

2021-ps614-It's-All-Connected

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SPEAKERS

Oeishi, Ashley, Alicia, Ann Marie Beals

Ann Marie Beals 00:03

It's All Connected, you can't parse it out. And that's the bigger picture that has to be looked at how this all connects together.

Ashley 00:22

Welcome to It's All Connected. The second in the PS614 podcast series about all things community psychology. We're your hosts, Ashley, Oeishi, and Alicia. And today we welcome our guest Ann Marie Beals and thank them for their time. First, let's find out a little bit more about Ann Marie.

Ann Marie Beals 00:40

So, I'm Ann Marie. I am a two-spirit, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian. So I'm Mi'kmaq, from the territory of Mi'kma'ki, my father's side, we were enslaved peoples in Virginia who escaped after the war, or during the war of 1812, with the promise of freedom, so my ancestors were freedom seekers coming from Virginia, to Nova Scotia with the promise of freedom, which didn't quite work out that way. Because regardless of where you go, colonialism seems to have its fingers everywhere. And it was part of the British North American project anyway, so. And yeah, so I'm from the territory and Mi'kma'ki, I'm Mi'kmaq. And I do the work that I do in community because I'm an activist, I guess now, I'm a scholar activist, because I've learned some stuff in academia. But the work that I do is for community, working with my people to help uplift our people after 400 years of racism and colonization that still exists today. And I've done a lot of various jobs in my life, that have led me to this point, but it's always been the volunteerism that I've done that kind of pushed me to get some letters after my name, because one of the things that I found was that in having those letters after my name gives me more access to funding that we need for our communities to do the good work that we do. And that's why I came into CP, because of social justice and all that. You know how that's different learning.

Ashley 02:36

During an initial chat with Anne Marie, their perspective on the ecological model in community psychology took our conversation in a completely different direction from the one we anticipated.

Instead of talking about how the elements of an ecosystem relate to each other, we started talking about what lies at the center.

Ann Marie Beals 02:53

The ecological models that I've learned about in my undergrad in psychology, especially, really don't resonate with me and my communities. Just looking at ways of working with our communities and trying to uplift our communities, I guess one of the biggest problems is what we have at the center of these concentric circles, which I guess is the individual. And as a person who is Indigenous to both Turtle Island and to the continent of Africa. I really feel that in my blood memory, the individual is not at the center of this of these circles. And so, health and prevention, individual wellbeing, empowerment, these competencies that we learn in CP, really do focus on the individual, which is kind of ironic, considering that we are in a community psychology program, yet our focus mainly seems to be at the individual level.

Oeishi 03:57

And Marie then elaborated on the pitfalls of placing the individual at the center.

Ann Marie Beals 04:03

Imagine the hubris of humans, thinking that we're at the center of everything. I don't know any other way to explain it, that we think that we're so superior, and all that is around us that we put ourselves at the center of everything. I mean, hubris is the only explanation I have for that and that and I will not say that that is not true in all cultures, though. Because, again, if we look at Indigenous cultural cultures throughout the lands, I'm talking all over the world, you will find that there is often a common denominator of collectivity that does not put one individual at the center of anything and has those relationships with the land that are really salient in understanding how we navigate on this earth, right? So I'm not going to say all humans, but some humans, so humans that feel that we have the ability to extract resources without any kind of repercussions, that is not going to affect anything else in the ecology, right that we can take and take and take and take and take, obviously, we have finite resources. And if we continue to extract at the rate that we're doing, so we're just going to suffer for that as humans. But again, if you look at, within an Indigenous epistemology, that kind of extraction just doesn't happen, because Indigenous peoples, again, I think, as a common thread are stewards of the land and understand the concept of only taking what we need,

Ashley 05:50

Ann Marie offers an altogether different conception of the ecological model for us to consider.

05:54

If I had the time, it would be something lovely that I would like to pursue. And looking at in an ecological model that really isn't made out of concentric circles at all. But it's more of a kind of a spiderweb. You know, when spiders build webs, they have that string, they have the silk that binds from the center, to the edge that anytime something tweaks that little string, a spider knows that something's in the web. Well, the center of that, and the connector, that connector is actually not humans, but land, land, and all that's entailed with land, land, water, air, that's encompassing of Earth Mother and all that she provides for us because honestly, without, without taking care of the land without being focused on the land,

we're just going to at the rate, we're going humans are just working themselves to extinction. So in my own mind, and this is, again, just me thinking about things, I really believe that it's more of an interconnecting spider web, because everything, including Mother Earth, and the cosmos, it's all connected together in this spider web, and what happens on one part of the spider web effects what happens on another part of the spider web, because if there's a hole in the spiderweb, and things fall through, then the nourishment that's needed to be provided is no longer there. And the web collapses,

Alicia 07:36

for example, the spider web model can be employed to help us better understand the displacement of indigenous peoples.

