Globethics Repository



Psychologists in Nunavut

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Wihak, Christine
Publisher	Native Counselling Services of Alberta and The ACADRE Network
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-10-30 23:17:11
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/171969

Psychologists in Nunavut: A Comparison of the Principles Underlying Inuit Qaujimanituqangit and the Canadian Psychological Association Code of Ethics

Christine Wihak
University of Alberta



Original artwork by Bob Martial

The Nunavut territorial government is the first public government in Canada (and possibly the world) to be shaped fundamentally by an Aboriginal world view. When the Nunavut government revises legislation governing the profession to reflect *Inuit Qaujimanituqangit* (IQ), Inuit traditional knowledge, Nunavut psychologists will need to question very deeply whether the ethics of the profession are compatible with Inuit ethical values. As one of the small number of psychologists registered in Nunavut and a researcher on health-related issues in the territory, this is a very personal ethical dilemma. But it is one that I share with any member of a regulated health profession who is involved in research or practice in Nunavut and who strives to follow the code of ethics established by his/her professional body.

In this paper, I begin an exploration of the compatibility of Inuit values and those of professional psychologists by comparing IQ principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) with the Code of Ethics of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA 2000). This exercise was helpful to me personally in understanding what I learned during many years spent in Nunavut and in suggesting directions for further investigation of ethical questions and value conflicts. I hope it may prove of assistance to psychologists and other health professionals doing health-related research in Nunavut or in other Indigenous communities with world views similar to that of the Inuit.

Principles of IQ

According to Arnakak (2002), the guiding principles of IQ were abstracted from extensive interviews with Inuit Elders across Nunavut, and elaborated in an interdepartmental workshop held in September, 1999. The four core principles are: *Pijitsirniq*, *Aajiiqatigiingniq*, *Pilimmaksarniq*, and *Piliriquatigiingniq*. The Department of Health and Social Services (1999), which is responsible for the licensing legislation for psychologists and other health professionals, has added an additional two principles: *Avatimik Kamattiarniq* and *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*. Drawing from Arnakak's and DHSS's material, each of these ideas is briefly discussed below. The reader should be aware that these are complex and multi-layered concepts, reflecting the world view of a culture whose history and experience is vastly different than European-derived cultures. This short discussion can only introduce the basic ideas. Further, the order of presentation does not in any sense reflect prioritization, since the Inuit clearly see all of these principles as interrelated. This is in contrast to the CPA Code, where the order of presentation reflects an order of priority if values conflict (CPA 2000).

Pijitsirniq

This word reflects the idea of leadership in service of the community. Within Inuit culture, authority comes from knowledge, skill, experience and wisdom rather than elected, appointed or inherited position. Leadership comes from merit. A real leader puts the interests of the community ahead of his/her own interests.

Aajiiqatigiingniq

This principle refers to the Inuit form of decision-making, by comparing views, conferring and taking counsel. This process ensures that all parties understand each other, and that people doing different functions or jobs are nevertheless working towards a common purpose.

Pilimmaksarniq

This concept refers to knowledge gained through observation and experience. Traditionally, skills needed to ensure success and survival were passed on through observation and practise. Collectively, the community needs to ensure that each member has the skills required to contribute effectively.

Table 1. Comparison of CPA Principles and IQ Principles

Principles of CPA Code (2000)	*Principles of IQ (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999)*
Respect for Dignity of Persons	
• "Belief that each person should be treated as a person . . . all persons have a right to have their innate worth as human being appreciated. . ."	• *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*: idea that respect and tolerance for individual is a mark of maturity
• ". . . their greatest responsibility be to those persons directly receiving or involved in psychologist's activities. . ."	• No directly comparable idea although *Pijitsirniq* contains the idea of knowledgeable people being responsible to serve others and *Pilimmaksarniq* has the idea of ensuring all members can contribute to a community.
• ". . . responsibility to develop and follow procedures for informed consent, confidentiality, fair treatment and due process. . ."	• *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: inclusive decision-making; ensure all parties understand
• ". . . individual rights exist within context of the rights of others. . ."	• *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*: views individuals within larger community.

