine, unidentified woman (sunglasses), unidentified woman, Grace Sage, unidentified woman, unidentified woman; Next row: Kevin Foley, unidentified woman, unidentified woman, Candace Fleming, Linda Dyer, unidentified woman, Scott Nelson; Front row: unidentified man, Damian (McShane) Vraniak, unidentified man.

boost connectivity between SIP and its members between annual meetings. The electronic mailing list provided opportunities for discussion of ideas, posting of jobs, and sharing of needs and support. A few years later, SIP went live with their first webpage from Oklahoma State University, which was subsequently moved in 2006 to Utah State University (<http://www.aiansip.org>).

The webpage made information about SIP available to those who had never before connected to other indigenous psychologists. Membership information, officers, and contact information, although basic, linked to others throughout the country. After a number of years discussing how to fund the annual conference and grow SIP, the organization received nonprofit status, opening the doors to outside funding sources. In March 2010, the SIP Group Facebook page was launched and more than 100 members joined in the first week. Elders and students alike have linked through this social network. These communication advances served to connect and inform SIP members while furthering SIP's mission "to provide an organization for Native American indigenous people to advocate for the mental well-being of Native peoples by increasing the knowledge and awareness of issues impacting Native mental health" (SIP, 2010).

In harmony with American Indian culture, SIP's growth and accomplishments have been and will continue to be the result of a collective process. Many people make contributions necessary for the organization to grow and function by supporting grassroots mental health efforts, mentoring and encouraging students, and integrating new ideas into the field of psychology.

Current Status and Resources

According to records, there were 52 members of SIP in 2010. Of these, about 30% were students and about 70% were clinicians, faculty, researchers, and non-Native friends. The Executive Committee of SIP includes the president, past president, president-elect, treasurer, secretary, student representatives, and newsletter editor. All SIP positions are filled by indigenous people (SIP, 2010). Also, according to the SIP By-Laws (2010), there are four standing committees: the Bylaws Committee, the Membership Committee, the Chapter Development Committee, and the Council of Elders. Although all of the standing committees are relevant to SIP's growth and success, the Council of Elders is most integral to SIP as it provides an important connection to indigenous philosophy. The philosophy and practice of acknowledging, respecting, and honoring elders is crucial to ways of being within indigenous families, communities, and societies, since elders are the wisdom keepers and natural leaders. In June 2010, SIP approved a by-laws change to allow for local chapters of SIP to be formed. This would allow local gatherings of indigenous psychologists and students to work together throughout the year in areas that have at least three members.

Now SIP meets formally each summer at a conference at Utah State University. SIP also meets informally each year at the APA annual meeting

where the meeting is typically held in Division 45's (Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues) hospitality suite. In addition, Division 18 (Psychologists in Public Service) has a meeting of Psychologists in Indian Country. The majority of founding members of this section came from the SIP membership. It is important to note that from approximately the mid-1980s onward, SIP has been partially supported by the Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs (OEMA) of the APA through the use of hospitality suites and other meeting spaces during the APA annual conference. The APA has also supported the travel expenses of the SIP president to travel to the APA central office to participate in meetings with presidents of the other ethnic minority psychology organizations. In 2004, SIP received 501(c)3 nonprofit organization status. For several years preceding that momentous occasion, discussion occurred annually at the SIP meeting about how we could better secure funding for the conference and other needs of SIP. It was very difficult since there was no central repository for SIP information. The required documents were collected from many of the previous officers and elders of SIP. The nonprofit designation has been a major organizational step for the Society.

SIP's annual conference at Utah State University has multiple purposes besides the important function of bringing members, nonmembers, students, and mentors together face-to-face in a collegial manner. First, the conference allows time for members to get acquainted or become reacquainted, renew friendships, discuss ideas, share opportunities, recreate, and rejuvenate the soul. Knowledge is disseminated and information relevant to indigenous psychology shared through keynote speakers, student presentations, posters, research forums, and announcements of upcoming events. Honoring of members' accomplishments is also made possible through this gathering. This is especially a time for the professionalism of psychology and the cultural identity of students to be more readily formed by their association with experienced indigenous psychologists.

