

Bridging boundaries: The power of cross-cultural exchange in psychology

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The value of sharing academic and experiential knowledge cannot be overstated in today's interconnected world. This exchange becomes particularly vital within and between communities of professionals and practitioners in different cultural contexts.

A recent visit by the Chicago School of Professional Psychology to the Cornerstone Institute campus is a shining example of the transformative power of such interactions. Through a thought-provoking presentation and engaging discussions, professionals and students from diverse backgrounds came together to explore the history of psychology, confront systemic barriers, and envision a more inclusive future. This article delves into the significance of sharing knowledge and experiences across communities that were highlighted during this engaging presentation.

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology's presentation delved into the historical foundations of psychology in the United States, highlighting the misuse of insane asylums and the spread of misinformation about mental health. By shedding light on this troubling past, the presenters created a space for introspection, emphasizing the importance of learning from history and accounting for the impact of history on current mental health barriers, such as hesitancy due to past misuses and widespread stigma. The attendees were encouraged to reflect on how historical factors have shaped psychology in the South African context, drawing parallels and highlighting unique challenges.

In this presentation, Flin Oshun and Dr. Sherry Green further explored how cultural factors and historical biases have contributed to the limited accessibility of psychology, particularly for marginalized communities. The presenters highlighted the disproportionate influence of white men in shaping the field, marginalizing Black Americans, women, people of colour, queer individuals, and disabled individuals throughout history. By openly discussing these barriers, the participants were prompted to share their experiences accessing mental health care, specifically focusing on South Africa's context. This comparative analysis enriched the discussion, deepening participants' understanding of the systemic obstacles faced by those seeking or needing the service of mental health practitioners.

One significant aspect of the presentation centered on the perception of psychological care among Black Americans and the associated barriers to seeking help. Lack of knowledge about available treatments, lingering stigma resulting from historical mistreatment in the field, cultural attitudes towards mental health, denial of mental health problems, and privacy concerns were all identified as factors hindering access to care. The participants engaged in a profound dialogue, highlighting the importance of community-based mental health interventions and the necessity of addressing these barriers in the South African context.

The visit culminated in a collective reflection on personal motivations for entering the field of psychology and hopes for the future of psychology in the United States and South Africa. It became evident that various barriers, such as poverty, therapy stigma, discriminatory hiring practices, and language barriers, pose challenges to effecting meaningful change. However, the conversation catalyzed renewed dedication to dismantling these barriers and creating more equitable mental health systems.

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology's visit to the Cornerstone Institute campus exemplified the transformative power of sharing academic and experiential knowledge within and between different communities of professionals and practitioners. By delving into the history of psychology, addressing cultural barriers, and envisioning a more inclusive future, the visit sparked vital conversations and fostered empathy among attendees.

This experience highlights the importance of ongoing cross-cultural exchange to encourage growth, challenge assumptions,

and work collectively toward a more accessible and equitable field of psychology. As we continue to bridge boundaries and engage in meaningful dialogue, we can cultivate a brighter future for mental health professionals and clients worldwide.

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