• ". . . responsibility to seek ethical advice and establish safeguards. . ."	• *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: inclusive decision-making; ensure all parties understand.
• ". . . psychologists must not exclude persons on a capricious or unjustly discriminatory basis. . ."	• *Piliriquatigiingniq*: all members of community can contribute; sharing of resources.
Responsible Caring	
• ". . . activities will benefit members of society . . . both those directly involved and those indirectly involved . . ."	• *Pijitsirniq:* knowledgeable leaders serve interests of community; • *Pilimmaksarniq*: passing on knowledge and skills so that all members are able to contribute to community.
• ". . . discern the potential harm and benefits involved, to predict the likelihood of their occurrence, to proceed only if the potential benefits outweigh potential harms and maximize benefits, and . . . correcting clearly harmful effects."	• *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*: views individuals within larger community; • *Piliriquatigiingniq*: wise use of resources.
• ". . . recognize the need for competence and self-knowledge."	• *Pilimmaksarniq:* skill development to ensure success and survival.
• ". . . recognizes and respects . . . the ability of individuals, families, groups and communities to make decisions for themselves and to care for themselves . . ."	• *Piliriquatigiingniq:* all members of a community can contribute.
• "animals . . . have the right to be treated humanely. . . ."	• *Avatimik Kamattiarniq*: what people put into the environment will come back to them.
Integrity in Relationships	
• "expectations include: accuracy and honesty; straightforwardness and openness; the maximization of objectivity and minimization of bias; and, avoidance of conflict of interest."	• *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: inclusive decision-making; • *Inuuqatigiittiarniq:* respect, tolerance, forbearance are qualities of mature and civilized behaviour; • *Pijitsirniq*: leaders serve the interests of the community.

• "*. . .* meeting expectations of integrity is enhanced by self-knowledge and the use of critical analysis*. . .*"	• No comparable principle.
• "*. . .* ensure that their decision not to be fully open or straightforward is justified by higher order values."	• No comparable principle.
• "*. . .* never to use deception in service activities, and to avoid *. . .* use of deception in research."	• No comparable principle.
• " *. . .* situations which present real or potential conflicts of interest are of concern *. . .*"	• *Pijitsirniq*: leaders serve the interests of the community as opposed to self-interest.
• "*. . .* maintain competence in any specialty area for which they declare competence *. . .*"	• *Pijitsirniq:* leadership based on knowledge and skill; • *Pilimmaksarniq*: skill development to ensure success and survival.
Responsibility to Society	
• "Psychologists *. . .* have responsibilities to the societies in which they live and work*. . . .*"	• *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*: views individuals within larger community.
• "*. . .* ensure that psychological knowledge *. . .* will be used for beneficial purposes *. . .* and the discipline's own structures and policies will support those beneficial purposes."	• *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: inclusive decision-making; • *Pilimmaksarniq:* passing on knowledge and skill.
• "*. . .* psychology as a science and a profession *. . . .*"	• No comparable principle.
• "*. . .* convey respect for social structures *. . .*"	• *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: inclusive decision-making and doing different tasks for a common purpose.
• "*. . .* work in partnership with others, be self-reflective, and be open to external suggestions and criticisms *. . .* "	• *Piliriquatigiingniq:* all members can contribute to community; collaborative relationships.

Piliriquatigiingniq

This word contains the concept of a community working collaboratively to ensure wise use of limited resources. It is based on the idea that all members can contribute something to the community. The emphasis is on sharing and collaborative relationships.

Avatimik Kamattiarniq

This concept encompasses the Inuit's relationship to the environment. Because they see themselves as part of the environment and understand that what they put into the environment will come back to them, this concept implies a responsibility for environmental stewardship. It also reflects accumulation of environmental knowledge.

