



## Episode 6: *Bringing it Home - Panel Question & Answer*

### Transcript of Conversation with Dr. Varela

Kristin Fields 0:09

Welcome to another episode of practicing antiracism clinically. For our last segment of the podcast, we have created mini episodes, talking to working psychologists in different areas of the field about how they are implementing diversity, equity and inclusion work, and how they can better improve these practices within their given role. We've invited guests spanning several positions in several states, from clinic directors, to faculty members to practicing clinicians and more. We are excited to hear their perspectives and how cultural humility and anti racist practices can be implemented in their respective settings. Here's who will be talking with for this mini episode.

Harley Layman 0:51

Dr. Jorge Varela is a professor of psychology and director of clinical training for the Ph. D. program in clinical psychology at Sam Houston State University. He teaches doctoral practicum, and multicultural psychology courses, as well as undergraduate courses in abnormal psychology and psychology and the law. His research interests include forensic psychology, especially forensic assessment, and multicultural psychology. He serves on the board of the Council of University Directors of Clinical Programs, and is co chair of the bridge committee of the American Psychology Law Society. Prior to his appointment to the faculty at Sam Houston State in 2008, he served in the US Air Force for nine years, after listening to the previous episodes and reviewing the material what stood out the most to you, and how does that apply to cultural humility or multiculturalism in your program?

Dr. Varela 1:47

Well, what stood out the most to me? I don't, I don't think that there's any one thing that I could say that was more important than anything else. But what stood out for me was the the strong commitment to multiculturalism, you know, including cultural humility, and, and generally a multicultural orientation. And the reason that commitment stood out for me is because it kind of serves as a call to action for me, as I got to do as good a job as I can, in promoting cultural competency in promoting diversity, inclusion, and justice, equity, all these words that are kind of flags for us now, even at the risk of them being overused. But they are, it really sent the message to me as a director of clinical training, that these things matter. We knew, I mean, I knew they mattered, but hearing you guys talk about them reminds me of how much they matter. And that it's on me to do everything I can to promote these issues among our students in our program, and especially so that our graduates are able to contribute, once they leave.

Harley Layman 3:14

And what ways could your program or department implement some of the techniques and training discussed by our podcast guests?

Dr. Varela 3:22

Well, you know, as I was thinking about this conversation we're gonna have one of the things that came to mind. And I don't know exactly, I can't recall exactly if this was discussed, at least in this way. But one of the things that came to mind is the importance of intentionality. Which is

to say, if we want to promote diversity, if we want to promote inclusion, if we want to ensure equity and justice, that we cannot just continue to do business, as we've done it for decades. And as a director of clinical training, you know, I've been I mean, I, I was trained the way I was trained, I don't think that was all that different from the people that came before me, it's probably not that different from the people that came after me. And society has changed, and we have to change. And those changes involve not just what we do, although certainly what we do is important, how we train about train people to be culturally competent. And by culture, I mean culture and all its forms. I mean, diversity in all its forms, whether it's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, all I mean, there's all ways in which people differ from one another. That's all part of the colorful tapestry that we have. And if we if we don't approach this with intentionality, we don't seek to change things from the way they were to change the status quo that we we can't get expect things to be different. We can't expect to achieve these goals. And that intentionality begins, of course, with what we train, as I was mentioning before. So you know, the content of courses, the training experiences, whether it's who you are treating who you are evaluating, who are you consulting with? Again, what do we talk about our classes? Who we do research with? And who do we include? And what are the questions that we ask especially? And how do we go about answering those questions? But also, who do we bring into the pipeline? Who do we admit? How do we make those decisions, our decisions historically have led to a predominantly white profession. All you need to do is go to the APA Center for Workforce studies, and see this, you know, the the ethnic racial composition of our profession, and that data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But all you have to do is look at those data and see, wow, we're a pretty white profession go to a conference, what do you see? And that's included in like, for example, I go to the directors of clinical training conference, our governing body, well, not governing, but you know, our or our professional organizations. And I look around and actually, someone even commented to me, like, we were talking about diversity and promoting diversity. It's a hot topic, it should be a hot topic, it's important topic. And someone even turned to me, like I didn't know it, just say, wow, look around, like, yeah, look around. I think, you know, who we bring into the pipeline is really important, and how we make those decisions and thinking about how have these have we really made it have our decisions led us to include the people that will succeed and exclude the people that won't succeed? Or have we been using criteria and things like that, that maybe don't reflect everything you need to succeed and don't. And that's been part of it. So that's something I put a lot of thought into, as DCT is admissions. And I'll say that the COVID 19 pandemic, while it has been terrible, and let's not kid around with that. It did lead us and many other doctoral programs to stop using things like the GRE, and give us an opportunity to see well, what would it be like if we change that? And let's see, and we won't know, for a couple, you know, for a few years, once people start kind of going through their training and, you know, doing things in their training, whether it's research practice coursework, and, and we'll see. I think that there, we're gonna have at least two years where we didn't do that. And a lot of the pendulum has swung is swinging the other way away from standardized testing and admissions. So we might, we might keep it, keep it going.

