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Editorial

In December 1993 the Board of Community Psychologists and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University held a conference on Aboriginal Psychology. Part of the aim of that conference was to explore the need for a conceptually separate Aboriginal Psychology. While there was considerable debate about this issue, there was a general recognition that the question will not be resolved without a large increase in indigenous people entering the profession of Psychology.

This view is consistent with that expressed by the Aboriginal Psychology Interest Group whose activities were applauded at the conference. The group had lobbied the APS for funds to encourage indigenous people to enter psychology. They have been allocated $25,000 pa for the next five years. The first activity was to identify all indigenous students in Psychology courses throughout Australia and to arrange a satellite conference at Wollongong in September.

The contents of this edition consist of papers given at the December conference and at the last APS annual conference on the Gold Coast.
This paper argues that it is important to 'take five' and carefully consider the nature of, and prospect for, a culture-specific 'Aboriginal Psychology'. A need for initial conceptual and referential clarity is underscored, as well as a stock-taking of other indigenous reference points with respect to indigenous psychologies and the discipline of psychology. A critical review of the nature, utility and implications of widely differing representations of psychology and psychological analysis in Australia is also suggested. An 'Aboriginal psychology' will need to locate and defend itself in a very contested cultural space - with what benefits and to what purpose? Is it possible that arguments for an Aboriginal psychology are based, in part, on some widespread misunderstandings of what psychology is or does? The argument is advanced that many popular 'psychological' accounts of indigenous problems and issues are not authored by psychologists and do not equate with credible and/or contemporary psychological arguments or analyses, and can do considerable harm. Additionally, misunderstandings of what psychology is and what services and benefits psychology offers can substantially prejudice discussions of policies and programs across a spectrum of issues and concerns. Finally, it is worth noting how theorists within the discipline of psychology have framed the challenges and problems posed by third and fourth world communities for a relevant and credible psychology.

Many of us have had considerable involvement with Aboriginal individuals and communities as friends, colleagues, teachers and researchers. For some of us this has been as non-Aboriginal psychologists, as students of culture as well as behaviour, with an interest and commitment with respect to indigenous issues. For many, including Aboriginal psychologists, the issue of an Aboriginal psychology has been a more central and involving consideration, with Western academic and professional psychology being occasionally useful, but more typically experienced as frustratingly insensitive, ill-informed and unhelpful across a spectrum of issues and concerns where psychology should have far more to offer.

It is clear that there is a will and a critical need to establish a more relevant profession, a more accessible and useful body of knowledge, and more adequate education and training programs in Australia for people of other cultures and colour. How can this best be done?
What is a useful agenda for those seeking a profession and practice that is informed about and by the indigenous cultures of Australia?

A starting point would be some clear terms of reference. What is clear is that the current rhetoric and discourse relating to psychology and Aboriginal people is both confusing and divisive.

Some important distinctions: psychology, indigenous psychologies, cross-cultural psychology, representations of psychology, representations of Aboriginality.

The term 'psychology' typically refers to a largely Western professional and academic discipline. While its subject matter is, ideally, culturally universal, its domain of knowledge and interest has been largely within the compass of Western European cultural contexts. 'Cross-cultural psychology' has constituted a comparative but largely conventional western psychology seeking external validity and exploring the nature and role of cultural context. Perhaps the most recent integrative definition of cross-cultural psychology is that of Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992).

Cross-cultural psychology is the study of similarities and differences in individual psychological functioning in various cultural and ethnic groups; of the relationships between psychological variables and sociocultural, ecological, and biological variables; and of current changes in these variables (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992, p. 2).

The expression 'indigenous psychologies' has been recently used to cover a number of other cultural perspectives (e.g., Kim, 1990), but the term was originally coined and specifically used to refer to lay understandings of why people behave the way they do, of what human nature is all about (Heelas & Lock, 1981). In other words, 'indigenous psychologies by Heelas and Lock (1981) is instructive, and at odds with the use of the expression by others.

They are the cultural views, theories, conjectures, classifications, assumptions and metaphors - together with notions embedded in social institutions - which bear on psychological topics. These psychologies are statements about the nature of the person and his relations with the world. (3) Indigenous psychologies are about what goes on inside the self - they enter into the very fabric of our psychological reality - and are equally important and necessary as functional and meaningful realities in interpersonal, social and cultural activities. (17)
psychologies' referred to within-culture lay or popular understandings of behaviour - as contrasted with academic or professional understandings².

Social representations of psychology, on the other hand, are popular understandings of what 'psychology' is or does, i.e., lay understandings of psychology as a domain of common and/or uncommon knowledge and expertise. Such social representations exist in cultural products such as the media as well as in people's heads (e.g., Farr, 1993) and essentially express and reflect shared notions and ways of thinking about or 'framing' the human condition or the world. 'Representations', in this instance of 'psychology', has come to have a somewhat different meaning, particularly in the context of social theory and postmodern writing (Kvale, 1992; Semin & Gergen, 1990; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). In this context it refers to articulated 'positions' or 'voices' in public and other forums (e.g., academia) with respect to the nature, content, methods or authority of 'psychology' or psychologists. The image of psychology currently being constructed and disseminated by the Australian Psychological Society through its public relations firm is an example of a representation of psychology. These more self-conscious statements about the nature and scope of psychology are, of course, rather different from popular and shared understandings of psychology. 'Representations' of Aboriginality or Aboriginal culture also cover a spectrum of perspectives, from media-based understandings and stereotypes to academic representations of Aboriginal 'culture' and otherness, to within-culture understandings of what it is to be Aboriginal (e.g., Beckett, 1988; Keen, 1988; Langton, 1993).

All of this presents problems of reference and meaning for an Aboriginal psychology. Is this a specialty area of the professional and academic discipline, defined in part by subject focus as well as corpus of knowledge? Alternatively does 'Aboriginal psychology' refer to a within-Aboriginal-cultures body of specialised or expert knowledge and practice with respect to human behaviour distinct from within-culture popular understandings of why people behave as they do? What is meant when people refer to an indigenous psychology in Australia? Are we speaking of lay understandings, or a culturally-informed but conventionally understood professional practice and academic discipline?, or a traditionally-based 'professional' discipline which deals with human behaviour and disorder? In North America there is not an Indian psychology. There are Native Americans who are psychologists, and there are some Native American psychologists who have a particular expertise in the area of Native American culture. There are also many other Native Americans who are well-versed in within-culture understandings of and treatments

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² The use of the term indigenous psychology and/or indigenous psychologies has become very confusing. Moghaddam (1987) speaks of a 'third world indigenous psychology', by which he means a professional and applied discipline with intellectual roots in the west, but an active involvement and concern with third world issues, problems and development. It is an 'indigenous' psychology to the extent that its practitioners largely come from third world countries and its concerns and agenda derive from criticisms of conventional western psychology.

for 'psychological' problems. These latter individuals occupy many differing roles, professional and paraprofessional, Anglo and Indian, but they are not considered to be psychologists.

Stereotypes and Social Constructions

The problem of reference is complicated by the fact that there are many other terms which loosely refer to similar things. Stereotypes, or stereotypic understandings of Aboriginal people or Aboriginal culture are social representations of a sort, stripped down to essentials and replete with expectations and attribution biases. There also exist stereotypes about psychology and psychologists, and these clearly differ depending upon one's cultural orientation (e.g., Davidson, Hancock, Izod, Muirhead, & Martins, 1986; Davidson, 1992). Confusion is encouraged by the fact that professional and academic understandings are also coloured by social representations and stereotypes (for example, western psychological accounts of Aboriginal culture and behaviour), and, in turn, popular understandings and representations of professional and academic psychology often reflect stereotypic understandings.

Finally, social representations are in part synonymous with social constructions, with the way in which individuals and societies impose meaning and order on the world and human behaviour. Individuals and cultures make each other up, continually, interdependently; people construct realities, values, social problems, disciplines and cultural identities. This is hardly a novel observation (e.g., Shweder, 1991), but an emphasis on this ubiquitous process is perhaps helpful. It allows us to understand that sense making at an individual or interpersonal or societal level is what human behaviour is all about, and much of academic and folk psychology as well. Cultural accounts, or accounts that make reference to culture as an explanatory or clarifying construct utilise particular understandings or representations of culture to make their point or argument. The same could be said of psychological accounts.

The Argument

3 There have been recent attempts to come up with a more generic term which would encompass a cross-cultural perspective on indigenous psychologies. That which has been most frequently employed is 'cultural psychology' (e.g., Stigler, Shweder & Herdt, 1990; Shweder, 1991) A definition offered by Shweder is the following:

Cultural psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self and emotion. Cultural psychology is the study of the ways subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground, practitioner and practice live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically and jointly make each other up (p.1).
Why a consideration here of this forest of terms, meanings, representations and shared confusion? I would like to argue that we critically need some analytic clarity with respect to what an 'Aboriginal psychology' could or should be on the one hand, and we need to be able to exercise some critical judgement with respect to 'psychological' accounts of Aboriginal behaviour and phenomena on the other. The first of these matters has been briefly addressed. I would like to, in the time that remains, briefly address the issue of 'psychological accounts' and offer several concluding comments.

Psychological 'analyses' and accounts are increasingly used by 'experts' and lay persons to explain a spectrum of problems and behavioural phenomena in Aboriginal communities. A consideration of these accounts allows us to get a better sense of what constitutes a 'psychological analysis' for politician and lay person.

Some brief observations on the representation of 'psychological approaches' to alcohol-related violence in Aboriginal communities

A substantial problem exists, in my view, with respect to popular and other discipline understandings of the 'psychological' literature with respect to Aboriginal society, 'social problems' and alcohol-related violence. There is an assumption that: a) there exists a substantive and research-based psychological literature on this issue, b) that discussions of 'psychological' phenomena (like self-esteem, identity, prejudice) or 'psychological' explanations (like powerlessness, 'rage turned inwards') necessarily equate with professional psychological writing and analyses, and c) that, notwithstanding the assertion of important cultural differences, it is reasonable to simply apply Western psychological models and understanding to Aboriginal society, as underlying psychological processes such as emotions, self constructions and human relations are universal. Each of these assumptions is problematic on many counts.

The psychological literature which addresses Aboriginal society is to date very selective and inadequate, with there existing no more than a handful of edited volumes of typically multidisciplinary not exclusively psychological papers and no more than two or three single authored works by psychologists. Areas of particular neglect include the social problems area, Aboriginal health and mental health issues; the psychological side of kinship in terms of relatedness, self-construction; and the areas of emotional experience, expression and coping, etc. (Reser, 1991a). The cross-cultural psychology and the cross-cultural counselling literatures are helpful to a point, but are not informed by the Australian historical or cultural experience, particularly as regards indigenous frames of reference and understandings.