SIP also mobilizes resources to aid in times of traumatic events such as suicide clusters, shootings, weather-related emergencies, and multiple sexual molestations at rural schools in Indian Country or other events affecting the well-being of tribal communities. One particular mobilization of SIP occurred during the Red Lake School shootings in 2005; then, the community preferred that emergency response be carried out by licensed indigenous mental health providers, believing that these providers would be more culturally sensitive. The electronic mailing list has also been used to make requests for tangible donations that allow SIP members to assist in providing material need. In 2009, during a suicide outbreak on one of the reservations,

a call to SIP members on the electronic mailing list asked for donations of cloth, leather, sage, sweetgrass, shells, and other items; tribal community members then made medicine bags for every youth in the community to help them cope with their grief. Another community request was for canned food, blankets, and money to be sent to reservations in the Plains area suffering from power outages and lack of food during multiple harsh snowstorms and subzero temperatures.

SIP supports and nurtures students while drawing from the wisdom of the elders. It provides many career and life opportunities, including mentoring on dissertations and assistance with finding and supporting students in internships, job searches, and posting positions. SIP's members work together to facilitate research, locate and engage speakers and authors, and build a supportive professional network that connects indigenous psychologists to cultures and worlds beyond their borders.

The status of indigenous psychology's influence and effect includes the leadership of APA President Logan Wright, who in 1985 became the first psychologist of indigenous background to hold that distinguished office (Trimble & Clearing-Sky, 2009). In addition, some counseling psychology SIP members have demonstrated their leadership and commitment to service in a variety of ways: contributing to APA governance and the APA Minority Fellowship Program; providing valuable clinical and research supervision and instruction of indigenous students, clinicians, and researchers in culturally appropriate practices in tribal communities; mentoring students through the Indians into Psychology, Alaska Natives into Psychology, and other programs; and working with the IHS at the clinical/treatment and policy/administrative levels. The trend of leadership, networking, and mentoring by SIP members continues into the present.

Connections to Counseling Psychology

SIP and the field of counseling psychology are both committed to improving the availability of psychological health resources for indigenous people. SIP's existence has grown out of this great need, and counseling psychology has integrated academic programming, research, and service activities to fulfill its mission of training culturally competent mental health providers.

The degree of philosophical alignment between SIP and counseling psychology is striking. Indigenous values such as cooperation, group harmony, respect, generosity, careful listening, and observation (Morris, n.d.) are just a few of the values that are in perfect accord with counseling psychology practices. Similar core values and beliefs are shared between indigenous tribes and even within tribes.

SIP's advocacy for the ethical treatment of indigenous peoples blends with counseling psychology's mission of advocacy for minority populations. Both entities promote building networks with indigenous graduate students, clinicians, researchers, and communities that develop linkages to counseling psychology graduate programs.

SIP and counseling psychology have similar goals with respect to social justice. Indigenous counseling psychologists have been asked to provide testimony to the U.S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearings on youth suicide in Indian Country and other issues addressing American Indian mental health and social justice issues.

Racism toward indigenous people comes in many forms, one being the use of indigenous sports mascots and logos. SIP takes a stance against such racism. In a 1999 letter, the president of SIP declared (SIP, 1999),

We, the undersigned members of the Society of Indian Psychologists of the Americas, write this letter in support of "retiring" all Indian personalities as the official symbols and mascots of universities, colleges, or schools (and athletic teams). We support doing so because of a variety of concerns related to the ethical practice of psychology.

Counseling psychology is built upon similar ethical standards and guidelines. At the 2001 National Multicultural Summit, the American Psychological Association, several APA divisions, and other ethnic minority organizations adopted SIP's stance. The issue was brought forward by students from The University of North Dakota, who were guided by indigenous counseling psychologists. This is but one example of counseling psychologists and leaders within the multicultural counseling movement training future indigenous psychologists.

