

Q1: Why “Indigenous” Australians? -psychology

The term indigenous encompasses other terms such as aboriginal, native, and savage, which is used way back in history and carries a derogatory sentiment. Although the terms sometimes can be used interchangeably, it is important to be culturally aware of the appropriateness of word usage in different situations and occasions.

So why do we use the adjective indigenous to describe some of the Australians? First of all, the word “indigenous” comes from the Latin language that is part of the Indo-European languages family, meaning something that sprung from the land. The word indigenous pretty much covers all the words used to describe Natives or Aboriginals around the world. Besides, different tribes or groups tend to have a different view on the term used to describe them and label them, some people find it absolutely acceptable to be called aboriginals, while some people find it unacceptable or even offended when people address them as natives and savages, but usually aboriginal is used interchangeably with the word indigenous in casual settings, though indigenous is more inclusive because it encompasses Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Tiwi Islander people. As plausible as it seems, indigenous Australians are becoming more and more materialized. Because of the different languages used by Indigenous and newcomers, I would imagine that indigenous Australians, on average, do not possess the same literacy and understanding of the English language that enables them to make a profound sense of the terminology.

Indigenous Australians, for the most part, are unable to live a relatively

healthy lifestyle and preserve longevity because of their distinct lifestyle in terms of diet, housing, and education. Typically, health is divided into psychological and physical health. Although two domains are interconnected, psychological/mental health is often viewed as a more difficult domain to be coped with. Psychiatry and psychology are the study of the human mind and behavior. Even though psychology and psychiatry developed much later than empirical sciences like physics and mathematics, they are capable of making a difference among people in need. Technologies like fMRI, EEG, and biofeedback are valuable in assessing one's mental wellbeing. There are patterns found in patients with depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.

As the European first arrived on the continent, a series of requirements were imposed upon indigenous Australians, and oftentimes the injustice and unfairness were rationalized using theories like Social Darwinism, biological determinism, and Eugenics. Hegemony has been the nature and the preferred way of achieving higher status worldwide. This can be backed up by the history of Britain and many other European countries. From triangular trade to colonizing different nations, Britain and some European countries have shown us how demoralized humans can be. Of course, this section is not centered around history but knowing what has happened is helpful for us to better assist indigenous people in need.

Numerous studies have been conducted to compare indigenous Australians with Europeans, yielding results that confirm the belief of racial, social, and cultural superiority. But scientists know that there is still much space for psychology to

develop. For example, many of the self-rating scales are developed by Europeans and Americans, which implies that the context may not be suited for indigenous people, not to mention the language barrier. Besides, there has been a number of theories developed regarding intelligence in human; a prominent musician may not be good at math, vice versa. What we can say is that Intelligence or neurological cognitive ability is made up of many domains, including verbal comprehension, processing speed, memory, attention, etc. The type of cognitive testing and the underlying theories used in a study dictate the validity and reliability to a great extent and how can a researcher make broad generalizations on a population-based on a study involving a limited number of samples? “Historically, the science and practice of psychology reflect and influence mainstream Western scientific values that have perpetuated and excused racism.” (Dudgeon et al., 2014). All in all, the studies based on psychology involving indigenous Australians are very limited in their validity and reliability and narrow in their lense. The traumatic flashback and long-lasting effects of slavery still exist among indigenous groups in Australia, so I think a better approach to elevate them is not to make comparisons between the indigenous and people enjoying the benefit of capitalism, rather, we need to focus on the mental and physical health among indigenous Australians longditudinally.

Q2: What have you read/heard about Indigenous peoples and cultures?

In ancient human history, relatively uncivilized humans were the indigenous people, no matter where they were born or where they migrated and settled. I guess humans were all indigenous people at the dawn of the time. I am assuming the question is asking about indigenous people in general, which include many other races (Native Americans, Tibetans, etc.) along with indigenous people in Australia.

The first time that I saw indigenous and aboriginal people was when I was watching a cartoon (not sure if it was Tom & Jerry or something else) where a bunch of brown-skinned and half-naked individuals wearing headgear made of feathers or other materials live together and hunt beasts using homemade weapons such as spear, knife, and bow. They also make those staccato noises by repetitively cover their mouth with their hand while screaming. So really, my first impression and understanding of indigenous people and culture were from watching TV as a kid living in an urban area. Later on, I travelled to Tibet with my family, where indigenous Tibetans showed me some facets of indigenous culture, including nomadic lifestyle, hospitality, and a close-knitted family system in which each generation has its own responsibility at home.

It was not until when I travelled to the United States that my understanding of Indigenous people deepened. Out of all the tourist attractions, Williamsburg in Virginia was the memory that came to me at the first when in retrospection. On the one hand, the destitution of their homeland gave me an intense feeling, combined with the things that I read about American history. Just like the nomadic race in Asia, more

specifically the Mongolians and Tibetans, Native's accommodation is also a cone, but the material is different. In terms of lifestyle, Natives also were a race on horseback, and they are always moving and resettling. One of the interesting things to do is to analyze indigenous and natives' DNA and genetics for us to trace their origins. "The ancestors of Native American communities, after crossing the Bering Straits from North-eastern Asia, spread themselves throughout the American continent..." (Palmiste, 2008)

The indigenous people in Australia share many commonalities with Natives in North America. They were both been exploited and forcibly removed from their homeland. Also, some members in both groups adopted Christianity as their religion. Not only they faced similar predicament posed by newcomers, in fact, research suggests that indigenous Australians share some of their gene code with American Indians. Presumably, indigenous Australians lived on another continent before migrating to Australia. According to The Migration Heritage Centre of NSW government, the first person arrived on the north west coast of Australia more than 40,000 years ago. The effort by archaeologists also revealed that there was contact between Aboriginal people and people living in Asia.

The cruelty by the British can be forgiven but never forgotten. Indigenous people were chained, dragged, locked up, used as labor force, and tortured for a substantial amount of time. A similar situation was experienced by Native Americans as well.

Nowadays, Indigenous Australians still face predicament in terms of their mental

and physical health. According to Paradies (2009), 70% of 312 study samples, who are indigenous Australians, still experience racism and rejection at workplace, in employment, or service providers. Systemic racism and interpersonal racism are found to be most common among older participants. Additionally, A cohort study conducted in 2006 by Valery and his colleagues (2006) suggest that due to the lifestyle of indigenous Australians, indigenous group are more susceptible to cancer. In fact, the proportion of indigenous Australians with cancer is much higher than non-indigenous Australians.

Another issue is the misrepresentation and false portrayal of indigenous people. Over the years, mainstream media has portrayed indigenous Australians as people with the issue of substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, and low level of hygiene. The study by Stoneham (2014) and his colleagues debunked these inaccurate stereotypes which are biased and racist in nature. The truth is that indigenous Australian do lack education and information regarding mental health and disorders (Ypinazar, et al., 2007). High prevalence of retrogressive diseases and cognitive impairment are found in Indigenous group as well, more so than non-indigenous groups (Smith et al., 2008). Being socially disadvantaged, indigenous Australians deserve more attention and help from government and non-indigenous Australians.