Discussions of such matters as self-esteem, identity problems and self-injury in Aboriginal communities are typically not written by psychologists, make reference to dated and culturally biased notions of self construal and interpersonal dynamics, and make little or no reference to the cross cultural psychological and social science literature on other cultures, particularly indigenous fourth world communities. The issue of cross-cultural and within culture perspectives and analyses is a profoundly important issue which is often glossed

over in the context of phenomena where the discourse is often more 'professional' and less academic (medical and legal). Adequate analyses of phenomena such as alcohol-related violence in Aboriginal communities must frame such discussions and analyses in an informed cross-cultural context which includes other fourth world indigenous cultures (Reser, 1990).

The issue of what is a professional psychological analysis carries important implications with respect to evidence and research. Few of the available 'studies' on alcohol-related violence in Aboriginal communities would meet minimal methodological requirements for making informed conclusions or generalisations about particular variables or interactive dynamics. It is interesting that the actual data referred to in most nonprofessional 'psychological' analyses is actually case study data, often second and third hand, often collected and compiled by non social scientists, often based on interpretations by individuals who have no particular expertise with respect to Aboriginal communities and/or the individual in question. The legal case material utilised by Wilson (1982, 1985), and so often referred to by others is a case in point. This is not to say that such material is not valuable and informative; it is to say, however, that this is not research data which can reliably inform us about the complexities of stimulus factors, emotional experience, and other intra- and inter-individual dynamics involved in alcohol related instances of interpersonal violence in Aboriginal communities.

Does this possibly inaccurate representation of relevant psychological material matter? I think it does. Non-professional 'psychological' analyses in terms of self-esteem, frustration-aggression, and internalised oppression have very different intervention implications from more accepted psychological analyses in terms of poor coping skills, poor mental health status, co-morbidity of alcohol with substantive physical and mental health problems, situational and family conflict and stressors, acquired brain damage, peer group socialisation, loss, the psychodynamics of intimate relationships, anger and anger management, culture specific loneliness, separation anxiety, boredom and the like. These latter considerations carry very different intervention and prevention implications in terms of assessment, risk identification, counselling, clinical intervention and ultimately, our understanding of the nature and complexity of alcohol related violence (Reser, 1991a,b).

The issue of alcohol and violence is but one example of a pervasive social construction of 'psychological' explanations for Aboriginal 'problems'. Other examples include lack of self-esteem, depression, fragmented cultural identity, and transgenerational post traumatic stress disorder. This is not to say that such considerations are not important or that they cannot help us to understand, in part, the experienced conflict and adjustment problems of many Aboriginal - and non Aboriginal - individuals. Such popularised, and pseudo-psychological accounts, however, ignore the complex, interactive reality of other critical determinants of adjustment, and ironically create a new and pernicious type of victimisation, one in which the blame attaches to external structural and political/power considerations while the individual is encouraged to identify with and draw strength from their condition as victim. Such a framing of one's circumstances is of course a motivational and behaviour change cul de sac, a strange inversion of the typical blaming the victim.
charge levelled at psychologists, and is ultimately disempowering and counter-therapeutic rather than being liberating and empowering (e.g., Steele, 1991).

Concluding Thoughts

There have been many recent discussions of the relevance of psychology to the problems of indigenous peoples (Misra, 1993; Sloan, 1991; Sampson, 1991; Sinha, 1990; Thomas & Veno, 1991). Such questions raise the more general issue of the inherent cultural biases of the professional and academic discipline of psychology. There are many substantive and indeed profoundly important issues here, ranging from epistemology, to methodology, to meaning, to usefulness and social relevance. What is important to note, however, is that throughout this debate, there has been a reluctance to go down the track of culture-specific psychologies.

Just as interdependence between European social psychology and U.S. social psychology is ultimately highly beneficial (Jaspers, 1986), third world psychology would be far more effective and useful to third world societies if it developed in cooperation with first- and second-world psychologies, rather than in isolation from them. However, for such development to involve a genuine exchange of knowledge and experience between psychologists in the three worlds, there is a need for greater awareness among all psychologists about the state of psychology around the globe (Moghaddam, 1987, p. 918).

Moghaddam, like other authors, is using 'indigenous' in a rather idiosyncratic and confusing way, but it is worth emphasising that he is talking about a generic, cross-cultural psychology, developed by third-world psychologists. There is no suggestion of a culture-specific 'psychology', or an 'indigenous' psychology developed by non-psychologists.

If Aboriginal psychologists and/or non-psychologists with an interest in psychology are genuinely interested in the indigenous psychologies of Australia, these already exist, as do the indigenous psychologies of non-Aboriginal people in Australia. They certainly do not need to be 'developed'. What is required is that this corpus of cultural understandings and

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4 Kim, in his 1990 contribution to Brislin's *Applied Cross-cultural Psychology*, chooses to provide a definition for indigenous psychology deriving from Webster's definition of 'indigenous'. To his credit he does refer back to Wundt's 'volkerpsychologie' and a bit of psychological history, but the ignoring of a far more recent, substantive and particularly relevant literature is perplexing, to say the least. His explication of this new term is telling. He argues that "each culture needs to develop its own indigenous understanding of its own culture", that indigenous psychology does not assume cultural relativity ... it emphasises the need to search for "psychological universals" and that psychologists should develop their own indigenous psychologies (italics those of the present author). Each of these assertions stand in stark contrast to the views and assumptions of the indigenous
knowledge be documented in such a way that it can be systematised, recorded and communicated. Such material would be invaluable both in the training of cross-culturally competent psychologists and in enriching the discipline of psychology. The irony is that this has never really been done with Western folk psychologies, despite the rapid growth of the discipline and practice of psychology. The tragedy is that the indigenous psychological assumptions, experience and symptoms of Aboriginal clients, to the extent that these are understood by non Aboriginal practitioners or researchers, are routinely compared and contrasted with academic psychological understandings.

Many of the issues implicit and explicit at this conference have been debated at length - in Australia in other venues and by a spectrum of disciplinary and cultural voices (e.g., Brady, 1990; Cowlishaw, 1993; Australian Journal of Anthropology, 1991, 2, whole issue; Oceania, 63, whole issue; Reser, 1991a; b). What is different are the protagonists, the focus on psychology and mental health, and the fact that this current form of the debate has been brought to the fore by pressing community need, the saliency of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the saliency of Aboriginal health and mental health issues in political forums, and the prospect of a professional course in psychology designed for Aboriginal students (Reser, 1993). One might also note that there is another and understandable political agenda here, with Psychology being viewed by many Aboriginal people as the most pragmatic and opportune avenue for professional accreditation in the mental health field and arena.

The problem of voices is an important issue. It implicitly raises/addresses issues of authority, legitimacy and accountability, i.e., who knows, who can legitimately speak, and who vets and critiques what is said.

I interpret some of the 'crisis' literature in various areas of psychology, for example, as expressing this concern with how the diversity of voices claiming equal status in representing the nature and meaning of human experience can be accommodated while maintaining the discipline as a proper science.... I believe that all share the same underlying concern with establishing a diversity of voices to represent human experience. For some, this has meant deconstructing the legitimacy of any and all forms that pretend to offer one authoritative voice to interpret human experience. For others, this challenge has taken a more self-affirming political stance, arguing on behalf of the equal standing and viability of multiple ways of knowing and representing their groups' experience. Whichever form it has taken, however, the thrust of this historical turn is towards granting voice, that is, authority, control and legitimacy, to multi-vocal worldviews to replace the unequivocal hegemony that the conventional Western psychology movement (e.g., Cole, 1991; Heelas & Lock, 1981; Lutz & White, 1986; Marcus & Fisher, 1986; Shweder, 1991; White & Kirkpatrick, 1985).
formulations have achieved in science and in culture more generally (Sampson, 1991, pp. 276-277).

A recurrent problem with contemporary and past 'psychological' discourse on Aboriginal issues and concerns is that the views expressed and analyses provided are often by non-psychologists, and are often poorly informed by Aboriginal cultural context or by contemporary cross-cultural research and experience. One might note that it is also increasingly the case that culturally informed perspectives by non Aboriginal psychologists tend to be viewed as illegitimate, while any statement on psychological matters by an Aboriginal speaker may be given blanket credibility and authority by virtue of cultural identification. Clearly this is a lethal situation in terms of informed psychological intervention and a damaging situation in terms of professional credibility. An arguably more useful development is the adoption of a global perspective, a perspective which itself challenges traditional western psychology and requires both a new understanding of personhood and an involvement and concern with third and fourth world issues and collective experiences. Such a globalisation of psychology has been advocated by a number of psychologists (e.g., Sampson, 1989;1991; Sloan, 1991).

References


CONSTRUCTION OF ABORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH: A STARVING SPIRITUALITY IN A STARVING BODY

Darcy Bolton

James Cook University

This paper examines the construction of Aboriginal mental health, focusing on the United Nations working definition of fourth world people. Australian Aborigines' fourth world experience includes alienation and dispossession of land through colonisation as a major contributing factor to Aboriginal ill mental health. Many people working in the Aboriginal mental health area generally agree that Aboriginal mental health is a social construction. Specific factors include the enforced restriction of social movement and the forced restriction of social organisation along with the loss of resources, having a profound, detrimental effect on Australian Aborigines. During this discussion references are made to Government policies and Acts that were enforced upon Australian Aborigines. Evidence is drawn from research which shows the visible manifestations of Aboriginal people being excluded from resources, wealth and knowledge of the society which created and maintains the physical conditions in which many are forced to live. This paper examines Aboriginal psychology from an holistic approach and in conclusion challenges psychology to accept a new paradigm; Aboriginal psychology and spirituality.

Associate Professor Errol West, Director of the Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation Research and Development at James Cook University, has responded to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody by proposing to establish a degree in Indigenous Psychology with an emphasis on mental health.

The rationale for this course is that positive mental health is a fundamental human right. Every person has the right to practise life skills in harmony within themselves, with family, peers, extended society and nature. The exercise of life skills pertains to the holistic practice of a person's culture, especially spirituality. Positive mental health results from the perpetual opportunity, public and private, to exercise and develop every individual in a self-focusing way.

The absence of appropriate social, political and personal opportunities to exercise these rights results in disequilibrium for the individual. This disequilibrium occurs from the loss of the process by which people naturally acquire a sense of self; both personally and collectively. One common cause is the practice of forced denial of the right to develop and exercise ones personal and collective life skills. This stems from individual and collective injustices at all levels in all societies.

For all people this can lead to a profound sense of loss, disorientation, disempowerment and frustration. Indigenous people can experience morbid aggression/depression and lethal despair.

Before we can examine Aboriginal mental health today, we must be sure of the past. We need to understand the past, we need to understand Aboriginal cultures, structures, the social systems, and how they work. Australian Aborigines had successfully lived in harmony with the land in excess of forty thousand years and were the first race of people to have a complex social system.