Inuuqatigiittiarniq

This word reflects the idea of viewing individual behaviour within a larger community context. Respect, tolerance, and forbearance are seen as qualities of mature and civilized behaviour.

Comparison of IQ Principles with CPA Principles

The CPA (2000) Code of Conduct is elaborated from four fundamental principles:

- Respect for the Dignity of Persons
- Responsible Caring
- Integrity in Relationships
- Responsibility to Society

A Values Statement associated with each Principle describes and defines the relevant values while detailed Ethical Standards outline the application of the specific principles and values in different activities of the professional practice of psychology.

Table 1 compares CPA Principles (2000) with IQ Principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999). Adapting a format used by Sinclair (1993), the first column contains key ideas about the CPA Principles extracted from associated Values Statements (CPA 2000). The second column highlights the IQ Principles that are most relevant to the Value Statement, focusing on the aspect of each that is particularly appropriate in context.

This preliminary analysis shows a basic compatibility between fundamental principles of Inuit tradition as expressed in IQ (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) and the principles underlying the Canadian Psychological Association's Code of Conduct (2000). Both sets of principles reflect respect for the individual; responsibility of people with skills and knowledge to use them wisely for the benefit of others, and to pass them on to others; the importance of open discussion and collaborative decision-making; and concern for community welfare. In all but four in-

stances, an IQ Principle can be seen which speaks directly to key ideas in the CPA Code's Value Statements.

The two sets of principles are, however, organized differently. Within each of the four CPA (2000) Principles, we can find more than one IQ Principle (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) concerned with that issue. For example, under "Respect for the Dignity of Persons," we find three of the six IQ Principles: *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*, *Aajiiqatigiingniq*, and *Piliriquatigiingniq.* Similarly, under "Responsibility to Society," we find four IQ Principles: *Inuuqatigiittiarniq*, *Aajiiqatigiingniq*, *Pilimmaksarniq*, and *Piliriquatigiingniq.* Is this apparent overlapping of principles a cause for concern, perhaps indicating that the IQ Principles are too general to relate clearly to the CPA Code? This probably is not an issue; we see a similar pattern when comparing the CPA Code to Codes from other jurisdictions. For example, in Sinclair's analysis (1993) of Canadian Psychological Association and American Psychological Association Codes, any given CPA Principle and associated Value Statement relates to several Principles from the American Psychological Association (APA) Code, even though the APA Code formed the starting point for the creation of the CPA Code (Sinclair et al. 1997).

Of more interest are the instances where no clear correspondence between the CPA (2000) Values Statement and IQ Principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) can be seen. Under "Respect for Dignity of Persons," no IQ Principle relates directly to the Value Statement of "their greatest responsibility be to those persons directly receiving or involved in psychologist's activities . . . ." Similarly, under "Integrity in Relationships," the statements

- "meeting expectations of integrity is enhanced by self-knowledge and the use of critical analysis";
- "ensure that their decision not to be fully open or straightforward is justified by higher order values"; and
- "never to use deception in service activities, and to avoid . . . use of deception in research"

are difficult to relate directly to any IQ Principle. Finally, the idea that psychology is a "science and a discipline" has no clear counterpart within the IQ Principles. Each of these instances may reflect a subtle difference between the Inuit and CPA value systems.

Discussion of Value Conflicts

With regard to the idea that psychologists' "greatest responsibility be to those persons directly receiving or involved in psychologist's activities"