Ann Marie Beals 07:43

If we think about, for instance, the displacement of Indigenous peoples on the land we call Turtle Island, which is Canada, United States, Mexico, Central America and the islands of the Caribbean, we think about the displacement of Indigenous peoples on the land that has to be part and parcel of what an ecological model would look like, if we think about the displacement, the actual enslavement of African peoples Indigenous peoples from the continent. And being displaced, in a sense from the west coast of Africa, throughout Turtle Island, we have to think in terms of geography and that disconnect, as well. So that would be part and parcel of the ecological perspective. And that and that would be a disconnect that would be a severed part of the web. Because of your psychological model, you can visualize if you had like a 3d model, and you see the little snips between the connections, which is a very broad kind of thing, but you can actually see how the holes are developing that we are actually heading towards demise because of the disconnect. And I don't think that traditional ecological models are able to show that

Ashley 09:07

we talked about ways in which Ann Marie and their colleagues are decentering, the individual in the field of community psychology.

Ann Marie Beals 09:14

And CP really needs to stop focusing so much on the individual. In promotion and prevention in and empowerment and the ecological perspective, stop focusing so much on that. And focusing really on changing or dismantling, would be even better the ideology of white supremacy that really informs all of those structures that we're talking about, through neoliberalism colonialism, the patriarchy, ableism, sexism, misogynoir, like there's all kinds of all of those arms, right? transphobia, homophobia, all of that is used to maintain the status quo and also used to take out those who would look to envision a better more just society for us all before we eventually do meet our demise, CP needs to step up and stop promoting the individual.

Oeishi 10:21

Next we asked Ann Marie about Proclaiming Our Roots. Our project that shares the stories and experiences of people who are of African diasporic Indigenous ancestry living on Turtle Island. It was clear that the project reflected Ann Marie's earlier ideas of a spiderweb model where community and land are the center of focus.

Ann Marie Beals 10:39

So, the Proclaiming our Roots brainchild, I call it as you know, is the project of my supervisor mentor, Ciann Wilson and her friend, Denise Baldwin. So, Denise is mixed blood Black-Anishinaabe Kwe. So, we had a conversation, they were having conversations and when they were on another project above why it is said there's such an erasure of mixed blood Indigenous-Black people. And so that was the impetus of the project. And so Ciann who is marvelous at grant writing, got a grant and then in my first year masters, I came on board, which was just very I think the universe was definitely talking at this time, because here I am, I'm mixed blood African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq. Coming to Laurier where Ciann had already applied for this grant looking at mixed blood Indigenous Black people to see how the universe works in mysterious ways. So, we had we had two workshops, one in Nova Scotia in my hometown, and one in Toronto, Two very different kinds of workshops. But the key thing was in the sharing of the stories and wasn't just about the individuals, it was about how the ancestors and about communities, and about having the ability, like for some it was, you know, we've never had the ability to tell our story before. Sometimes it was because of shame, shame to have either Black blood or Indigenous blood, safety, we had Indigenous blood you might be taken to the residential school. Census would do things like if you had one drop of Black blood, then you were considered to be Black and not Indigenous. So, colonialism had a really big effect on how people identified. So, for some people, it was the first time telling their stories and actually having a sense of pride in who they were. So, in bringing in life and raising consciousness for our communities, one of the things that has come out is the connection to the land, and how that has in the past been taken away from us. But there's a reclamation happening to say that, yes, we can practice ceremony, we can be on the land, we can have that relationship with the land. So again, the land becomes a focus, because that disconnect from the land is one of the things that causes so much trauma for Indigenous peoples, absolutely no question. But I would say for everyone, honestly, that disconnection to the land. It's harmful, I think to our souls or spirituality, but it's not seen as such. So being able to go back to the land, respect the land have a relationship with the land is again, part of that consciousness raising because that's the missing piece of who we are.

Oeishi 13:45

Or last question for Anne Marie was one from student to student, what works are currently capturing your attention within or outside of CP,

Ann Marie Beals 13:54

We're really reaching outside of CP. So, it's not so much focusing on the attention to people within CP. But it's going broader beyond CP. So right now I'm looking at reading a lot of Black feminists who do a lot of collective work and working in community for the benefit of people in our community, the actual collective like getting out of that individualistic frame of mind to think about our communities, our collective and in thinking about others. So, for instance, Black feminists, Black activists, almost always, at least where I come from are always thinking about and bringing Indigenous activists into working together in solidarity, to protect our communities and to dismantle white supremacy bring down the status quo.

14:54

As scholar activists, I would really suggest reading outside, do your own learning, read things that really speak to the larger picture of what's going on because that's the problem is that that hidden information that that we don't see.

Alicia 15:21

We'd like to thank them for their time and knowledge. This has been Ashley, Oishi. And Alicia, for It's All Connected. Thank you for listening. We acknowledge that this podcast was created on the traditional territory of the Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples. We invite you now to reflect on your own relationship with the land on which you reside, as well as its Indigenous caretakers.