Historically, the wants of Aboriginal people of Australia had always been satisfied by adequate means, thus providing Aborigines with abundance of time for leisure and spiritual pursuits. Anthropologist, Marshall Shallins (1974, p. 1) described Australian Aborigines as the "original affluent society". The comparison at that time was made to the average peasant and working class European lifestyle, by comparing time spent in daily subsistence, leisure and spiritual pursuits. Whilst some Europeans were starving from failed crops and a potato famine, Australian Aborigines with their hunting and gathering lifestyle lived in abundance.

Australian Aborigines do not enjoy the same status today. In fact, Australian Aborigines along with the Indians of North America and the Maori people of New Zealand are classified as fourth world people, as defined by the United Nations (1987). The United Nations held an independent commission into humanitarian issues and described fourth world people as those having experienced colonisation, resulting in their minority status in relation to the dominant society. Fourth world people are characterised by alienation and dispossession of land, resulting in the loss of their economic base, their autonomy, and the loss of traditional social structure. Hence the indigenous people have been forced to assimilate into the structure of the dominant society (Reid & Trompf, 1991).

Further findings from the United Nations Independent Commission inquiry demonstrate that Aboriginal health and mental ill health result from alienation and dispossession of land and forced assimilation. The working definition the United Nations use of fourth word people is: "composed of the existing descendants of the people who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived from other parts of the world, overcame them and by means of conquest, settlement or other means reduced them to a non-dominant or a colonial situation; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form a part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are dominant" (ICIHI, 1987, p. 7).

Aboriginal mental health can be traced to a broad set of historical conditions, including alienation and dispossession of land, the destruction of traditional social systems and the dispersal of Aboriginal clans. This resulted in small mobile groups being rounded up and placed into large stationary groups, forced assimilation, and protection resulting in oppression. Whilst the United Nations inquiry gives us a premise to work from, we can confidently say that Aboriginal mental health is a social construction. Atkinson (1990) describes the colonisation well:
In 1788 the bridegroom came uninvited and unwanted, intent more on rape and forceful oppression than on developing a relationship of mutually beneficial co-existence. In fact the union was never legitimised by the intruder and; in the process used to dominate, deny rights to responsibility and dispossess, many more acts of violence were committed. Indeed, the law was used and legislation passed to legitimise these acts of violence. The invaders ignored, defied and abused the principles on which their own judicial and parliamentary system was based (p. 4).

Massacres took place in every state, from the time of Governor Phillip continuing to the early 1900s it was believed that killing an Aborigine was NOT a crime. Police allowed settlers to protect their stolen land by slaying the original, indigenous owners. Accounts of these massacres can be found in Evans, Saunders and Cronin (1972); Loos (1982); Reynolds (1981); Rowley (1972); Roberts, Parsons and Russell (1975); Kamien (all cited in Miller, 1992). At my home town of Brewarrina in Western NSW over two hundred Aborigines were herded into a dry creek bed and shot. Only one adult and a child survived when the man laid on top of the child and pretended to be dead, then crept away under the cover of dark. This institutionalised violence and racism throughout the years has left a psychological scar on Aboriginal Australians, also on the subconscious of the invader.

The need to rationalise alienation and dispossession of land through the use of force, resulted in the devastation of Aboriginal society. The coloniser contended that it was psychologically desirable to confirm the belief that Aborigines were inferior and should be treated as vermin. Hence dispossession of land in a direct way could be seen as fostering and perpetuating racism. Again it was psychologically desirable to justify the actions of the invader on the grounds that Aborigines had no government, and no law, therefore they had no title to the land. Australia became stratified into two racial classes separated by a huge gap in status, living standards, legal rights and cultural practices. With the introduction of English law into the colony of New South Wales, the Aboriginal population became subject to, and entitled to, the protection of that law in the same manner as every other person within the colony. (Australian Court Acts, 1828). Under the Australian Court Acts 1828 there was to be no distinction between Aborigines and the European race. However the 1867 Constitution Act gave general power to the Parliament of Queensland to:

- legislate for the peace, welfare and the good government of Queensland
- unquestionably extends to the aboriginal [sic] race in acquiring the arts of European civilisation, legislation was designed to protect its members and differentiate them in certain aspects in the administration of law became essential (The Constitution Act of 1987 p. 2).

It was to this end that the following 19 Acts were passed.

In 1881 New South Wales appointed a protector of Aborigines, and by 1883 a Board for the protection of Aborigines had been established. This was to be the end of the policy of extinction.

- 1884 The Native Labourers Protection Act 1884.


The Statute Law Revision Act 1908.

The State Children's Act 1911.

The Aborigines (Training of Children) Act 1923.

The Aborigines Ordinance Act 1925, amended 1928.

The elections acts amendment Act 1930, s. 8 introduced new section 1 IA into the principal Act disqualifying Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and their "half-castes" from enrolling to vote and new section 1 IB Duty of principal Electoral officer to remove from the electoral roll any name subject to 11A. (It was not till 1969 some two years after that historical referendum that Aboriginal people were allowed to vote and not compulsory until 1984-5).

The Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act 1939.


The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Act 1965.


The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Qld Discriminatory Laws Act).

1975 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait (Qld Reserves and Community Self-Management Act) 1978.

The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976


These are but a few Acts that had devastated the original inhabitants of this country.

The institutionalised racism and discrimination that was inflicted on Aborigines and their "half-castes" resulting from these acts and policies have left a psychological scar with us. For example, the early policies of extinction, the dispersal policy, segregation policy, followed by the integration policy, the assimilation policy, the self-management policy and now the self-determination policy. We are not talking ancient history, this is living history, I have personally experienced living under the Assimilation Policy and the Aboriginal Protection Act, for example by not being allowed into High School because of my Aboriginal heritage. It was still possible to be excluded from school on the following ground; uncleanliness, without a medical certificate, home conditions or opposition from the White community. It was perceived that education was wasted on Aborigines. It was not until 1972 just over twenty years ago that this section was withdrawn from the headmasters' handbook (Sydney Aboriginal Education Unit 1982).

With the establishment of the protection Act 1909-1963 a Protector of Aborigines was appointed and under s.4. (1) the Commissioner of Police was the Chairman of the Protection Board. Police in country towns were the protectors and prosecutors of
Aborigines, yet they were responsible to the Aboriginal Protection Board for the good behaviour of Aborigines. Under s.8. of the Aboriginal Protection Board, police, as officers of the Board, had the right to enter any Aboriginal reserve or home, at any time, with out any reason. In my home town the Aboriginal Protection Board treated Aborigines so badly that they were referred to as the Persecution Board.

Police could walk into an Aboriginal home and confiscate possessions, remove Aborigines from reserves and, on a regular basis, take children from their parents along with the Welfare Board and then place them in Welfare or Training homes many hundreds of miles from their families. Some of my cousins were taken away, and in particular three girls were removed and sent to Cootamundra Girls' home where they stayed until they were old enough to be sent out as domestics to white families.

The psychological torment and anxiety of being taken away and never seeing their parents again is still hurting today. My cousins' parents passed away before the girls could trace their families. We were only reunited again in the late eighties. The loss of identity, the loss of extended family, the loss of cultural beliefs have driven many Aborigines to lethal despair grief.

Today Aborigines may wear the white man's clothes, speak his language well, and adopt some of the customs, but it is necessary for us to go beneath the surface of conformity, for it is here that we can discover what it is that Australian Aborigines refuse to part with, then you will have the key to Aboriginal Psychology. It is my task at James Cook University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre to articulate this and other "keys" and establish the course.

I see this course as timely, not only responding to recommendations from Aboriginal Deaths In Custody, but also last year being the International Year of the Worlds Indigenous People. To develop this course we, as psychologists, have an advantage over anthropologists and sociologists because I think you will find that Aborigines are psychologically less changed even though we appear to be different as a result of colonisation. The change is only on the surface. If you look at "traditional life" as it was, it may appear to be different today, but the beliefs, customs and gestures are retained because it has a special value in Aboriginal psychology.

To understand the psychological basis of social behaviour we need to begin our work before our culture is fully assimilated. Despite the various Acts and policies and the influence of forced assimilation by colonisation, there are still sufficient numbers of urban, community and traditional Aborigines who have maintained some or all of our characteristics, customs and attitudes. Many retain traditional cultural rites as well as compensatory cultural rites and mores

The retention of some of our customs has psychological value in strengthening our hold on life and survival since the attempted destruction of our social system. What you need to understand is that whatever has been retained is considered by us to be most significant to
Aboriginal Psychology. The deeply entrenched beliefs and mental attitudes are likely to survive forever. Hence we need to understand Aboriginal spirituality and the holistic approach to life. The void between Aboriginal and Western psychology needs to be closed.

To achieve this psychologists need to understand Aboriginal spirituality and the holistic approach to life. However, before this can be accomplished an understanding of how the principle roots of Australian indigenous spirituality (the Dreaming) affects all aspects of Aboriginal traditional lifestyles must occur.

Aboriginal religion is the Dreaming through which the people's total social ideology is relayed. Through sacred oral histories and ceremonies their day to day life is governed by people performing their required duties, drawing the people, the land and the spiritual together. Aboriginal social order is based on kinship structures with elders being dominant.

They believed that our spiritual, land-bound ancestors committed the same "rights" and "wrongs" as today's Aboriginal man. In comparison, Europeans live in a nuclear family basis in which is the psychology of moral and immoral dividing the people, the land and spirituality.

Hendricks and Hefferan (1993) describes Aboriginal spirituality in the following terms:

Spirituality is the inner strength of "being". Spirituality of Aborigines is a relationship between the Great Spirits and the heart that allows the mind to live in peace and harmony with the human (p. 31).

Aboriginal spirituality has never been understood by non-Aborigines. Spirituality depends upon the principles of societal beliefs, attitudes and values.

Likewise Aboriginal spirituality is the heart of a supernatural belief ....... Aborigines' relationship to the land is far more meaningful than that of a physical and materialistic nature. It is the Dreaming; and spirituality dwells in the land (Hendricks and Hefferan, 1993, p. 32).

What they are saying is that the spiritual link between the spiritual oral histories and Aborigines relies on the land to strengthen the spirit within, because without this, Aboriginal life is psychologically barren. The psychological value in Aboriginal life relates to the spiritual oral histories of the land and the social system. The totality of Aboriginal history has become crystallised and preserved in song, dance, story and paintings handed down from generation to generation. Elders gained great satisfaction in being able to explain themselves, and the world in which they resided and thus became great orators.

As hunters and gatherers, Aboriginal mental alertness required extreme sensory awareness, ingenuity, sustained muscle control, undivided attention with inexhaustible patience and concentration of purpose in order to survive.
The social system and customs, with their underlying psychology have been moulded in adaptation to all ecological zones throughout Australia. The diversity of things in which Aborigines found edible shows that as a race they have served a very long apprenticeship. This intimate acquaintance with food and its values indicates an accumulation of experience dating back many thousands of years.