Acculturation stress and threats to racial identity are further obstacles faced by indigenous people and other minorities. Both SIP and counseling psychology promote research in these areas, especially as they pertain to influences on mental health. For example, Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, and Robbins (1995) created a health model conceptualization of American Indian acculturation that has guided researchers in creating an indigenous model of stress and coping (Walters & Simoni, 1999). LaFromboise, Albright, & Harris (2010) recently examined the effect of bicultural competence (i.e., those who are adept in both Indian and White cultures) on hopelessness among American Indian early adolescents living on and off reservations. They found that biculturally identified youth have significantly less hopelessness than do those with adeptness in only one culture or in neither culture.

These types of studies that add to culturally accurate research with indigenous populations are goals that both SIP and counseling psychology share and where they may be most closely connected.

Another example of blending cultural tenets with psychological theory and interventions is the work of the Indian Country Child Trauma Center (BigFoot & Braden, 2007). The culturally adapted evidence-based interventions and nationwide trainings offered through the Center not only illuminate risk and protective factors for mental health but also offer culturally viable solutions for indigenous people, therefore strengthening communities and tribes overall.

Counseling Psychology Elders Within SIP

Carolyn Attneave was the original elder of indigenous counseling psychologists who left an indelible mark with her significant contributions to the field and commitment to mentoring (LaFromboise & Fleming, 1990). Attneave was the founder of the Network of Indian Psychologists, one of the first groups of indigenous psychologists. She is regarded as the founder and premier leader of SIP through the early years. Although Attneave has made many contributions to the field of counseling psychology, she is probably best known for her social network therapy with families. LaFromboise and Trimble (1996) eulogized Attneave as “undoubtedly the most well-known psychologist of American Indian background and who was internationally renowned for her expertise in cross-cultural topics in counseling and psychotherapy.”

The great difficulty in naming other prominent counseling psychologists goes beyond identifying some and omitting others. Within indigenous culture, it is being an elder, a wisdom keeper, and a natural healer that is a responsibility and an honor. Indigenous leaders are to be humble and not seek attention; the indigenous society is collective, not individualistic. During the research for this article, numerous indigenous elders were consulted and offered their guidance and wisdom. While offering memories and contributions to the collective history of SIP, they cautioned that it was important not to list names and honor some when indigenous philosophy is collectivist. All who contribute to a project are seen as providing an important part, without which the whole could not be accomplished. The indigenous psychologists whose names, projects, research, and writings appear in scholarly journals, monographs, and books represent countless other psychologists, students, tribal leaders, and tribal community members who were integral to completion of these works. The authors are named because a name is required by

Western culture. Indigenous counseling psychologists recognize that what they do is built upon the back of all who have gone before, who are going with, and who will go after them. The accomplishments and growth of SIP have truly been a collaborative effort, thus leadership is more by consensus than by majority rule, although our by-laws must conform to requirements dictated by Western culture.

It is known that the counseling psychology programs that are most successful in mentoring and developing indigenous counseling psychologists have a cohort of indigenous students who work in collaborative ways and provide peer mentorship throughout their programs, which is critical to indigenous student success. These programs have at least one faculty member with whom indigenous students feel supported. Students in these programs help one another in classes, preparing for comprehensive exams, applying and interviewing for internships, and completing their dissertations. They provide moral support, teach one another, take care of one another and their families, help recruit research participants for dissertations, and become cheerleaders and performance coaches when necessary. Early indigenous graduate students and early career psychologists have had to develop their own support groups across departments and disciplines to meet their own needs for encouragement in programs where there were no cohorts or few supportive faculty mentors.

One of the earliest and most prominent cohorts of indigenous counseling psychology and SIP leaders came from The University of Oklahoma in the 1980s. Counseling psychologists from this group have contributed to indigenous psychology by strengthening individuals, families, and communities. They have made significant contributions in suicide prevention, culturally appropriate treatment, and assessment of children and adults. In addition, some members in this cohort have been presidents of SIP, and one of the graduates of that program served as president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues (Division 45 of APA). This program provided such leaders as Teresa LaFromboise, Dolores Subia BigFoot, Paul Dauphinais, and Sandra Bennett Choney, who were presidents of SIP during its early years. The master's degree in community counseling at The University of Oklahoma became a major pipeline to indigenous counseling psychology doctorates in Oklahoma and other schools.