Harley Layman 7:57

What things previously discussed, are you already doing? Or what are the strengths of your program?

Dr. Varela 8:04

Well, be easier if instead of talking about what what what did you discuss and what we're doing, let me talk about what we're doing. One is, as I was kind of alluding to that we have been more

intentional with our admissions, we specifically had this conversation last admission cycle. Like if this is what we want to do, then I'm going to take this did it? Yeah, like that exact kind of thing. So that's one thing. Our program has, a few years ago created a Diversity Committee. And interestingly enough, maybe for you as a student, and someone who clearly is aspiring to a career in psychology, you maybe you'll find this kind of cool, which is, I was at a meeting of the Council of University Directors of clinical programs or CUDCP, the organizing body of DCTS. And the there's always student representatives on the board actually sit on the board now. So we you know, we have student representatives. And that particular year, the represent the students did a study and they do though they do they do some study every year. Usually it's a survey of DCTS and gathering information, either from DCTS or doctoral students and kind of where we are in our training. It's particularly relevant there. They did a survey of students that asked about program climate, and what made a difference. And what they found was that pretty clearly the programs that had a Diversity Committee had better climates. And, of course, it's not just having a committee. I mean, yeah, I think I can kind of maybe infer a little bit from their findings and say, well, a committee that's doing good things. But the front had had a committee that went through the trouble of making a committee had better climate. So I made a note to myself, I can I can I to start program Diversity Committee. And I came back, and I told the faculty who are our doctoral program faculty, like, we got to do this, and talk to one of our professors. And, you know, he agreed to take it on. And I asked him specifically, because, and this is more of a leadership thing, but I said, you know, this guy's Craig Henderson, he's a friend and a colleague, Craig does it. He's brilliant. And he's very passionate. If he does it, he's gonna do it. Well, he's gonna go all in. And he did. And we formed the Diversity Committee. And what the Diversity Committee does, is that they have that, well, they brought in speakers for one, I mean, and this is more pre pandemic post. During the pandemic, it's been a little bit harder, everyone's busier and but they've had speakers. They put on diversity training, we started a diversity brown bag series.

Again, with the pandemic, that kind of that kind of, tailed off because people aren't on campus. And everyone was just trying to get their work done using video teleconferencing whenever they could, and, you know, practicum training and things like that they helped with they actually were very instrumental in developing our diversity recruitment plan, and ways to measure the effectiveness of that plan. And now, that comes, the need for that comes from well, just people of conscience wanting to divert to recruit diverse students, but also, the American Psychological Association, for accreditation, wants to know, what's your plan? And how are you evaluating it. So we want to make sure we did a good job there. And so we put, we put together a plan and how to evaluate that plan. And they put on diversity, multicultural events like potluck dinners, where people bring in the foods from where, you know, from their backgrounds, and we've had a few international students, we've had students from different parts of the country, things like that. So people were sharing about their backgrounds and the things that are important to them. And, unfortunately, and we know each other, right, so this is not just like strangers popping in like, oh, you never seen me before. Here's my pot of Cuban black beans. It's people coming together, and they seem to enjoy that movie nights. So watching movies where diversity, racism or discrimination, I mean, just all the various topics that relate to this and are adjacent to this. We're talking about and students seem to really enjoy those the faculty that are involved in that seem to really enjoy it. So I mean, that's things we of course, infused multiculturalism into our, into our classes. And we've had some new faculty members, join the department and join our core faculty of the program. They're interested in matters of diversity. So they've been incorporating this into the classes they've taken over. So it's been nice. I should add that we

have we have student representation on our Diversity Committee, not surprising. In fact, we have our co chair, chaired by a faculty member co chaired by a student. So we want students to have a voice to have a loud voice and to to play a role in what we do. And I think they appreciate that.