Quite often today we hear of the "Aboriginal problem" with the negative stereotype remarks such as being dirty, lazy and unmotivated. Consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs and motivation. When we examine Maslow's theory we find that Aborigines do not equate with the first step by fulfilling their physiological needs such as thirst, hunger or shelter. As we know you must at least partially satisfy these needs before those that are higher can become important (Hilgard, Atkinson & Atkinson, 1985). Today most Aboriginal people live in extreme poverty, substandard housing, are starving, or are welfare dependent and have a low level of education. In effect their health problems resemble that of several underdeveloped countries.

Many of our people have turned to drugs and alcohol and they are being institutionalised at a very high rate. Over two hundred years of alienation and dispossession of land, raping of the body, mind and soul, many need to find themselves again.

Some need culturally appropriate counselling while some need traditional healing. With traditional healing practices, Aboriginal people had a diversity of bush medicines and a vast knowledge of their natural therapeutics. Besides taking the medicine there would be a lot of touching and rubbing of the person who was ill, along with sympathy, empathy and love. The psychology behind traditional healing was not only to treat the symptom, but to treat the mind and the soul as well.

We still have a lot of research to do and a long way to go. We also have a lot to learn about Aboriginal psychology and it must be done now before Aborigines are assimilated. I have identified three main areas that we should concentrate our research efforts on. They are:

* The fourth world experience, that Aboriginal health and mental ill health can be traced to alienation and dispossession of land through colonisation and forced assimilation.

* Aboriginal mental ill health is a social construction.

* Aboriginal Psychology and Spirituality a holistic approach.

We challenge the Australian Psychological Society to accept a new paradigm in Psychology and that is Aboriginal Psychology.
REFERENCES

Aboriginal mental health in the Peninsula and Torres Strait Region has received scant documentation. Torres Strait Islander mental health statistics are fewer still.

The Peninsula and Torres Strait Regional Health Authority is on the verge of commencing a wide-ranging service aimed at addressing the mental health needs of remote Aboriginal communities. Employment of Aboriginal mental health trainers and subsequent community-based mental health workers are a pillar of this proposal.

This paper examines the positive and negative aspects of Aboriginal Health Workers employed in their own communities. It is prompted by the advent of the new service aimed at providing a service of benefit to the people while being cognisant of worker wellbeing. It posits that the advantages of Aboriginal employment are probably well-known and expounded often in the context of increasing Aboriginal self-determination and involvement. However, this can lead to a potentially dysfunctional assumption on the part of employers and others which could be of detriment to the service and alienating for the workers involved.

This paper draws from the personal experience of the author and from multiple worker interviews. Notably, it is acknowledged that the factors considered are not peculiar to Aboriginal people but are common to many work settings. Given the salience of the issues discussed however, it is important that they be considered in any new program and indeed, any existing venture if the barriers to better health for all are to be addressed.

There's an old saying, which goes: You don't have to be crazy to work in mental health but it helps. Now I'm not saying that we are crazy but that we work in a very challenging and sometimes very difficult area. It can be difficult because it makes us feel certain things which might be hard to take. It might be difficult because we might be called on to use European medicines or hospitals. It might be challenging because we might not understand what is going on, or we might not like the explanation. It can also be very stressful because of the demands which might be placed on us rather than looking at the clients. I want to discuss the issues facing those people who might work with, live with, or care for people with a mental health problem.

First of all, I would like to share with you some of my experiences of working in the mental health field. I would like to emphasise that this has not always been a smooth road...
and has made me think very hard about who I am and what I can do for other people. I guess I want to tell you about some of the "bumps".

I would also like to describe a new Aboriginal Mental Health Program being started in Northern Queensland and how the mental health needs of the employees are to be looked after. The reason I am doing this is so the mental health of future mental health workers might be considered, and not assumed to take care of itself.

What I hope to say by the end of the talk is that you don’t have to be crazy because you work in mental health, as long as you and other people, help to look after your feelings.

Who am I?

I’m 24 years old and I was born and raised in Cairns. My ancestors come from the Torres Straits, from T.I. and Hammond Island. When I left school in 1986, I had the feeling that I wanted to help people. I wasn’t sure how or who. I did well enough in school to go to university where I eventually studied psychology because I felt that would help me understand people a little better. Four years later I left University with a degree in psychology, still not really sure of what to do or where I was going.

Since then, I have worked with disabled people, and in the alcohol and drug field. For the last year I have been employed as a psychologist with Community Health in Cairns. I work in the hospital and in the community so I get to see people when they are very sick in hospital, and when they are better in the community. I see people, no matter what race or colour they are. I guess this also means that mental illness doesn’t discriminate.

Not too long ago I saw a young Aboriginal man, about the same age as me, bright and good looking with what seemed like a lot of potential. He got drunk sometimes and along with this came anger and destructiveness. I really thought that we could work on this and I felt we were able to communicate well. However, not too long after this, I got a call from his girlfriend to say that this young man had taken his life. What was I to think? Was it my fault? Could I have done more? Did I miss something? Why did he do it? So many questions and so many feelings.

No amount of training or study can prepare you for things like this. Unfortunately, it is only something that comes through experience. Perhaps other people here today have had similar experiences or know of someone who has.

The people I worked with assured me that I had done as much as I could have. I guess I’m lucky working where I do because I have a lot of experienced people around me who I can talk to and share my feelings with. They’ve been there and can appreciate what I’m going through. This sort of support is very important.

Tug of war

At other times I've felt like I was in tug of war... and I was the rope! Picture this...
I was asked to see an Aboriginal lady who was suicidal. Voices in her head were telling her to hang herself. She was going to do this in her house. She had been in hospital before for the same reason and was "going off" again in her community.

On the one hand, my training, experience and observation told me that this lady was at risk and that she would be safer in hospital. There she would be cared for by experienced doctors and competent nurses who would be able to look after her continuously.

On the other hand, my intuition told me that to remove the lady from the community might reinforce the negative view about the hospital by taking her away from her family and friends and her home. Many of the locals had said that they would pray for her and keep an eye on her in more familiar surroundings. And thus the dilemma arose - what to do? Who was right?

She finally agreed to come along voluntarily. But the staring faces of the locals as we drove out of town, and the look of uncertainty on her own face affected me deeply. I wasn't sure whether to feel pleased for helping her, or the traitor for removing her from her community. I felt torn - that's probably the word that best describes it.

In reality, the decision lay with the doctor. But the situation really challenged my beliefs and values. The memories still come back from time to time. It made me ask "Which way is the right way?"

These questions and feelings can make you stressed. The thing is, if you're over-stressed, not only your health, but the service you offer your clients suffers! This doesn't only apply to working in mental health. I am asked by many health workers to help with their stress or problems. These are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who work in sexual health, health promotion, alcohol and drugs and the like, who are also asking for assistance for their own wellbeing which is being threatened by the demands of work, or home, or family. But the appropriate support to deal with these issues has generally not been there.

From their stories and my own experience, being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and working with our people brings with it other considerations that might not be as common in a European, or white context.

What if the people we are dealing with are our relations (which they often are)? This is more likely in remote communities or in the islands of the Torres Strait. What if we don't feel comfortable with what we have to say to people? What if we fear that what we have to say to our community might not be accepted and we are looked at differently as a result? It might be said, "Well, you just get on with it and do the work". To these people I
Garvey say you are absolutely right. The work gets done... but at what expense and at whose expense?

Future plans - considering the mental health of mental health workers in the north

The Peninsula and Torres Strait Regional Health Authority is about to start a program specifically aimed at addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health in our region. Three Aboriginal mental health workers will be employed who will be responsible for monitoring and follow-up of people throughout the Cape and within Cairns itself.

These Mental Health Trainers will undergo thorough instruction in hospital and community settings. Most importantly there will be a concentration on the need for respect for all people and this is an area where communication and cooperation for the sake of our clients, and ourselves, is essential. It is from this partnership that our way of dealing with mental health will grow. Therefore, the success of the Aboriginal mental Health Trainers is important in and of itself, and for the future expansion of services to be offered.

Mental illness as we know and describe it, is new to Aboriginal and Islander communities. Given this, I feel that there should not be an imposition of western, medical, psychiatric or psychological models. These theories as they are explained and described at present would hold little credence and have little meaning in such settings. It is not just a matter of changing the words to make them "simpler". In a sense, it will probably call for the creation of a new language for mental health based on a synthesis of indigenous and imported philosophies. Most importantly, indigenous explanations and philosophies should not be ignored!

The education should be a two-way learning process in which the informed trainers actively contribute to the structure of the program and the strategies employed. Only then will the outcome represent the best of both worlds, only then can the course claim to be sensitive, appropriate, and thorough, and only then can the people involved feel truly involved in the reconciliation and solution to a longstanding problem.

This previous section fits into my story in the following ways. I hope that I am able to contribute to the construction of these services. And through my experiences I hope that I am able to assist in maintaining the mental health of our future mental health workers. The issues are those with which I am currently dealing. The second and more important reason for my wish is that the issues, the area, and the people, are close to my heart.

The never ending story.....

I had almost managed to convince myself not to write. I wondered if my observations would be of any worth and whether I was the only one to have had these experiences. Three factors made me persevere.
One was my conversations with other workers who told me that I was not alone in my experience and that others had similar experiences in their own fields. Secondly, I thought that if I and others had felt this way, then it was likely that other people coming into the field could also be under the same pressures and constraints. Thirdly, I felt that it was important that a black person take this opportunity to speak on the subject of mental health.

This is a testing time. It is a time where the theme for the International year of Indigenous People is perfectly suitable. That theme - Indigenous People: A New Partnership, and indeed the theme of this conference reflect the title of this paper and the heart of my observations. A partnership which breaks down the barriers to greater communication suggests that no single perspective dominates, that is, it is not "black or white". Rather a partnership suggests input from a number of perspectives - shades of grey; or "shades of brown" if you will.

Ultimately, this is not a black or white thing. I suspect that the issues raised are not only applicable to black persons in a predominantly white structure. Indeed I am certain that closer sensitivity and co-operation would be welcome in any setting where people work closely together. The area of mental health concentrates the need for respect for all people and is an area where communication and cooperation for the sake of our clients and ourselves is essential.
CONSTRUCTION OF ABORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH

Barbara Miller

Cairns, Queensland

Psychology is often seen by Aboriginal people as another tool of the racist coloniser and oppressor. Aboriginal land was stolen - land which is the basis of Aboriginal identity and spirituality through relating to totemic animals, birds or fish. The land was also the basis of Aboriginal sustenance and economic independence, and Aboriginal people became dependent on a cash economy with high unemployment as hunting and fishing areas were alienated or destroyed. Aboriginal government by tribal elders has been weakened firstly by repressive white administrations engendering learned helplessness and then by elected organisations by younger educated Munis (Aborigines). While Aboriginal culture has been resilient and adaptive, many Aborigines no longer speak their own language and some Aborigines are in the predicament where white anthropologists are interpreters of traditional culture. Traditional social control processes have been eroded as Aboriginal people have been forced to live by white law. Aboriginal health has reached third world standards while traditional healers have been forced to go underground.