In recent years, Oklahoma State University has produced a number of indigenous counseling psychologists in their School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology that has an APA approved Counseling Psychology specialty. Jacque Gray is a president of SIP from this program. Their cohort system facilitates a supportive, peer-mentoring, collectivist community that helps students progress through the program. Indigenous counseling

psychologists from The University of North Dakota have primarily provided services to tribal communities and worked within the Indian Health Service.

Utah State University has provided SIP with an annual meeting place. However, through the development of the American Indian Support Project, it has also provided a combined clinical, counseling, and school psychology program that focuses on building a cohort of Navajo students in the field. The Indian Psychologists and Psychology Graduate Students Conference and SIP meeting has facilitated the development of indigenous student cohorts, lending them support and mentoring and providing them a place to belong when many of them receive doctoral training in programs that may have only one indigenous student in the program. This allows these isolated students the opportunity to join with other like students from Utah State University and other programs at the retreat and conference. Carolyn Barcus graduated from Utah State University and has provided many years of leadership as well as being a SIP president and member of the Council of Elders. This conference also provides the opportunity for indigenous graduate students to be mentored by the elders of indigenous psychology. Additional SIP presidents and members of the Council of Elders who had counseling psychology roots include John Peregoy, counselor education, and Mary Clearing-Sky, director of a university counseling center.

Implications for Counseling Psychology

Trimble and Clearing-Sky (2009) recalled that years ago, in the 1920s and 1930s, some social scientists and historians described indigenous people in America as “vanishing and becoming extinct.” Fortunately, this early “harsh prognosis” did not come to pass (Wilcox, 2010). In fact, the numbers of indigenous people grew to more than 4.5 million by the year 2007, with more than 560 tribes and villages recognized by the federal government (Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2009; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2010). Content on indigenous mental health may be overlooked or relegated to a nonessential status in academic coursework on multicultural counseling or cultural psychology. One task for counseling psychology in the face of this population growth would be to also illuminate the resiliency (e.g., spirituality, social connectedness, humor) that exists among indigenous people (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006).

Another possible charge for counseling psychology would be to strongly advocate for the inclusion of counseling psychology programs as a health field to be funded by the Indian Health Service Scholarship Program. Without scholarship funding and support, there is less incentive and opportunity for

indigenous students to become counseling psychologists. Another barrier to increasing the numbers of indigenous counseling psychologists is that the Indians into Psychology Doctoral Education (INPSYDE) programs are based only in clinical psychology programs. Although this is critically beneficial to training indigenous providers in psychology, the lack of such supportive programs in counseling psychology results in fewer indigenous counseling psychologists. The career path of many indigenous students includes multiple entries into and exits from the educational process while working in between (Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000). Providing financial support to indigenous students in the field of counseling psychology would broaden their experience and enhance their ability to remain in learning communities of trained indigenous counselors and psychologists.

Counseling psychology programs were among the first graduate programs in psychology to include multicultural courses in their core curriculum. This leadership not only fostered a climate of inclusion for indigenous students within programs, but it also supported the formation of the National Multicultural Conference and Summit, which provides educational and networking opportunities for indigenous psychologists. The field needs to continue this type of training along with opportunities for intensive research training with ethnically diverse populations.

With societies like SIP, counseling psychology truly has a centralized, knowledgeable, culturally specific, indigenous organization from which information can be gleaned for continued training of indigenous providers, while also custom fitting culturally viable mental health services. The Society of Indian Psychologists and Division 17 share much of a common outlook and should strive in the future to serve as mutually valuable resources.

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Note

1. The term *indigenous* is used in this article to include American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other indigenous peoples of North America. During the 2009 SIP business meeting, one of the issues raised was how SIP now encompassed a broader spectrum of indigenous professionals than were previously included and that a broader term needed to be used to be inclusive of all indigenous groups (SIP, 2009).

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