

Interview with Dr. Kavita Avula

In preparation for this event, Anisley interviewed Dr. Avula about her interests in the topic and why she wanted to share such insights with our community.

Anisley: Kavita, tell us what motivated you to bring this topic to the New Washington School of Psychiatry, specifically?

Kavita: I am a large group enthusiast and believe that dialogue with one another can help us to understand the dynamics that underlie societies. As an international trauma psychologist, I have learned over decades of supporting groups in conflict that being with each other, and listening, rather than pushing our agenda can be transformative. I have noticed that the same fractures that are occurring nationally and internationally are happening at NWSP and believe the Reflective Citizen Methodology has a great deal to offer.

Anisley: What interests you about this topic, in particular?

Kavita: I am interested in supporting communities to sit with each other. To find ways to co-exist without having to agree with each other. In my work, I have pushed myself to step towards the people who hold the most different identities. For years, I have been creating sanctuary spaces for Brown, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BBIPOC) to be together outside of the "white gaze". At AGPA, I offered the first ever BBIPOC institute and it had a waiting list for the 3 years I offered it. This year, I invited a white male psychologist, Dr. Aaron Black, to co-lead an institute in an effort to share this work and to step towards the person with the most different identities from me. I want to find ways to co-exist without imposing our agendas on each other.

Anisley: What do you hope attendees of this program will take with them and deeply understand?

Kavita: I hope attendees will learn to notice unconscious codes of superiority. When we try to address superiority or othering unconsciously using superiority or othering it doesn't work. It creates more fractures. Ultimately, my greatest hope is that attendees learn something more about peace and conflict and how power and privilege can help us to know how to best direct our influence.

Anisley: What is the role of therapists in the context of geopolitics?

Kavita: Therapists strive to create safe, dignified, spaces for individuals and groups to process what has not been processed and to work through places of stuckness. It is our role to know ourselves and our biases as well as possible so they do not disrupt a client's experience. As group practitioners, we have to know how to facilitate conversations without unconsciously influencing the group in unintended ways. Our clients are picking up on our unconscious communications and microaggressions that we are not always aware that we are engaging in.

Anisley: What can you tell us about how therapists can use the Reflective Citizen (RC) model in group therapy?

Kavita: RC was not created to use in group therapy. It was created for communities living in contentious times to have a space to talk about what is happening, to share, and be together. Engaging in this method makes us aware of what is happening in our community. Letting go of personal agendas can be transformative. It has been for me.

Anisley: What are the barriers that hinder peacebuilding in some of these conflicts we are facing in society?

Kavita: Getting too attached to one's agenda. This recreates the wars we are trying to address. Superiority. When we try to address oppression and become oppressive while speaking out for one community's rights, it only creates more oppression. If we can take a trauma-informed lens and notice when we get triggered, and why we are in fight, flight, freeze, fawn, we can turn to self and group regulation to invite learning and growth.

Anisley: Why do you think some conflicts garnish more attention than others?

Kavita: People in power and with privilege influence what conflicts show up in our news, on our TVs, and our conversations at the dinner table. There are over 150 world conflicts. Why are we only centering two? When we don't create spaces to hear from one another, and when we don't step towards those who are most different, we become emotionally stunted and, worse, emboldened in our "truth". There are many truths that can co-exist alongside each other. If we take the time to listen instead of convince, healing becomes possible.

For more details about this event, including how to register, [click here](#).