Psychology is seen in the context of academic colonisation - trying to take another resource away from Aboriginal people - their knowledge of themselves - and use it to further the careers of psychologists who must "publish or perish". What we need is a decolonisation of the attitudes of white Australians to Aborigines so that a colonial mentality is replaced by an attitude of respect for Munis. Psychology should be harnessed to empower Aboriginal people and communities through public education and public relations campaigns, positive small group interaction, and changing discriminatory power structures.

While community psychology needs to be the most important focus, by empowering Aboriginal communities to take charge of Aboriginal mental health, we also need decolonisation therapy for Aborigines whose lives have been destroyed by colonisation. I shall return to this point.

We are beginning to see the articulation of an indigenous psychology which has always existed within its own terms but has been ignored by Australia's western dominated psychology. White psychologists have previously defined mental health, and then judged Aborigines in terms of their ethnocentric values. They have often been blind to the occultation stress that Aboriginal society has had to deal with.

We need to strengthen Aboriginal support systems e.g. kinships and other networks and to promote effective traditional and adaptive coping mechanisms. The collective self-esteem of Aboriginal people needs to be restored through promoting positive Aboriginal role models and community education to overcome stereotyping.

The training of Aboriginal psychologists is an important part of this process. While Sue (1988) maintains that cultural, or values, match between therapist and client is more

important than ethnic match, use of psychological services is likely to increase with increasing numbers of Muni or Koori psychologists. James Cook is presently developing a curriculum for a psychology course open to all but specifically geared to the needs of Aboriginal psychologists in that it will:

1. Have a holistic approach including Aboriginal spirituality, traditional healing and personal development of students.
2. Have a community focus with preventative programs and community-driven research.

Such courses around the country will enable the development of culturally appropriate counselling - what I have called decolonisation therapy where Aboriginal people are enabled and empowered to overcome feelings of grief, powerlessness, alienation and depression at loss of land and culture and loss of family members due to suicide or violence where government policy has split families. Race memories of the massacres of Aboriginal people have resulted from the pain and bitterness of these memories being passed on from generation to generation with resultant feelings of hate, anger, frustration, shame, grief, depression, powerlessness and alienation. Distressed behaviour patterns are also passed on via modelling. It is this pain, and the knowledge that Aboriginal people constitute too small a group to regain control of Australia by force, or by peaceful means, that leads Aboriginal people to displace their aggression against other Aborigines (through domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, homicide and assault) rather than against white Australians. Tailor noted this issue in the Alwyn Peter case (Wilson, 1982). Aggression and oppression are internalised as the negative images society presents of Aborigines are accepted by them in varying degrees.

There is an important link between violence and self-inflicted injury. Aboriginal people are not as individualistic as Europeans, the boundary between self and family is not clearly defined and family violence may be perceived as similar to violence against the self (Miller, 1992). Alcohol and drug dependence exacerbate other problems at the same time as being a symptom rather than a cause of mental health problems. It is very important that therapy is not used as a tool to encourage client conformity and assimilation to the values and behaviour patterns of those in the power structure. Franz Fanon exposed this colonialist perspective in psychoanalytic therapy. Buchan (as reported by Ramirez, 1990) commenting on Fanon asks: "How can an intervention liberate the patient from social oppression when the therapist-patient relationship itself is suffused with the inequities of the non-reciprocity elitism and sadomasochism of the social order?" (Ramirez, 1990, p272).

Ramirez suggests multicultural therapy as an answer as the client-as-activist phase of multicultural therapy represents a radical departure from traditional forms of therapy. Ramirez (1990), whose work has been with Hispanics and Afro-Americans, says:

The focus of multicultural therapy is on the development of personality and multicultural orientations towards life. In addition, clients are given an
awareness of how they have been victims of mismatch shock and feelings of being different. Clients are empowered to change their environment, helping to create a multicultural society sensitive to diversity and oriented towards peace and cooperation (p. 39).

The Aboriginal community needs to activate an indigenous psychology. Aboriginal psychologists to be trained in culturally appropriate ways and decolonisation of white and black attitudes needs to occur, individually and collectively. Aboriginal mental health workers need to help Aboriginal communities repossess their land and spirituality.

References:


RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Lisa Pollard

In this paper the need for social impact assessment in Aboriginal contexts is outlined, several social impact assessments that have been conducted in Western Australia are summarised and each is then used to illustrate an important issue in social impact assessment. Finally, principles for conducting social impact assessments involving Aboriginal people are outlined.

The Need for Social Impact Assessment

Social impact assessment provides a mechanism for involvement of multiple stakeholders in decision making processes. In resource development projects in Western Australia's north, the major stakeholders have been industry, Aboriginal people and the State Government.

There are strong reasons why each of these groups can benefit from participating in social impact assessments1.

The mining industry's interests in developing a coherent approach for addressing the social impacts of resource development on Aboriginal people are:
To reduce the number and scope of unknown variables which may affect a project.
To have a greater ability to plan and make commercial decisions about projects.
To reduce the likelihood of lengthy disputes and subsequent project delays.

The interests of Aboriginal people in developing a coherent approach to addressing the social impact of resource developments are:
To ensure participation in decisions which affect them and those parts of the environment that are important for cultural, social or economic reasons.
The protection of sites that have cultural importance.
To avoid disruption to communities and efforts to re-establish cohesive social structures.
To develop economic independence through employment enterprise and maintenance of economic activity that is compatible with a traditional lifestyle.

A government's interests in developing a coherent approach for addressing the social impact of resource developments on Aboriginal communities are:

1 The work of Graham Barrett formerly of the Social Impact Unit was used as a basis for these observations.

To reduce the conflict (but not the debate) involved in resource development by addressing the issues up front, before development approval is given.

To fulfil commitments to increasing Aboriginal autonomy and self management.

To ensure that people have the opportunity to influence decisions that may affect them.

To increase the extent to which development projects benefit local communities.

To ensure that developments are socially acceptable to the state.

Social Impact Assessments Involving Aboriginal People in Western Australia

Several social impact assessments involving Aboriginal people have been carried out in Western Australia's North West. In particular several studies have focused on the impacts of the Argyle Diamond Mine. One of the earliest studies was completed by a consultancy firm, Dames and Moore, which looked at environmental and social impacts of the proposed development for the government project approval process.

A later study, the East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project, was a large scale analysis of the impacts of development activity on the East Kimberley Region. This project involved a number of academics from different disciplines and was overseen by the Australian National University in the late 1980s.

As part of the East Kimberley Impact Assessment process an outline of how to conduct social impact assessments in Aboriginal communities was produced (Kesteven, 1987). An analysis of the cumulative effects of colonisation up to and including the Argyle Diamond Mine was undertaken (Donovan, 1986) and an overview of social impact assessment issues for review was produced (Ross & Johnson, 1989).

A further study centred on one of the communities affected by the Argyle Diamond mine and was used as an experiment in participative methodology (Ross, 1988). In other parts of the State, a general assessment of the effects of mining in the Roebourne area in the Pilbara was conducted (Howitt, 1989) and a social impact assessment of the impacts of a uranium mine in Rudall River in the Pilbara was released by the Institute for Science and Technology Policy (ISTP) at Murdoch University (1993).

The overview is discussed first because it provides some background to the development of the Argyle Diamond Mine (ADM). This was perhaps one of the most significant resource developments in Western Australia since the Pilbara was developed for oil and gas, and certainly one of the best documented developments in terms of social impact analysis. The paper highlights the issues concerning compensation for social impacts.

Compensation

In 1980, under the 'Glen Hill Agreement', the Argyle Diamond Mine agreed to provide the Mandangala (Glen Hill) community with $200,000 worth of 'capital items' and $100,000 worth per year thereafter, to increase with inflation and for the life of the mine. The
agreement was extended in 1981 to include Warmun (Turkey Creek) and Woolah (Doon Doon) communities (Ross & Johnson, 1989).

The Argyle Joint Venture was not required to make these payments to Aboriginal people, but established the good neighbour program as a goodwill gesture towards communities in the area.

In 1985 the Western Australian Government introduced the Argyle Social Impact Group's scheme. This scheme extended the good neighbour program to incorporate community groups other than the original Aboriginal communities. The original scheme was amended on the basis that the impacts of the expansion of the town of Kununurra affected more communities than were included in the original agreement.

Ross & Johnson (1989) identified issues that had arisen from nearly a decade of Good Neighbour and Argyle Social Impact Group contributions.

The issues they identified were:

The form and continuation of the scheme. The researchers did not consider the program to be a model example of self determination, however, Aboriginal people in the area obviously did not want to lose the capital injection into the community.

The amount of available money. The income of the mine far outstripped the percentage that Aboriginal people received. Also, some communities were receiving more than others.

Determination of recipients. Should payouts be restricted to incorporated bodies, family groups, individuals, custodians, owners; and on what basis should money be distributed? Issues such as geographic proximity, relationship to the land, traditional ownership also need to be considered.

Purpose of money. Should the money be used for capital purchases only or to fund salaries to employ Aboriginal people? Should the money replace Government grants?

Distribution of money. Who should make decisions about who should receive money?

The extent of Aboriginal involvement. Project teams from the three areas make recommendations to an almost totally white Steering Committee to receive the money.

Management of the fund. A non-Aboriginal executive officer was employed by Argyle Diamond Mine. Aboriginal people had no access to financial statements. Communities were not equipped to do their own purchasing. However, the scheme was easier and quicker to access than Government grants.

These issues remain pertinent for any projects considering compensation to Aboriginal communities in the future.
Community Control Over Social Impact Assessment

Building on the social impact experience of the Argyle Diamond Mine, Ross (1988) worked with Aboriginal communities in the East Kimberley to carry out impact assessment in a way that emphasised Aboriginal control over the study. As Ross expresses it:

The people are calling for forms of research that are under their control, follow their priorities rather than those of the Government or academics, and the methods they can identify with. They wish research to serve them, rather than to be done on them, and to deal with current problems (p. 186).

The study was carried out with Warmun Community and some of its out stations and it attempted to encompass the following elements:
- Mechanisms for community control.
- Emphasis on community values and perspective.
- Embedding of social impact assessment in social and cultural context.
- Research methods that Aboriginal people feel comfortable using and that effectively represent Aboriginal viewpoints.
- A cumulative view, exploring impacts in their historical and regional context.
- Extension of the cumulative view to place Aboriginal aspirations in the context of development in the region, heightening Aboriginal awareness of issues and possible strategies.