Harley Layman 13:51

In what areas do you believe we as practicing psychologists require the most growth.

Dr. Varela 13:57

One thing that really I think that psychology needs to do as a profession is that we we don't have enough psychologists that speak other languages. So I grew up, I'm first generation American, my parents immigrated to the United States from Cuba. I grew up bilingual. And my grandparents in the home, you know, very, you know, kind of common family structure. And, you know, spoke Spanish at home, spoke English at school, spoke English with my friends at school spoke Spanish when I was at their homes. I mean, I grew up around everybody I knew was Cuban. Actually, I barely knew anyone that wasn't Cuban. And so I'm fortunate, and my parents told me this would be true. I didn't realize it at the time that it would be good to speak Spanish. And it is for lots of reasons. And I think that our profession is really lacking practitioners and researchers, that speak languages I can do practice and research in other languages, and my partner and my own case, and the things that I spend my most time thinking about and practicing it relate to forensic psychology, criminal, specifically criminal justice applications. And we know unequivocally that people of color, especially African American, and Latinx people are overrepresented in the justice system. So having psychologists that look like and talk like the people that they are working with, whether it's treatment or evaluations, for example, if someone's I do a competency to stand trial evaluation, if I can do it in Spanish, that helps, and I do. So I think that's one area, a big area of growth. And the problem with that, I would say, it's not the problem, the difficulty, the challenge that we have, is that are people pursuing doctoral education? I mean, they have a lot of work to do. You probably see students always stressed out in the department and things like that. So we're kind of adding to that, because I don't think we can take anything away from their training, we shouldn't. So we're adding to that. And that means that's time. That's energy. And that's cost. And we have to find a way to do that. And not, I wish I had the answer right now. But I assure you, I'm thinking about it. And I'd like to do that on campus and our own campus. I still don't know what it's gonna look like. But I've been thinking about it and talking to people about it for a while.

Harley Layman 16:43

What are current goals that you and your program or department are working towards to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in your program and in your services?

Dr. Varela 16:54

Well, in our services, let me start there, let me kind of start with the second one in our services, we are cognizant well has it where we live, okay, where we work and where our campus is located. There's a lot of people of color. And that includes people Latin X people who, for whom English is either a second language very much a second language, or perhaps they don't even speak in very limited English proficiency with some clients. And so one thing that we we consider during admissions, and in really everything that we do is to think about, can we provide services to that community through our psychological services center, because we're located about roughly 90 miles, maybe a little less from Houston and Houston is the most, one of the

most diverse cities in the country, if not the most diversity? We think about how can we meet the needs of these these people. Now, even though again, the big city stuff, there's not like a bunch of therapists around and psychologist of other and other mental health providers. So you know, somebody if a family needs treatment, family therapy, and maybe the kids speak English, but the parents own who's going to see them. And in our case, you know, since we do our program has an emphasis in forensic psychology. We get referrals from from time to time for Spanish speaking defendants, fortunately, I'm there, and I can do them. So one of the things that we do to promote competence and in practice, is when we have a student who, who speaks Spanish in this case, I we tried to get make them opportunity to create opportunities for them to do services. So I've, I've seen, I've had students who worked under my supervision, providing treatment in Spanish, to just community dwelling clients. We've also done forensic evaluations of justice involved adults who, who needed to be interviewed in Spanish. So we provide those opportunities. And I think offering those opportunities, hopefully, is attractive to someone who comes from a diverse background and maybe wants to say, Okay, I grew up bilingual. I speak Spanish, for example, and like, oh, wow, here's a cool place where I can kind of do that. And then we get those people into the training pipeline. It doesn't only have to be us, but yeah, those are the things that we do. There's been a, I think, an increasing interest in doing research that asks questions related to diversity across all our faculty, not just me, and not just few. So I think that has also been promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in the research questions that we ask and the answers that we get, and then the research that we disseminate. So that's been helpful I mentioned I mean, I've already mentioned about intentionality and admissions, and cognitive being cognizant of that. We listen to our students and and when they have suggestions like, oh, the climate would be nice if we did this or you know, we'd like that. And we try to do the best we can to create the climate that they want and to maintain the climate. More importantly, that, that makes our students of color feel comfortable. And sometimes there are things that we just can't do. But other times, there are things that we can, and you know, everything things that are under our control. Like I would love to be able to say, oh, yeah, we're gonna double everybody's funding. That'll help me get through graduate school, and that'll help me feel better. And I like, yeah, I assure you, nothing would I would love to double your funding, but I can't, I don't, I just don't have the money to do that. But aside from those kinds of things, and the students understand they know those things that we have no control,