(Canadian Psychological Association 2000), the Inuit do have a strong respect for the individual, but the individual is not seen as separate from the community. In the small family groupings that characterized Inuit traditional life, individual survival was so interdependent with community survival that conflicts could only very rarely be said to exist (Pauktutit 1991). Therefore, Inuit might consider it a very odd idea that what is beneficial to a given individual may have to be given higher priority than the welfare of the community. Rather, they might think that if any situation were really understood deeply, the apparent conflicts would be resolved. Whether this view is appropriate in the Inuit communities of today is another question. The Inuit certainly recognize that their traditions and practices will have to be adapted to the modern world (Arnakak 2002). Nevertheless, the value of putting the emphasis on community welfare, rather than individual welfare, is still deeply entrenched. For example, I heard from a student, a woman in her late 30s, about being raped as a teenager by an uncle. She was living in an outpost camp, and went from tent to tent, asking for help. No one would do anything because, as a hunter, he was more important to the community. This type of scenario is, of course, similar in some ways to reactions southern Canadian women and children faced when issues of family violence and sexual abuse emerged into the public domain. Southern value systems have changed and Inuit value systems may do the same. Nevertheless, some conflict may exist between the CPA Code (2000) and IQ Principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) in that the CPA Code gives priority to concern for individuals rather than the community.

The question of deception, whether it be self-deception as implied in the statement "meeting expectations of integrity is enhanced by self-knowledge and the use of critical analysis" (CPA 2000) or deception of others as suggested by "ensure that their decision not to be fully open or straightforward is justified by higher order values" (CPA 2000) and "never to use deception in service activities, and to avoid . . . use of deception in research" (CPA 2000) is an interesting one. Within traditional communities, and even within modern Inuit communities, sustained deception is difficult to achieve. The communities are so small and private lives so exposed that concealing any behaviour, attitude or idea is hard to do. If someone is trapped in self-deception, traditional methods of social control such as gentle teasing or a vigorous round of gossip will usually bring the person back to reality very soon (Pauktutit 1991). Trying to deceive anyone, even for a "higher order value," would be considered futile, since the truth would soon become known. Therefore, the Inuit Elders who contributed to the development of IQ Principles perhaps

did not see a need to speak specifically about deception as a concern. Given the opportunity to discuss the issue further, they may well be able to see why it is a concern in contemporary Nunavut communities, and how that concern can be addressed more directly within the principles of IQ.

The final instance where no applicable IQ principle could be found is in the Value Statement for "Responsibility to Society," which describes "psychology as a science" (CPA 2000). Nowhere do IQ principles refer to "science" as an important value. To the contrary, IQ itself means "Inuit traditional knowledge," and that traditional knowledge, although much of it is based on direct observation of people and animals, would not be recognized as "scientific" by the vast majority of scientists. Certainly, we have examples of scientists collaborating with Inuit in studies to validate traditional knowledge (Arnakak 2002). In these examples, however, Inuit knowledge is valued as a source of hypotheses to be tested, not as valid knowledge in and of itself. This area is thus the one posing the greatest potential conflict between the IQ Principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) and the CPA (2000) Code of Ethics. It highlights the difference in the truth detection systems of the two value systems. In essence, the two cultures may use different methods to answer the question "What is true?"

Ethics are concerned with the question of what is good. As Fernandez-Armesto (1998: 3) has pointed out, "Everyone's attempt to be good . . . starts with two questions: How do I tell right from wrong? And how do I tell truth from falsehood?" The question of how to tell what is true must be answered before ethical questions of right and wrong can be answered with certainty. Fernandez-Armesto identifies four primary methods that humanity has used at different times and places for determining the truth:

- felt truth (visions, direct communication with the supernatural),
- revealed truth (as in religious stories or texts such as the Bible or Aboriginal creation stories)
- reasoned truth (as in logic, mathematical reasoning), and
- empirical/scientific truth.

The dominant North American culture relies most heavily on empirical/scientific truth. This is reflected in the CPA (2000) Code's emphasis on scientific research and evidence. The Government of Nunavut, in adopting IQ as a founding principle, is essentially asserting that what Inuit traditionally knew is true. Fernandez-Armesto's (1998) analysis of anthropological evidence suggests that hunter-gatherer cultures like the Inuit, however, accept felt truth and revealed truth to be on an equal par with, if not superior to, empirical

truth. When Inuit look at science-based culture and see environmental degradation, unequal distribution of resources, and widespread violence and war, they may have good reason to be skeptical about "science" as the privileged form of truth detection and a reliable guide to correct action.