During the research, the community opted for story-telling and oral histories as the preferred research method. They exerted control over the researcher by informal methods and they took a cumulative perspective by emphasising the early impacts of colonisation.

Ross's (1988) experience with community controlled social impact assessment provides a basis for deeper consideration of this as a method for conducting assessments in the future. The major lesson is to find solutions that bridge cultural boundaries.

Howitt (1992) also approached some of the issues of community control.

Wherever possible, participatory mechanisms for Aboriginal participation in and control of research on social impacts upon them and their communities should be required. In most instances it should be possible for local or regional Aboriginal community organisations to be funded and engaged as consultants or sub consultants to undertake the research for and writing up of specific sections of the EIS [Environmental Impact Statement]. In all areas they should have complete freedom to employ technical advisers and researchers of their choice (p. 10).

Howitt (1992) focused on the essential act of empowerment that social impact assessments, however incompetent, provide for local communities in that if they choose not to participate or to commission their own study, then they can force their point of view to be listened to, even if it is not acted upon in the final decision. In North America this has led to a legal
process of intervener funding. Howitt sees social impact assessment as a process of local empowerment which seeks to extend the formal process of decision making into the community and make legitimate the standing of "community" in the formal process.

Recognising Cultural Context

A number of issues that relate to social impact assessment in Aboriginal Australia were flagged by Kesteven (1987) and a useful outline to conducting social impact assessments involving Aboriginal communities is provided. However the overriding theme is the difficulty of bridging cultural boundaries and the consequent issues surrounding the use of professionals such as linguists and anthropologists in social impact assessments.

Kesteven (1987) elaborated in some detail the tasks that would be required to complete a baseline study for a social impact assessment of an Aboriginal community, providing a useful working document. She also outlined some techniques for gathering information, including participant observation, the need for economic data, the need for surveys and interview questions to gain perceptual data and the need for other demographic data such as a community census. This approach differed from those commonly used in social impact assessment in that it is based on ethnographic techniques and therefore appropriate to Aboriginal communities. It also implies that those familiar with ethnographic research techniques are necessary to guide or conduct the study.

The interrelationships between different elements of the social and cultural system were highlighted as limiting factors on social impact assessments.

Thus examining social impact assessment is like trying to untangle a tightly woven ball of spaghetti, teasing out the individual strings but at the same time trying to describe each string's entanglement with other strings (Kesteven, 1987, p. 1)

Kesteven (1987) suggested a model for how social impact assessment might be carried out in Australia, given the cultural boundaries that separate Aboriginal Australians from those of a European background. Her model diverges from those discussed previously because it attempts to fulfil objectives that are specific to Aboriginal people. She suggests that social impact assessments should be consistent with Aboriginal aspirations such as; to understand the situation of the Aborigines concerned in order to prevent undesirable outcomes; to provide Aborigines or Aboriginal organisations with strategies to deal with developments on Aboriginal land; to learn from past mistakes; to present an interesting case study for scholarship; to help in the formulation of government policy.

Kesteven's study is important in the context of social impact assessment issues in that the pervasiveness of cultural boundaries are highlighted. She shows the difficulties of even attempting to find solutions to cultural barriers. A major issue that Kesteven identifies is that if a proponent does use anthropologists and linguists, the length of time needed to gain baseline data will be extended. A second issue highlighted by Kesteven is that different
cultural concepts of land must be understood and accounted for. For example, she points out that what looks like a wilderness environment to European eyes may be a complete social landscape to Aboriginal people. Therefore, a "scientific" description of the environment and environmental impacts, may not adequately reflect Aboriginal cultural concepts of land. The definition of the environment that should prevail in a final report is therefore another issue that commonly arises when anthropologists and linguists are involved in social impact assessments.

Differentiating Between the Impacts of Separate Projects.

Without diminishing the significance of impacts caused by the Argyle Diamond Mine, Donovan (1986) focused on the difficulty of separating these impacts from those that would have occurred over time, irrespective of the development of the mine. Donovan's concern is that social impact assessments are still in their infancy and therefore do not concentrate on separating out historical impacts. He criticises social impact assessments as falling into the following traps:

- dependency on studies provided by vested interests;
- the vacuum model wherein studies are made of the impact of any given development in historical or contemporary isolation from other events and developments;
- the judicial model, typically conducted along quasi legal lines by legal practitioners or judges. These tend to present as social impact assessment a representation of interests usually based upon the concept of justifiable versus unjustifiable claims and rights;
- the political lobby through which diverse interests seek to influence the outcome of political decision making usually by presenting a professional or social scientist interpretation of cause and effect;
- the functional descriptive model, based on an amalgamation of social psychology and the community studies (American and British schools). This rests heavily on social science ideas about cultural norms, value clusters, deviance, social consensus and so forth.

Donovan (1986) criticises these approaches because they generally produce statements about what ought or ought not to be. To overcome this problem without the pretence of value freedom he used a method of critical social analysis which he explained as: "... a conflict model of stasis and change; that is, change and stasis occur as functions of conflicting interests and the structures employed for the effective pursuit of those interests" (p. 67).

Essentially, the critical theory method employs elements of historical background, economic data, macro level information of superstructures and micro level data. Donovan believes this approach is superior because it enables a view of the interconnectedness of things.
Donovan's (1986) paper is not so much a prediction, as an assessment of impacts that have already taken place. He separates impacts into those that are a result of historical processes - dispossession, dependency, alienation; and those that resulted from the introduction of the diamond mine, loss of land, destruction of significant sites and general impact on the community (money, more people in the area, re-enforcement of historical impacts).

Donovan's (1986) work highlights the advantages of placing social impact assessments in an historical context, as well as the difficulty of separating out impacts of projects from those changes that might occur independently.

Cumulative Impact Assessments

Howitt (1992) too examines the historical context of social impact assessments but he advocates looking at these impacts in a cumulative manner. He argues for an holistic approach to the development of new industries in previously undeveloped regions to accommodate the associated restructuring of local economies. He uses the case of Roebourne in the Pilbara to argue that the impact of industrialisation on Aboriginal people of the Pilbara was to integrate the regional economy into the international economy and hence marginalise the local Aboriginal economy even further than it had been by colonisation, effectively contributing to the disempowerment of Aboriginal people in the region.

By discussing the combination of a number of individual projects and associated capital which lead to the restructuring of the regional economy, Howitt provided an example of cumulative impact analysis.

Conflict Between the Proponent and the Community

A study was undertaken by a group of researchers associated with Murdoch University and submitted to the State Government to aid in decision making about land tenure in the Western Desert (Newman, Wright, Lantzke & Dowling, 1993). The study made recommendations to government about land use tenure in the area, taking into account the aspirations of the Martu Aboriginal people, as well as land use conflicts between conservation, mining and tourism values for the area.

Of particular note is the discussion of breakdowns in trust between the Aboriginal and mining groups concerned, and the difficulties that this caused for negotiation of ameliorative strategies.

The SIS team do not lightly conclude that to resolve the individual distrust by personalities on each side will require a greater level of honesty and commitment than has been shown so far. Only then will the necessary personal trust be encouraged to develop, which is the basis of easing social impact" (Newman et al., 1993, p. 2).
The paper describes the consultation process that was undertaken in some detail, including the concerns of both mining and Aboriginal groups, about land use in the area.

Another significant point covered in the document is the confusion between protection of sites and other social impact issues. While sites are crucial to the preservation and development of Aboriginal identity in remote areas, modern Aboriginal culture also involves aspirations for their future such as the development of an economic base, return to homelands and the provision of adequate social services. "While sites are centrally important to Martu culture, Martu culture is not defined solely in terms of sites" (Newman et al., 1993, p. 158).

The Rudall River Social Impact Study highlights two issues central to social impact assessments involving Aboriginal people in Western Australia. These are the need to develop trust in negotiations, and to resolve the confusion between the protection of sites and other social impact issues.

These case studies highlight a number of issues for social impact assessment that are relevant for future assessments. Briefly summarised they are; the complexities of compensation payouts, the use of participatory methodologies emphasising community control, the difficulties of attempting to transcend cultural boundaries by using linguists and anthropologists, the difficulty of separating out impacts of projects from those that might occur independently, the importance of cumulative assessment, and the history of conflict between mining and Aboriginal communities.

Principles For Social Impact Assessment in Aboriginal Communities

These principles have been drawn from the above discussion and are suggested as tools for creating social impact procedures to address the social impact of mining on Aboriginal people in remote areas:

1) Discussions about resource development should take place at the earliest possible stages of development planning.

The earlier the negotiations with Aboriginal people begin, the more time there is to develop trust and therefore the more co-operative the process. The Rudall River Social Impact Assessment shows that once a situation has developed, where trust has been broken, it is almost impossible to enter into constructive negotiations about how a proposal will impact on Aboriginal people.

Early negotiations should not concentrate on financial contributions but on ameliorative measures, ways of avoiding negative impacts and maximising opportunities. A comment made at a Mineral Industry and Aboriginal Affairs Conference by an industry representative was:

The message ... was that Aborigines are not adverse to the development of mines on their lands. They are however extremely concerned about the need for open and honest discussion with mining company representatives at the earliest possible stage in order to define the conditions under which the development will take place and the financial and other benefits which will flow to the Aboriginal communities.

2) Discussion and negotiation about a project should be based on full information about the proposal and its potential impacts.

Social impact studies should be completed for projects which are likely to have significant social effects on a community. These studies should predict impacts and recommend ameliorative measures.

3) Negotiations should include impacts on contemporary culture as well as impacts on traditional culture.

Social impacts of mining are not limited to the disturbance of Aboriginal sites, though to date these problems have received the most attention.

Since major resource development projects usually involve earth moving activities, the destruction of sacred sites has been a significant problem. Perhaps because of the large amount of press coverage of issues such as Nookanbah and, more recently, the Hamersley (Karijini) National Park, the destruction of sacred sites is often understood as the most contentious issue associated with Aboriginal people and development. While the destruction of sacred sites has had a social impact on Aboriginal community groups, other significant impacts can be associated with resource development that are not related to specific sacred sites, or even to developments on Aboriginal land. For example, the introduction of more people in to an area, can cause significant social and cultural impacts.

As well as concerns about impacts on traditional culture such as disturbance of and access to sites, Aboriginal people are concerned about the impact of mining on their aspirations for the future. Social impact assessment is a potential mechanism to provide a forum for concerns other than sites issues to be aired.

4) Aboriginal communities should be adequately resourced to obtain information about social impacts.

