In our own voices: Black women’s narratives of conflict and post-conflict experiences

Abstract

The meaning of suffering and memory within psychology has for a long time been viewed mostly from a ‘pathologizing’ standpoint, which it has been argued, has multiple limitations. Viewed as pathology, people’s suffering may become universalized thereby leaving out broader contextual aspects that have been shown to play a role in the subjective experience of various forms of suffering. The study investigated how Black women’s private memories of the conflict/apartheid period within South Africa influence how they make sense of their newly found freedom. With ‘empowerment’, and ‘equality’ as the order of the day, it becomes crucial to acknowledge women’s lived experiences and how they relate to the changes taking place in the democratized South Africa. The study further investigated how Black South African women use artistic forms such as embroideries to re-stitch their lives, create personal life stories, and make connections between the past and the present. The results of the study highlight how the women’s narratives call to the importance of acknowledging gender, power, and racial aspects when talking about people’s experiences. They point to the significance of re-visiting history in order to make sense of the present, with this they show how freedom should be understood within its historical context. The interweaving of their experiences highlight the collectiveness of suffering, and their narratives may be perceived as echoes of their individual experiences. The embroideries they produced externalize their embodied experience, and allow for the weaving in of multiple life experiences. They offer space for the historical, the personal, collective and the political.