Harley Layman 20:44

Are there barriers that prevent us from diving deeper in our DEI journey as a program or field. And how can these barriers be addressed, in your opinion?

Dr. Varela 20:55

I think that the keep going back to the training pipeline, I really think that we need to attend to the training pipeline, who are we training? And who are we excluding, even if it's unintentional, when we look at our applicants, for example, on paper, you know, that sometimes we don't know their race, ethnicity, we certainly don't know things about for example, their sexual orientation and other parts of their identity and other parts of their, you know, in what ways they're diverse, to the extent that we can and pay attention to these things and and know about our applicants trying to really ask ourselves, okay, what is it that really helps them make it so that someone is a successful graduate student, and goes on to be a successful member of our, of our profession? Whether it's in research, whether it's in practice, whether it's in policymaking, or something else. And during that week, kind of always just done things, GRE, GPA, letters of recommendation, personal statement. And, and while some of these things, I mean, certainly having someone tell

us about who you are, and why you're interested in coming here is probably has some usefulness, GPA, right? How you did in school before helps with how you did but even GPA is a little can be tough to compare across institutions and things like that. But also thinking about and I really got to thinking about this, after reading an article I think in the Atlantic wasn't about psychology, it was about, you know, graduate school, maybe higher education in general about who are the people that get admitted to graduate school. Well, they are the people that maybe they spend a lot of time doing research as undergraduates, and that's great, except there is probably some bias there. And who gets to do that bias meaning and, you know, there's their people self select into that, well, the people who have to work, the ones who aren't doing that, and maybe the ones who and if we start thinking about socioeconomic status, we know that that's kind of inextricably tied to race and ethnicity, in our, in our, in our country anyway. And other countries as well. So we start thinking, Okay, well, who are we? Are we accidentally, unintentionally systematically excluding someone because of our criteria? And how do we do that? How do we pay attention to that, think about admissions in a new way, because what we mean, we certainly want to admit qualified students who are going to be successful. But we also don't want to pass over people who, you know, because of one reason or another, they may not have the standard package. And we we need to consider those students too. So I think that's a big thing. And I kind of said it again, but I'll repeat it as like kind of what we need to do is I really think that if we were to start trying to find ways to train our, our next generation of psychologist to speak the language of the clients, we're serving, you know, we're talking about the Census Bureau estimates, like 2042, that will become a minority majority country. And that tell me tells me like, wow, that's not that far away. And 20 years, we, you know, we're, we're changing quickly. And as, as the new census data is coming in, we're seeing that we need to be able to, we're going to be relevant as a profession. We need to be able to do these things.

Harley Layman 24:42

Thank you for listening to this episode of practicing anti racism clinically. This podcast was funded by an award from the APPIC call to action on equity, inclusion, justice and social responsibility. Resources associated with today's episode can be found at our website at [psychology.okstate.edu](https://psychology.okstate.edu). That's [psychology.okstate.edu](https://psychology.okstate.edu) If you hover over that adversity tab you can find the Student Diversity Committee. By clicking this link, you can find the Practice ARC podcast tab with all associated resources and supplemental materials for each episode.

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