The role of the 'middle person', be it anthropologist, community adviser, advocate or lawyer, has been a point of contention between Aboriginal people and the mining industry. There is concern about the degree to which non-community members influence Aboriginal
people's decisions and the degree to which Aboriginal people should have direct contact with company representatives.

Social impact assessment provides the introduction of a staged process for conflict resolution and enables discussion and negotiation to become less legal/formal and therefore to proceed on the basis of good faith on the part of all parties. The third party can be useful as an expert adviser or information gatherer in the process.

To enable the identification of social impacts, information about community aspirations and ability to cope with change should be gathered along with information about the project. Non Aboriginal community groups are not expected to identify impacts on their communities without the aid of an "expert" (usually a consultant employed by the proponent). Aboriginal groups should benefit from appropriate expertise in the same manner.

5) The social impact of a project should be monitored throughout its duration

As Howitt (1989) showed, the changes that a project, or a series of projects bring about over a given time span can be dispersed and vague. Project monitoring is an essential mechanism to ensure that actual impacts are identified and addressed and ameliorative measures are working.

6) Where financial contributions are arranged there should be direct Aboriginal involvement in the decision making process.

Financial contributions to communities should be made on the basis that they are to ameliorate the social impact of a development on a community. A comprehensive program must be worked out to gather baseline data, to devise strategies to ameliorate or avoid impact and to monitor impacts. This process involves direct Aboriginal involvement.

Conclusion

Western Australia's situation is unique in that major resource developments often occur in regional areas where there is also a high proportionate representation of Aboriginal people. In the past, there has been land use conflict of great proportions and a great deal of public controversy over Aboriginal rights to land access.

In Australia as a whole there is a trend towards a broader application of social impact assessment to understand the implications of development on indigenous people in relation to their aspirations for the future. Studies that have attempted to assess the impacts of policies or programs on indigenous people have found it necessary to emphasise the view of the community rather than rely on a scientific or 'detached observer' approach.

Thus, attempts to express the perspective of indigenous people have involved experiments that move away from technical, project based social impact assessments to those that incorporate a more community based approach which emphasise the cumulative impact of development.

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THE NORTHAM YOUTH CHALLENGE PROJECT:
A COMMUNITY WORKING FOR CHILDREN

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This paper describes a mixed race, rural community based project, designed to foster self esteem through developing positive peer relations in a group of students in their first two years of high school. The project was generated, planned and implemented largely by the local community with minimal input from outside "experts".

The project involved running a structured programme through the local high schools but decision making regarding content and implementation remained the responsibility of the community members who also acted as "mentors" to the students. Participants worked in small groups facilitated by the community mentors.

The project required significant commitments on the part of the schools and members of the community to cooperate in the implementation of the project, which was based on the "Challenge" model. However in addition to the traditional emphasis on providing participants with a series of demanding but achievable outdoor physical challenges, this project also focussed on developing good peer and student/adult community member relationships through encouraging the participants to work cooperatively in the planning and organisation of several physical challenges and a large scale community project. The paper outlines the various stages of implementation of the project, the outcomes and some key factors identified in determining the success of the project.

Background to the challenge projects

The Youth Challenge Projects are a series of community based projects for "at risk" youth that have been implemented in Perth and country W.A. over the last six years. As such, they are part of an evolutionary process whereby the projects have been developed, refined and implemented in a variety of settings with modifications and improvements gained from previous project experience, incorporated into their ongoing development and implementation. New projects are planned for the latter half of 1994 and some of the existing projects, including the project that is the main focus of this paper, the NORTHAM YOUTH CHALLENGE PROJECT, are progressing autonomously into second and third years of implementation and evolution.

The projects are a combined community and school programme designed to develop "at risk" adolescents' self esteem and abilities to cope with societal pressure. They enable "at risk" students to establish concrete meaningful relationships with significant community

members. They provide the community and school with a long term resource to assist with catering for "at risk" adolescents. They are a means of bringing together all community service resources to focus on needs of "at risk" adolescents.

They provide "at risk" adolescents with relevant challenges; a chance to develop new goals; the opportunity to develop team skills; relationships with long term significant others; an opportunity to develop new peer relationships; and an opportunity to develop positive attitudes towards the needs of others and themselves as members of communities within and outside the school.

The Northam Youth Challenge Project (NYCP) had been preceded by two earlier projects carried out over the previous five years. Both these previous projects had been based in the Perth metropolitan region, one involving three different high schools in low socio-economic residential suburbs of the inner metropolitan region, the other project based in an industrial region south of Perth.

In 1991 the NYCP was designed and funded to explore how readily the project model could be translated to a rural setting. The rural town of Northam was chosen because of its relative proximity to Perth and the necessity to cater for the logistics of Perth based consultants to access the town at various stages of the project's implementation. Secondly, the local high school had already made contact with one of the consultants seeking assistance in dealing with an unfortunate series of circumstances including staff and student suicides, perceptions of growing racism and the deepening impact of the rural recession on what had once been a relatively prosperous country town.

The projects were originally funded by the Gordon Reid Foundation for Youth (W.A.), an autonomous body although it is an adjunct of the Lotteries Commission. The Foundation had monies available for funding projects that were "innovative community based projects for youth."

The model underlying the challenge projects

The basic project model has six key characteristics:
1. The key independent variable is self esteem and the aim of the model is to improve the self esteem of students who have been identified as "at risk" due to low self esteem. It is important to emphasise that the project is targeted specifically at those students in the early years of secondary high school, who are starting to display a range of behaviours that are believed to be underpinned by poor self concept; students who are experiencing fear of failure or starting to withdraw from classroom and peer interactions because they are afraid they will make mistakes or be rejected. The project then targets the quiet, submissive, often withdrawn students as well as the students who display intolerance for the needs of others, the verbally aggressive student, the attention seeking student and the student who is beginning to show disregard for school and community standards and rules. It tries to screen out through a selection process those who may be considered "at risk" because they are difficult to manage, particularly in a classroom setting, because

they have a learning difficulty or an emotionally based behavioural problem. It is felt that there are many existing alternative programmes available specifically to help these types of students.

2. The project is embedded in the local high schools and requires their ongoing commitment and cooperation.

3a. The project requires local community involvement. Adult local community members are solicited to volunteer to provide support by acting as "mentors" to the "at risk" adolescents.

3b. Community service organisations or agencies are encouraged to become involved and offer whatever resources they can. It is hoped that the project will provide a catalyst for the community's organisations to combine in a joint effort with the project's student participants directed at a community area of need. However if this does not eventuate, the project should still have as a focus, participation in a community based task which is designed to foster pride in and commitment to community by the student participants.

4. The project has the concept of "Challenge" usually in the form of some physical challenge(s) built into the framework. That is, it confronts the participants with challenges that are both physically and emotionally demanding. This concept of physical challenge and its significance for improving self esteem has a long history dating back to the early 1940's and the original Outward Bound School founded by Kurt Hahn in Wales. More recent Australasian applications of the same approach have been reported by Marsh, Richards and Barnes (1986) and O'Brien (1990). Interestingly the notion of challenge as a significant factor in promoting greater intellectual understanding of self is also appearing in the research literature dealing with the effects of marital breakdown and divorce and the implications for children's adjustment Gatley and Schwebel (1991).

5. The project encourages parental involvement, particularly in the out of school activities associated with the physical challenge tasks.

6. The project aims to be self supporting (by the schools and the community) in terms of planning, organisation and implementation, after the initial framework has been established by the outside consultants.

The Northam Youth Challenge Project

Northam is a West Australian country town with approximately 7,000 inhabitants in the township and an additional 2,000 inhabitants living within the surrounding shire boundary. It has a predominantly white population with an estimated 7% of the total population being of Aboriginal descent. It is on the western edge of the West Australian wheatbelt situated some 90 kilometres east of Perth. As outlined above, Northam was selected as a project location for two reasons:
1. A desire to trial the project model hitherto applied only in metropolitan settings in a rural setting.

2. A direct request from the state high school for some assistance in dealing with self esteem problems.

In addition there was already in existence in Northam Senior High School (NSHS) a challenge type programme being run by the teacher who was in charge of the "alternative"- non academic stream school programme with a strong emphasis on outdoor, physical activities. Also, "Northam Outreach", an initiative of the local Anglican minister/church had been set up in the late eighties in response to the fact that Northam at that stage had the greatest number of police per population in the state. This statistic was largely felt to be attributable to problems associated with "at risk" youth- unemployment, juvenile offenders and a high incidence of family feuding involving Aboriginal youth in particular. The church felt that the community needed to do something to address this problem.

Finally the Department of Community Development, also aware of the problem with youth, was keen to establish a community school link in Northam. They financed a Community School Support position (part time) in 1988 where an officer was employed to develop a bridging programme to facilitate student transition from the last year of primary and start of secondary and to improve the high school retention rates. In addition the role was also to develop links between the two high schools and the community. Although the position was to help all students, it was the opinion of the Community school support officer (who also worked at the Outreach centre) that the students in need of the greatest support were the Aboriginal students. This was reflected in a high dropout rate from the state high school (where it was estimated by the school support officer that 80% of the students were failing) and from statistics from the Outreach centre that showed that 80-85% of the youth seeking help were Aboriginal.

In sum, Northam seemed an ideal rural town to locate the project as it not only served the researchers' needs, it also clearly filled a community need and if well implemented, could pool a variety of powerful community resources.

The NYCP was set up to involve the two high schools in Northam. One of these was the state NSHS, the other was the smaller private Catholic high school equivalent of NSHS, St Josephs (StJ). NSHS had a total student population of approximately 650 students. Forty nine of the total school population were of Aboriginal descent representing 7.3 %, and all of these students were in the lower school years. StJ's has no upper school and had a student population of 160. StJ's had no Aboriginal students.

Funding for this project was originally granted from the Gordon Reid Foundation in late 1991. The remainder of 1991 and early 1992 saw the basic planning and framework for the project established including:

1. Consultants facilitating the establishment of a management committee composed of representatives from both the schools (both Principals, Youth Education Officers, School Chaplain) and the local community including Northam Outreach, Community School Support Officer, Aboriginal liaison workers, Community Policing officers, "Share and Care" organisation.

2. Selection of the project Coordinator a NSHS staff member, additionally a similar role being designated for one of the staff at StJ's.

3. Selection of the students to participate in the project.

4. Selection and training of the community member mentors (included males, females, aboriginals/non aboriginals, employed, retired, businessmen; housewives, parents, non parents).

5. Development of and initial collection of baseline data for evaluation purposes.

The project is now nearing completion of its second year with the implementation of the second year having been delayed until mid 1993. In its first year of implementation, NYCP operated as follows. Under the direction of the management committee the project coordinator initiated the following. At the end of 1991 students were selected for participation in the project. Students were selected using the following criteria:

1. A measure of self esteem based on the Song-Hattie self esteem scale (1984) was administered to all lower school students, that is, all students in years 8, 9, and 10. A rank ordered set of Z scores for all these students was generated showing lowest or "poorest" self esteem, or those students considered to be most "at risk", to highest or "best", or those students considered to be least "at risk".

