

*** Critical self-reflection of a Psychologist uncovering their personal bias toward Australian Indigenous People in their daily living***

Self-reflection plays an essential role in growth development. I can be a better person tomorrow if I reflect on who I was today. Unfortunately, that does not make it any easier a task to take on. In searching myself, I do find that I hold some negative perceptions regarding Indigenous people that I need to let go. Perhaps this can be done through self-reflection, as it is a tool one can use to dig deep.

An example of my malignant perception stems from an awareness of an ongoing mental health crisis. It is hard to see people struggling; I want to help in any way possible. It is often difficult to wrap my head around the understanding that many Indigenous people think that typical disorders such as many mental illnesses can result from being plagued with evil spirits. Another belief is that such maladies stem from payback for certain intentional behaviors, such as not following cultural practices. I struggle with this understanding. In a world where we have become so scientifically advanced that we are able to cure or control so many disorders, why would anyone want to believe otherwise? In a similar instance, such as the Christian belief that God made Job sick to test him, should we then surmise that each bad thing that happens to us is a test from God? While grappling with my own issues surrounding faith, it is nearly inconceivable to me that such beliefs can actually keep a person from seeking treatment for a problem with a scientific cause.

This reflection is undoubtedly a chance for me to expand my understanding of the underlying causes of the lack of medical care surrounding the cultural background of Indigenous people. More importantly, it is a chance for me to examine my personal bias toward the cultural differences we all have coming from many various backgrounds. After all, many Indigenous people might find it odd that I take a pill to cure any illness. They may find it strange that I can use therapy as a tool to feel better. Moving forward, I will strive to remain neutral regarding any cultural differences I come across.

Another misconception I have personally dealt with is that race affects how you perceive a person. Not being a Black or Indigenous Person of Color (BIPOC) myself, I cannot speak about their daily struggles, which they will continue to face amidst racial divisions. I can say that I feel it should be common sense that all races should be treated equally. However, upon further reflection, do I not have some underlying issue that may bring forth mixed feelings about a different race?

Indeed I do. I heard my mother's voice telling me to remain calm as the Indigenous person held a gun to my chest and helped himself to the register of the convenience store I was visiting. I heard my mother retelling the story of when she was robbed while working in a dry cleaning store; she just closed her eyes and prayed until the person left. She tried to return to work, but BIPOCs most frequented her location, and every time someone of that race walked in, she felt instantly scared and was

worried she would be robbed again. As an adult, I now see that my mother was traumatized and needed help. I told myself that it could never be me. But then, when I faced a similar scenario, what did I do? The real challenge came the day after the robbery when it was time to get back to my normal routine. Rather than return to the same store, I chose to go 5+ minutes out of my way to another station for my morning coffee. Over time this became my new routine. Looking back now, I see my own bias in the situation. Because that store was frequented by people who looked like the thief, I chose to stay away from it. That is racist. I am uncomfortable with this realization about myself. There is much work I need to do in this area, and I recognize this as a severe bias I have had for nearly a decade now.

Another way I find myself lacking in empathy is through my willingness to brush off so much about the history of Indigenous people. Before now, I have thought, and possibly even said out loud, "I should not be held responsible for things that happened in the past," or "I did not do these things to them; why should I be blamed for that?" I thought to myself, I have been taught all my life to take responsibility for my own actions because that is all I can control. Further reflection tells me I have been approaching this situation the wrong way entirely.

Small changes in my perception can completely alter my bias toward Indigenous people. Indeed, it is not my job to take responsibility for the actions of others from the past. However, it is my responsibility to recognize that these things happened. I should work to understand the impacts of these atrocities on the Indigenous people and how history may impact building trust between races after so much division for so long. After all, If I refuse to go to a store because a BIPOC customer looks like someone that robbed me there, it stands to reason that an Indigenous person does not want to sit in therapy and take advice from someone that looks like someone that caused them much harm for many years. I cannot eat my cake and have it too. Furthermore, to turn a blind eye to such is hypocritical of me. I need to recognize that my responsibility lies in being a part of the change moving forward to bridge the gap between a terrible past and a brighter future for all races.

Self-reflection is difficult because it brings out the ugly parts of oneself. In assignments like this, it bares that ugliness to the world. But despite its difficulties, it is necessary. Looking inward and finding the root of my own bias can help me be not only a better psychologist but it can help me to be a better person overall. Perhaps this will help me be more open to learning about Indigenous people's cultural differences and how much they face and overcome daily.