

EDITORIALS

Editorial: Valuing Indigenous Voices Despite the "No" Vote

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Despite only 39.9% of “yes” votes in the October 2023 voice to parliament referendum, almost nine in 10 Australians (87%) believe that First Nations peoples should have a voice in matters influencing them, according to a comprehensive post-referendum survey (Biddle et al., 2023). Over three-quarters of “no” voters (76%) support this view. Reflecting the survey findings, two articles (Carmody, 2023; Latham et al., 2023) in the December 2023 issue of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* advocate for valuing the cultural skills, experiences, and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in therapy and therapist education. Another article (O’Hara, 2023a) explores how the counselling and psychotherapy profession defines itself, an important concept given the forthcoming two-year review of national standards by the Federal Government. An attachment-based model for supervision (Soliman, 2023), a literature review on dog-assisted therapy for children with anxiety (Wu & Wei, 2023), a conversation analysis of silence in psychotherapy (Berger & Rae, 2023), and the Power Threat Meaning Framework and self-discrepancy theory (O’Hara, 2023b) are also featured. This issue is the first to showcase new sections called Practice Reflections and Viewpoints.

Despite the unsuccessful October 2023 referendum on establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to parliament, a post-referendum survey has shown resounding support (87%) for Indigenous Australians having a say over issues affecting them. The Australian National University survey (Biddle et al., 2023) also found that 76% of “no” voters believed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people deserved a say on decisions affecting them, while 68% of the nationally representative sample agreed that many First Nations people experience current disadvantage due to historic race-based policies.

The December 2023 issue of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* (PACJA) contains two papers promoting culturally respectful therapy and practitioner education with First Nations peoples. Both articles emphasise common themes such as the systemic nature of shame, the importance of language and listening, and what happens when the cultural skills, experiences, and knowledge of people in the community are not as valued as academic knowledge.

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In “Healing the Psychic Misery of Aboriginal People in Mparntwe (Alice Springs): Who is Best Placed to do This?”, Tyson Carmody shares how his practice, Kings Narrative, employs only Aboriginal men and values their cultural experiences, skills, and knowledge. This in turn assists “Aboriginal men to re-author their own stories, to step outside the discourses in place preventing men from seeing their true worth” (Carmody, 2023, para. 10). Without forsaking their unique worldview, the practice’s staff are encouraged to further their academic skills, which are viewed as complementing rather than replacing their existing expertise. Carmody notes that as an Aboriginal man, he already has lived experience of many academic concepts, such as psychic misery, which occurs “when people no longer have a belief in themselves, or faith in their own knowledge” (Barreto & Grandesso, 2010, p. 34). He questions whether using such terms diminishes his people’s local knowledge and advocates for consulting with Aboriginal Elders about whether a word or concept is culturally relevant.

“Reflections on a ‘Black and White’ Model of Teaching Family Therapy to First Nations Students” by Robyne Latham, Banu Moloney, and Stephen Andrew (2023), likewise argues that First Nations people within the tertiary education system deserve to be recognised for their skills and wisdom. In a transcribed yarn featuring former members of the First Nations team of the Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy run by the Bouverie Centre and La Trobe University, the authors explore how mainstream terms such as “family” and “therapy” are understood differently from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. Like Carmody, Latham et al. (2023) relate how students check with their communities about the meaning of western jargon. They “want to be able to articulate [mainstream family therapy theories] but [they] also want it to be respected and recognised that [they] have [their] *own* ways of understanding trauma, [they] have [their] *own* ways of dealing with grief ... So that’s the ‘black and white’ thinking” (para. 32). Similarly, the authors found that maintaining a dominant Indigenous culture in the student cohort boosted students’ learning confidence by ensuring a “non-intimidating, non-shaming environment” (para. 36).

The subjects of identity and agency—from our profession’s point of view—continue to be tackled in another article, “Conceptions of Counselling and Psychotherapy: Towards Professional Self-Clarification” by Denis O’Hara. In the leadup to the Australian Government review of national standards for counselling and psychotherapy, O’Hara (2023b) discusses three definitions of counselling and two of psychotherapy. He then recommends either inclusion in the Medicare Better Access initiative or the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Agency and explores the strengths and weaknesses of each option. Another article by O’Hara (2023a), “The Power Threat Meaning Framework and Self-Discrepancy Theory: Complementary Perspectives”, reviews an alternative framework to the dominant medical model, the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF). This humanistic and relational paradigm is then operationalised using self-discrepancy theory in a convincing example of

how the PTMF, combined with self-discrepancy theory, can help clients “move from troubling experiences of living towards a renewed sense of their own value and agency” (para. 26).

An exclusive look at the use of the Circle of Security as an attachment-based model for supervision (Soliman, 2023), a conversation analysis on the preferential use of silence in humanistic psychotherapy sessions (Berger & Rae, 2023), and a literature review on the benefits of dog-assisted therapy for children with anxiety (Wu & Wei, 2023) are other articles displaying the journal’s focus on original and wide-ranging research. Greer White’s (2023) book review of *Psychopathology of the Situation in Gestalt Therapy: A Field-Oriented Approach* (Spagnuolo Lobb & Cavaleri, 2023) caps off this compelling issue.

Volume 11 (2) of *PACJA* is the first issue to showcase two new sections. “Viewpoints” is a vehicle for expert commentary on current professional issues or topics affecting the profession(s) of counselling, psychotherapy, and Indigenous healing practices. “Practice Reflections” features submissions from practitioners about their experiences in the field, highlighting practice issues, initiatives, and insights.

As always, this issue would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), the PACFA research committee, *PACJA* editorial board, authors, peer reviewers, copyeditors, and Scholastica staff. In the interest of continuing to build *PACJA* as a platform for a diversity of voices related to psychotherapy, counselling, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing practices, feedback and submissions are warmly welcomed.

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