2. Teachers who had contact with the lower school classes were asked to nominate and prioritise students whom they thought would benefit from the project as it had been explained to them. Teachers were asked individually to initially identify students whom they felt had poor or low self esteem and who seemed to demonstrate an inability to relate successfully with their peers and as a consequence, were not "maximising their potential." Any student whose name was listed by more than three teachers was automatically put on the candidate list. The teachers' list was then cross referenced with the results of the standardised testing and a final list of students was selected. Names were then discussed at a whole staff meeting and staff were asked to comment on or query any names that they thought ought not be on the list.

3. The school staff involved in pastoral care were also invited to consult the list and comment on the appropriateness/inappropriateness of candidates.
4. Parents of these students were then contacted by letter and informed that their child had been identified as needing some help in the self esteem area and invited to attend a meeting at the school where the nature, aims and scope of the programme would be discussed.

Due to the misconceptions and general emotive connotations that are associated with the "at risk" label, the term "underachieving" adolescents was used in any public discussion about the programme.

5. Students were then invited to join the programme; some took up the offer /some refused. Some refused although their parents were keen for them to participate.

Total student numbers selected for inclusion in the programme as at December 1991 were 56 from NSHS (24 females; 32 males) and 10 from StJ’s (5 female; 5 male).

Mentor selection was originally organised by the project management committee through the project coordinator. The management committee nominated names of some forty prominent community members who were then sent invitations to attend a meeting where the goals and framework of the project were outlined and those who were interested in lending their support were encouraged to make a commitment to the project. Out of the thirty nine who attended the meeting some twenty four individuals took up the challenge.

Training of the mentors was then instigated. Mentor training was originally set up and conducted by the consultants. It was structured to take place over a series of four weekly meetings held in the early evening and lasting approximately 90 minutes. The aim of the mentor training was to give a group of non trained adults some basic skills in handling a small group of adolescents, and some idea of the content that they could use in formal meeting sessions. It was recognised however, that although these adults lacked "formal" training, they were in the majority of cases all parents and had successfully raised or were raising children and were identified by their peers in the community as competent individuals. In short, they were not without some relevant experience!

In each of the training sessions case studies were used to highlight specific themes or issues relating to adolescence (particularly self confidence, self worth and self esteem) and to encourage the adults to exchange ideas and develop confidence in expressing themselves.

During each training session the consultants modelled the actual structure that was to be adopted for use by the mentors with the students in their own sessions; that is, how to open a session, how to alternate content with discussion, how and when to move to small groups, how to allow time for questions, how to close a session etc. At the end of the mentor training sessions sixteen mentors (9 females; 7 males) were still willing, and able, to commit their time to the programme.

After these training sessions mentors met on a fortnightly basis with the students during the last half of one afternoon during school time and the various theme topics discussed and requirements for the challenge days were planned.

Challenge day activities have included parasailing, abseiling, canoeing, windsurfing, sailing, snorkelling, planning for and going on an extended camp to the beach. The main community project for 1992/3 has been to design a series of floating nesting areas for the local white swans that breed on the Avon river that runs through Northam. The bird numbers were declining as they are an unprotected species, considered feral in fact, and a decline in numbers was becoming a concern as they are a tourist attraction for Northam, being one of the few places in the state that has a colony of white swans. The goal of the community task was agreed to jointly by the management committee and the Northam shire, who provided the materials for the building of the floating nesting sites. The nesting sites were designed in conjunction with the local Northam officers of the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Some quantitative and qualitative analysis of the programme has been conducted. The quantitative analysis has been confined to a pre and post test measure of the students' level of self esteem. Post test measures were collected after students had been involved in the project for twelve months. Using paired t tests, a comparison was made of the pre and post programme self esteem means. The comparisons reveal a significant difference between the pre and post tests means of "total self esteem" showing that the self esteem scores were significantly higher at the conclusion of the programme.

Qualitative data collection and analysis through one to one semi-structured interviews provides some of the most interesting insights into the success or otherwise of the project. There have been a series of insightful anecdotes reported in these interviews conducted with a range of the adult personnel involved with the implementation of the project-coordinators, teachers, parents, mentors. Some of these are reproduced below.

The greatest number of positive comments about the project came from StJ school. (We believe that this in itself is an important factor to note in terms of the success of the project and the significance of size of school that it can be implemented in.) Here staff have commented that they can see -

"a real, positive change in the Challenge kids." (teacher)

Among the changes noted were that the students had begun -

"to pick up academically in the last six months" (teacher)

and that behaviourally -

"in class they were much more amenable to suggestions and that they were much more settled in themselves." (teacher)

Teachers commented that they have noted a difference in some of the parents' attitudes to their children too. One teacher recounted talking to a parent who said that he saw his son as a bit of a "no hoper" because he never seemed to be very successful at anything he tried
and saw him as lacking in guts- "a bit of a wimp". The teacher persuaded the father for the boys sake to at least accompany the boy on one of the one of the outdoor challenge days (abseiling). After watching his son participate in the abseiling and then experience for the first time the abseiling himself, the father later confided to the teacher that he was "stunned" to see his son even tackle the abseiling and expressed his own sheer terror at being asked to join in the experience; and that now for the first time realised that his son was not a "wimp". The teacher noted that this had been a turning point in this father's attitude to his son and the boy was "blossoming" in the changed relationship where there was

"now a sort of a new bond between the father and his son where the father is prepared to be with the boy; it's been very worthwhile!" (teacher)

Another parent who had been having great difficulty dealing with her son at home and earlier had described him to the teacher as insolent, always answering her back and questioning everything she said, recently commented to the teacher -

"that since he's been in the programme, there has been a small change in him at home- he's a lot less argumentative and more prepared to listen to what I've got to say, to my side of the story." (parent)

Another anecdote relates to a female student who was "shy, recalcitrant" and not well regarded by her peers. According to the staff, this girl was developing a reputation as a "bit of a misfit" up until the time she joined the challenge programme. Since then, "in the last six months, she has changed her act altogether; in fact she was nominated by her peers to be 1994 school captain!" (teacher)

Another very telling anecdote relates to a tragic incident that occurred in the latter part of the year and involved many of the students in the programme at StJ's. A fellow student, who was not in the programme but was a close friend of many of the students in the programme was killed in an accident on the football field during a junior league game. The school staff set up counselling support for the whole school, but found that:

"...the Challenge kids had already come together as a group; they seemed to 'cohere' as a group in this time of need. They talked about the incident to each other and to their mentors, formally and informally and obviously found great comfort in each other as a group." (coordinator)

Community mentors have also rated the programme as a very satisfying and rewarding experience. They highlighted their personal satisfaction in feeling that they are helping these students at a crucial time in their development and that if they could contribute in some small way that helped "keep the kids on track" then they felt that this was a worthwhile contribution to the students and the community on their part. They also mentioned how working with the challenge students had often given them some insights as to "where their own children were coming from". They also recounted with great
satisfaction, anecdotes of where they had personally initiated some improved communication or shared understanding between parents and children as a result of activities involved in the challenge days. These they rated as amongst the most satisfying aspect of their involvement with the programme.

Needless to say they also were able to identify shortcoming in either the structure and implementation of the project. Amongst the most common was the lack of consolidated periods of time to really get to know the children and the difficulties in terms of real life practicalities of being involved in a project such as this and trying to fit it in with a full time job, running their own business or shift work or their own family life commitments.

Looking at the negatives of the project from a broader perspective, one would have to note that the project was not particularly successful in attracting or maintaining involvement of the Aboriginal students identified as candidates for the programme. This is a major shortcoming for as was pointed out above, the need for involvement of the Aboriginal students had been identified by a variety of sources as a significant community need. Failure of the project for the Aboriginal students was quantifiable in that the number of Aboriginal students who were originally selected for the programme dwindled steadily throughout the year -despite the fact that there were adult Aboriginal mentors working with the groups-and this has reoccurred in 1993/94. Clearly there is some element that is not accommodating the Aboriginal students. It is hard to be definite about what is lacking in the programme for the Aboriginal students but again interviews with adult personnel involved with the project and some local Aboriginals who were not involved may provide some clues.

Firstly it is suggested that the model of adult community mentors is sound. Personnel who have had extensive experience working with Aboriginal youth in the past reinforced the belief that the best way to work with Aboriginal youth was to achieve this with Aboriginal adults and get them to mentor the young people. The major criticisms were that the selection of mentors had not targeted the key adult Aboriginal community members and this had weakened the impact of the programme right from the outset. That there should be a greater degree of consultation with the traditional Aboriginal community leaders of the district to facilitate selection of the Aboriginal mentors rather than the rather haphazard word of mouth selection process that had occurred. In addition the training of the mentors should have been accompanied by a greater amount of informal Aboriginal community support that needed to be ongoing throughout the year and provided by the significant Aboriginal community leaders in Northam. In this way, a greater amount of Aboriginal family involvement could have been initiated and maintained and this level of commitment would have flown on down to the students. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen. However looking at the dropout rates in 1992 and 1993 there is clearly some room for rethinking this aspect of the project.
Summary of findings from the Northam Youth Challenge Project to date

From the project team's point of view the project seems to be achieving its stated aims of improving these adolescents' self esteem. Nonetheless, there are some problems of implementation that have become apparent including issues surrounding the selection of appropriate children for the programme, how do you determine "at risk", communication to and among all those involved in the project, the need to identify a willing and strategically placed coordinator within the local community and the apparent "lack of fit" of the project for the Aboriginal students.

The project is now moving into its third year. It is now embedded in the local high school and is completely managed by the local community without any reliance on the outside "experts". It is self supporting and still has a significant involvement of a group of community members who contribute in the role of mentors. Through the community project, the various community agencies-local and state were involved.

From the students' perspective it seems that the challenge project took the first year of implementation to establish some credibility amongst the students but having been in operation for a year there is definitely a shift in their attitude towards the programme.

"The first year the Challenge group were seen as the 'dawg' group-the kids used to get a bit of a ribbing initially. Now it's reversed; they are seen as the group that are doing things; others want to be in it...they're now asking 'how can you get in it?'" (teacher)

The adult community members involved with the project in 1993/94 continue to build on this enthusiasm and are currently planning the next year's programme.

References


Information for Authors

Network is published quarterly (April, August and December). Contributors should submit their manuscripts to the editor no later than one month prior to publication date. Manuscripts should be typed or submitted on a computer disk using any standard DOS or Mac word processing. Word or WordPerfect are preferred packages. Diagrams should be sent photo ready. The format to be used is the general style described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (3rd ed., 1983) except that spelling should conform to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

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