

COMMON GROUND PSYCHOLOGY: AN EMERGING THEORY AND PRACTICE AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR AFRICA

John Egbeazien Oshodi

Transatlantic Enrichment and Refresher Institute, Miami, Florida, ISCOM University, ESPAM Formation University, Cotonou, Republic of Benin

ABSTRACT

In the light of the assumptions of African or Black oriented psychology, multicultural psychology and cognitive psychology, this paper attempts to develop the theory of Common Ground Psychology. In this paper, attempts are made to dynamically and systematically show how culture influences emotion, cognition, and behavior. Common Ground Psychology or the psychology of common ground is borne out of the ways people interact with each other and integrate into each other's cognitive, emotional and social space in various societies, including societies with abundant distinct values, rituals, ethnicities, tribes, languages, religions and cultures. Common ground is seen as a situation or state in which people with different interests agree upon something of mutual interest and a major technique in Common Ground Psychology is the use of negotiation for solving differences and for finding common ground.

KEYWORDS: Common Ground Psychology, Shared Interest Psychology, Psychoafricalysis, Psychology, Africa, Human Behavior, Cognitive Psychology, Integration, Individuals, Mutual Understanding, Community, Nation, Society

INTRODUCTION

Psychology encompasses all aspects of human experiences; the study of psychology incorporates all the elements involved in understanding behavior, mental processes, and more precisely the practices that motivate behavior with interest not only in understanding behavior, but predicting it, too. In the same vein and within our current cultural and social world, behaviors are organized by some degree of psycho-social specific meanings, processes and practices.

Theoretical Foundations

This author long constructed the theory of psychoafricalysis or psychoafricalytic psychology which highlights the role of African or Black-oriented psychological factors that are intrinsically and extrinsically appealing in regard to human behavior, which largely includes emotionality, perception, neurology, intelligence, personality, memory, visual-motor orientation, communication, society, spirituality, general experiences and the need for achievement and existence (Oshodi, 2012, 1996). Common ground as a psychology theory is viewed as a form of "mutual understanding in knowledge, mutual understanding in beliefs, and mutual understanding in assumptions" that is essential for communication between two people (Clark & Brennan 1991, p.127).

In order to understand how the different and surrounding human cultures relate to the best interest of individuals, communities, societies, our daily existence and overall well-being, let's turn to cognitive psychology.

Cognitive psychology allows us to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the many cultural and ethnic actions that contribute to attention, memory, perception, problem-solving, creativity, thinking and language.

Cognitive psychologist, Albert Bandura (1998), states that the process of right and wrong cognitive restructuring includes:

- (i) Using religion to justify such acts by invoking "situational imperatives,"
- (ii) Using the political dispute of self-defense to show how the group is "fighting ruthless oppressors" who are threatening the community's "cherished values and way of life,"
- (iii) Using the psychological device of dehumanization to justify killing "the enemy" (pp. 174, 180-182).

The strength of the theory is that it addresses cultural and political factors that inform individual and community decision-making, as it relates to finding common ground. Expanded in this way, the psychoanalytic and cognitive concepts could serve as strengths in the foundations of common ground theoretical and applied psychology.

Bromme's theory (2000) on common ground has direct applicability to the process of developing and integrating the construct on Common Ground Psychology. Bromme asserted the theory of interdisciplinary concepts and the development of mutual language or ways to integrate conflicting disciplinary insights, help to identify the concepts providing different explanations with different meanings before attempting to discover common ground.

Common Ground Psychology, as it relates to what is realizable in conflicting environments and different cultural and mental processes with techniques of developing common ground, becomes vital.

Common ground can be composed of knowledge that is distributed among or common to cultures. Common ground can comprise agreement on what is not part of the shared knowledge. (2000, pp. 128-129)

Common ground theory says that "every act of communication presumes a common cognitive frame of reference between the partners of interaction called the common ground" (Bromme, 2000, p. 119). The theory of Common Ground Psychology seeks to adopt the common frame of reference between the partnering individuals and cultures of interaction. The Common Ground Psychology as a

framework follows Bromme's integration of everyday social interaction where two individuals enter into each other's frame of reference, attempt to discuss a problem, try to identify sources of disagreement concerning it, and arrive jointly at a resolution of it.

Common Ground Psychology adopts Bromme's idea that "all contributions to the process of mutual understanding serve to establish or ascertain and continually maintain this common ground" (p. 119). Relevant to the development of Common Ground Psychology is the work of Newell (2001): "to bring out their commonalities so that linkages can be identified between [conflicting insights]" (p. 20).

Through Newell's (2001) ideas, the psychology of common ground points to something that could be created which involves modifying or reinterpreting cultural components; something which allows modifying different components using various integrative techniques. In the sense that psychology dynamically and systematically is involved in how culture influences emotion, cognition, and behavior, psychology remains rooted in our individual, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, religious, communal, regional, national and continental cultures.

The idea and origination of what I see as Common Ground Psychology describes ways people interact with each other and integrate into each other's cognitive, emotional and social space in various societies, including societies with plenty of distinct values, rituals, ethnicities, tribes, languages, religions and cultures. These polarized relationships in such living environments usually result in everyone being almost bound in their tribal/linguistic and religious cloths and in a hyper-regional, hyper-emotional and hyper-situational state. The social and psychological responses to these multiple and distinct differences make the people open to intentional and unintentional divisiveness as it relates to domestic, community, and national issues. Many problems build up in the form of self-serving attitudes as it relates to one's "people," warring religions, self-serving types of governance, intercommunal antagonism, corruption, violence, and wanton destruction of life and properties.

