

The Influence of Indigenous Culture on Sport Psychology Practice: Challenges and Prospects



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Abstract

Given that contemporary cultural sport psychology has advocated for more inclusiveness involving intersecting cultural identities for applied work (research and practice), it is still surprising that information on indigenous practices across many societies remain untapped. This opinion paper highlights a range of issues that have been addressed within differing cultural contexts and offer ways in which indigenous practices could be integrated into existing professional frameworks across diverse societies that maintain respect for new set of culture-specific behavioral norms, beliefs and practices.

Keywords: Culture; Competence; Shamanism; Identities; Practice; Psychology

Introduction

The past decade has seen a consistent upsurge in literature regarding cultural diversity in sport and a continual demand for more culturally underpinned sport psychology research and practice [1]. The foundation of this emerging paradigm is the idea of cultural praxis, “a critical discourse” and “an attempt to broaden the epistemological spectrum of theory and practice in the field” [2]. This perspective contests deep-rooted cultural theories, research, and practice, and attempts a paradigm shift in the field of sport psychology from decontextualized knowledge to new approaches that consider athletes by their divergent backgrounds and identities [1]. One criticism that has often been raised against mainstream psychology by some researchers is its lack of openness to different cultures and its cultural one-sidedness [3]. Critiques as varied as eurocentrism [4], westocentrism [5], individuocentrism, irrelevance [6] and ethno centrism [7] are terms often used to describe these perceptions.

The necessity of these criticisms is based on the fact that culture permeates across many aspects of human functioning, such as patterns of language, thoughts, actions, customs, beliefs, courtesies, rituals, manners, interactions, roles, expected behaviors, and values connected with race and ethnicity [8]. However, recent developments suggest that varied socio-cultural differences exist across a wide spectrum of constructs in sport [9]. Some researchers in sport psychology have acknowledged

cultural impact on dimensions as diverse as regulation of emotions [10], participation motives [11], athlete identity [12], attributions of success and failure [13], coping style [14], goal orientations [15], preferred coaching behaviors [16], social physique anxiety [17], and responses to athletic retirement [18]. Similarly, shamanism (i.e., concept behind traditional healing ceremonies) offers diverse practices to access different modes of consciousness to incorporate deeper brain activation for perception and cognitive processing within a healing process, a pathway that can be tapped for athletes’ injury rehabilitation, motor control and action anticipation [19]. Furthermore, new technologies such as eye-tracking, neuro feedback, memory measurements may as well offer researchers and applied practitioners with better understanding towards cognitive functioning and the effects of indigenous practices from a scientific viewpoint [20].

The development of cultural competence opens another chapter that allows sport psychology practitioners to integrate athletes’ and other analogous personnel compatible behaviors and attitudes that show culture and other socio-political factors mould individuals’ behaviors that intertwine at several levels of professional practice [1,8]. It has been recommended that practitioners in sport psychology ought to formally seek knowledge of different cultures as well as make a commitment to be well informed about current prevailing issues in this area

[8]. Another area that may require significant improvement is linguistic challenges [21] and objective measuring instruments [22]. Therefore, adopting a meaningful dialogue (communication) between athletes and practitioners through a shared language that promotes a shared experience would be worthwhile. A productive exchange of ideas opens sport psychology practitioners' communication channels to new perspectives of athletes' localized beliefs and values (e.g., customary rites, issues about religion and/ or spirituality) specific to their context. This open-minded approach to relevant information through dialogue helps develop a shared "cultural code" with specific elements unique to the local terrain towards professional practice [23].

The intricacy of these interrelated constructs (indigenous practices) in a typical socio-cultural context has led to the development of four key pointers for enhancing applied psychology work from typical western perspectives. Sport psychologists and other analogous practitioners would have to give precedence to the study of culturally distinct psychological and behavioral characteristics of the local people as well as examine the exact content and involved processes of these cultural related phenomena. Additionally, any research activity ought to integrate thoroughly the natural, tangible details of the phenomena to be investigated; and basing research on local intellectual local traditions rather than purely western approaches [24] These processes would help all involved with athletes deliver localized evidence-based interventions that uphold reverence for and consideration of cultural characteristics (e.g., spiritual beliefs, customary rites). For example, the "Haka", a customary postural dance used as pre-game ritual by New Zealand rugby representatives, could serve as a typical cue for other indigenous societies. This dance involves a combination of psyching verses, verbalizations, and primal scream. The "Haka" epitomizes New Zealand's cultural heritage that typifies bravery, resilience, assertiveness, determination, desire, confidence, and commitment. Sport psychologists, coaches, other personnel, and players have embraced, believed, observed this tradition over the years to their advantage during major competitions. By integrating, and adhering to similar traditional practices over time, athletes could optimize their pre-start state and potentially enhance future sports performance [22]. These indigenous practices may thus provide potential avenues for reconnecting nature with other conventional psychological techniques like imagery, relaxation, and self-talk [19]. By developing sport psychological practice through this cultural lens with advanced technologies could enrich sport psychologist-coach-athlete interactions toward athletes' well-being and performance enhancement [1,2, 20,22].

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