The difference in world view will clearly affect explanations of the causes of human behaviour, important in health-related research. For example, Inuit have a strong belief in a form of reincarnation (Pauktutit 1991); Inuit will explain why a person behaves a certain way in terms of which deceased relative s/he resembles. In the context of contemporary mental health theory, this understanding of behavioural causality is quite different than that found in scientific studies of human development. Another example is the different explanation of schizophrenic behaviour in the two cultures. To a scientific psychologist, the voices and visions often associated with this disorder are abnormal. To many Inuit, hearing voices and seeing visions may be a normative experience, while the problem comes from the type of messages being conveyed and/or the person's inability to reject or refute the messages. To scientific psychologists, schizophrenia is seen as the result of biochemical imbalances. To many Inuit, schizophrenia may be considered the result of demon possession. For the psychology profession, pledged to rely on scientifically verified demonstrations of causality and the use of therapeutic methods based on science, such differences in world view will have profound implications.

Many people, including those with scientific training, have little metacognition concerning their preferred mode of truth determination. While they may be aware of a sense of conflict generated by different world views, they cannot articulate the cause. Conflict at this level may prove to be a more fundamental issue than disagreements over what is right or good. Using Fernandez-Armesto's (1998) classification system, Inuit traditional knowledge recognizes "felt truth" and "revealed truth" to be highly acceptable, but it is dubious whether CPA would recognize those as valid methods. And given that governance in Nunavut is mandated to reflect IQ Principles, Inuit may well feel that the onus is on the psychologists to accept Inuit truths without Inuit having to validate their cultural and traditional insights through scientific studies using truth-testing methods from another culture. Rather, the psychologists conducting research in Nunavut may have to demonstrate to the Inuit that findings from their scientific research methods are on a par with Inuit traditional knowledge.

Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to explore the question of compatibility or conflict between Inuit Qaujimanituqangit Principles (Arnakak 2002, Department of Health and Social Services 1999) and the principles contained in the Canadian Psychological Association (2000) Code of Ethics. The analysis of the two sets of principles revealed a high level of compatibility at the level of "what is good." Apparent conflicts concerning the importance of individual welfare versus community welfare and deception could probably be resolved by further discussion and elaboration of IQ Principles.

A more serious conflict may be the question of how to tell what is true, specifically whether "psychology as a science," with its associated scientific research methods, is acceptable or meaningful to Inuit. With the creation of Nunavut, it is no longer possible for people from the south to impose their world view on the Aboriginal people. Rather, the Inuit will be the ones deciding how much of the other culture they wish to adopt. For Nunavut psychologists, and other regulated health professionals, this process could challenge their fundamental principles and standards about appropriate research processes and the scientific basis of therapeutic interventions.

References

Arnakak, J.

2002 "Incorporation of Inuit Qaujimanituqangit, or Inuit Traditional Knowledge, into the Government of Nunavut." *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* 3(1).

Canadian Psychological Association

2000 *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (3rd ed.). Retrieved Nov. 22, 2002 from http://www.cpa.ca/ethics2000.html

Department of Health and Social Services, Government of Nunavut

1999 *From the IQ Presentation held at Apex, Abe Oopik Hall on September 29, 1999.* Unpublished internal document.

Fernandez-Armesto, F.

1998 *Truth: A History and a Guide for the Perplexed.* London: Black Swan Books.

Pauktutit

1991 *The Inuit Way.* Ottawa: Pauktutit

Sinclair, C.

1993 *Comparison of CPA, APA, and ASPPB Codes.* Unpublished document.

Sinclair, C., S. Poizner, K. Gilmour-Barrett, and D. Randall

1997 "The development of a code of ethics for Canadian Psychologists." In *Companion Manual to the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, 1991.* Ottawa: CPA, 1-11.