This lingering and huge issue makes resolving personal difference hard, interpersonal conflict hardened, cross communal deliberation difficult, and communal tolerance tough.

This persistent and huge issue makes deliberation hard for "all of us" as a people and in the process national growth and democracy ends up in a state of difficulty.

For the purpose of illustration, unlike other continents, Northern Africa is mainly populated with Muslims and Southern Africa is mostly Christian and this line of division has remained volatile in terms of religious, tribal and ethnic relationships. This volatile tribal fault line more recently is openly pronounced in Nigeria, the most populous black African nation, where sectarian behaviors affect civility, safety, security, law, tolerance, hopefulness, trustfulness, economy, leadership, and

governance. The other characteristics of these oppositional relationships lead to the psychology of “Us or Them” behaviors and mental processes.

Stalnaker (1978) sees common ground as the “context of a conversation...represented by a body of information that is presumed to be shared by participants in a conversation (p.1)” and in the course of perspectives, opinions, disagreements and conflicts.

Applications and Practices

Common Ground Psychology asserts that as it relates to people, the interactive dynamics of dealing with differences are pretty much the same, regardless of the complex nature of the situation.

In order to reach some degree of shared interest, Common Ground Psychology adopts this idea in matters that call for shared arrangement. Common ground is viewed as a situation or state in which people with different interests agree upon something. Common Ground Psychology is about shareable ground whose margins are marked by a range of arrangements that all can live with.

You and your classmate may not vote for the same political candidate, for example, but your shared belief in votes and voting processes, free speech, and the democratic process is generally a sign of common ground.

A principal technique in Common Ground Psychology is the act of “negotiation” which is a rational process for resolving differences and for finding common ground.

When negotiations are effectively done, they can bring people into harmony instead of pushing them apart. They can lead to resolutions that are smarter and fairer than either side may have originally proposed that is seen to be fair to both parties without any form of partiality.

Common Ground Psychology asserts that to achieve common ground, (a leader, a tribal head, a religious head) must propose something, such as a set of basic goals, which the people of different sides can agree upon. When such an arrangement happens, that set of goals becomes their common ground; it becomes a basis agreed to by all parties for the attainment of a mutual understanding and development.

Common Ground Psychology asserts that there are situations that are sometimes difficult to bridge; as such, both parties must be willing to live with the fact that they may not agree on all things, but instead of focusing on where one disagrees, both parties should build on a variety of areas that can strengthen the relationship.

Common Ground Psychology asserts that people who put on a defensive face will usually fight back, which then closes their minds to anything but survival or winning.

Common Ground Psychology asserts that in manipulating or overpowering people, one may get his or her's immediate objective, but it is also certain that fears and resentments could come back to hurt one's cause.

If two of you are on a journey, following separate paths, you will reach common ground when you finally get to the set place and enjoy the benefits of equal placement.

CONCLUSIONS

Common Ground Psychology, as a foundation for mutual understanding and respect of views and opinions, calls for where no one's interest is higher or lower than another's.

In order to effectively arrive and share a common ground, individuals should try to seek out the opportunity to start a conversation with someone you don't know. Do not be too fast in launching into one's own personal situation too readily as it might make the other person feel awkward.

No matter what your relationship with a person, be attentive and sympathetic regarding the other's feelings, as most individuals like to be appreciated, so showing interest is a mark of hospitality, which invites them in. Enthusiastic words which include different types of praises and acceptance allow the dance of shared interest to start.

Common Ground Psychology provides a pathway of communication, which could lead to trust, and talking about things that are common to humans, like food, drink, or music. Such activities which allow for common experience helps build connectivity and trust. Common Ground Psychology creates avenues for experiencing a sense of freedom that allows one to be true and authentic in interaction.

Common Ground Psychology allows us to understand each other better, and caringly; it allows us to learn and understand how another perceives things; it allows one to begin to see that not all others' opinions are wrong and not all our views are right. One learns to let go by way of appreciation of each other, by our being willing to negotiate, and, by such style, previous difficulties can then be approached because we have more ways to tackle the problem and have more tools to work with.

Common Ground Psychology rails against outwitting or overpowering an opponent; it focuses on bargaining over interests and positions. Common Ground Psychology is about finding solutions that are steady because they bring people together instead of pushing them further apart. Winning at the expense of others is highly discouraged and anti-solution in its finality; seeking unilateral victories often easily results in sacrificing long-term benefit for short-term gain.

Common Ground Psychology seeks to lessen stereotypes and provides examples showing that multi-ethnic cultures can have a positive outcome, and leads to respectful multi-community living.

Common Ground Psychology helps find ways to transform the way individuals and societies deal with conflict - away from confrontational approaches and towards collaborative problem-solving. Common Ground Psychology helps in finding ways to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively, finding ways to understand differences and acting on the commonalities.

Common Ground Psychology is culturally embedded—and it is all about advancing the field by offering a theoretical and practical model for founding the roots of shared interest psychology in a broad cultural/tribal/religious context, including dialect, socioeconomic status and political identifications. Common Ground Psychology is a developing theoretical and appreciative approach within the field of human psychology that researchers can use to contribute to shared human-related studies and clinicians can use as orientation and technique to facilitate positive interpersonal relationships. Policy makers could use it to seek more ways to bring out goodness, progress and what is best in a society, the multiethnic ones especially.

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