
From Settler Colonialism
to Self-Determination:
An Indigenous
Perspective on
Decolonizing
Social Work

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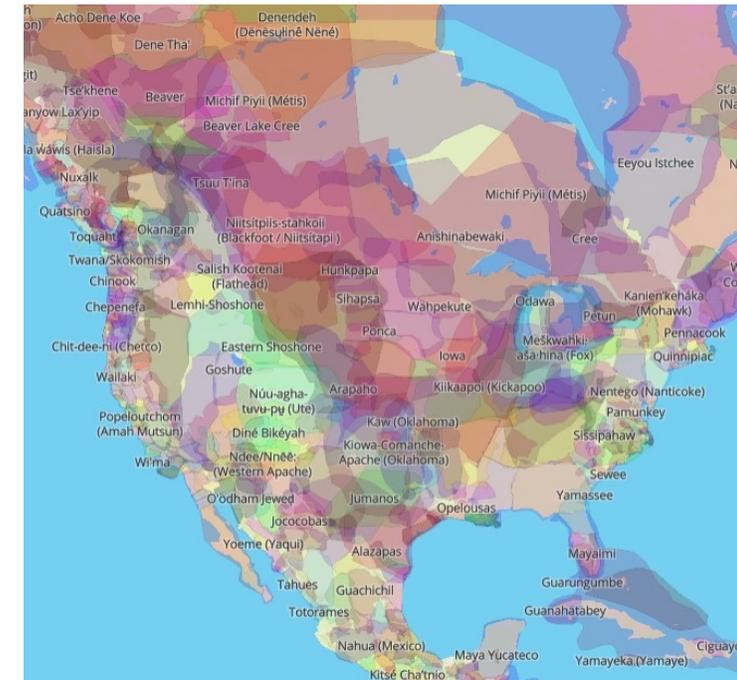
HEY, I'M AUTUMN!

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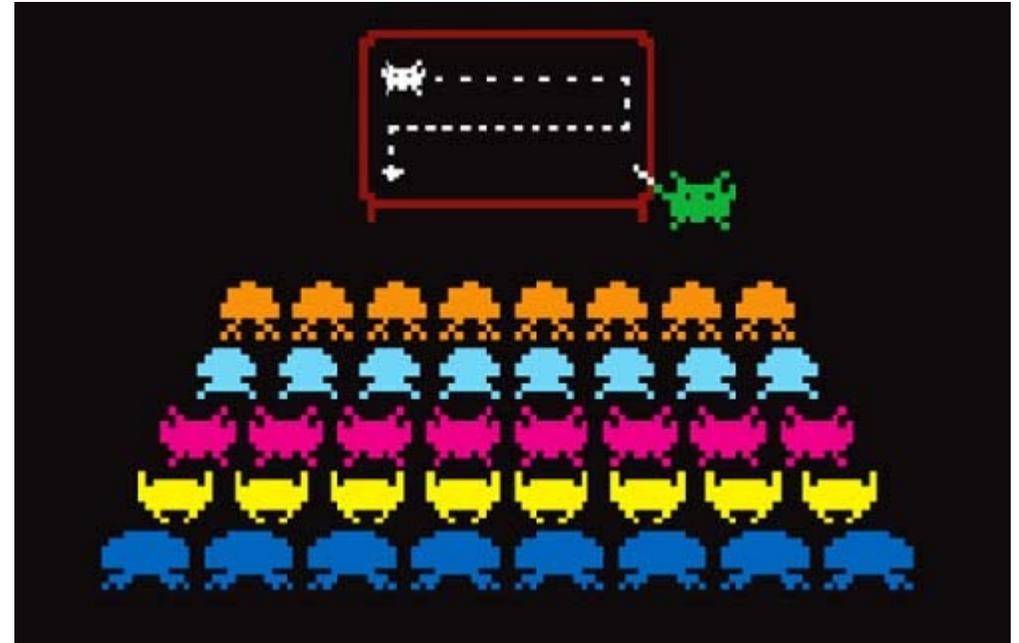
BEYOND A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT –

- Support Native folx in your community!
 - Whose land are you on? www.Native-land.ca
 - Sponsor the [WUSTL powwow](#)
 - Learn more at [Native Governance center](#)
 - [Self-Assessment](#)
 - [Voluntary Land Taxes](#)



PLAN OF ATTACK

- Background
- Social Work + Native Nations
- Present-day Problems
 - Research
 - Teaching
 - Practice
- Future directions
- Reflectors / Q+A



BACKGROUND

SETTLER COLONIALISM

- **Settler colonialism** is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures.
- Colonization began with the exploitation of Native lands and resources for settlers to gain wealth and power while subsequently making Natives dependent upon state resources
- Attempts to “**solve the Indian problem**”
 - outlawed tribal institutions, beliefs systems and practices, and traditional ways of life
 - imprisoning Natives for attending powwows, praying, and even holding traditional ceremonies
 - in schools, Native children were not permitted to speak in their Native languages

WHAT IS DECOLONIZATION?

- The **undoing of colonization** whereby a nation reestablishes itself
 - Returning to traditional ways of being, such as traditional practices and languages
 - Addressing one's own internalized oppression and colonization
- Logical endpoint: dismantling structures
- **NOT** a buzzword
 - Does a disservice to the truly decolonial work that targets power structures
 - Not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools

Decolonization is not a metaphor

Eve Tuck

State University of New York at New Paltz

K. Wayne Yang

University of California, San Diego

WHAT IS DECOLONIZATION?

Short term work that's not **decolonization** but helpful:

- Diversify syllabus and curriculum
 - Digress from the cannon
 - Decenter knowledge + knowledge production
 - Devalue hierarchies
 - Disinvest from citational power structures
 - Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings while magnifying others
- Social justice
 - Reformist
 - Diversification + Inclusion
 - Recognition
 - Decolonial work
 - Anti-capitalist
 - Anti-colonialist
 - Sovereignty
 - Abolition

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

- **Tribal sovereignty** refers to the right of American Indians and Alaska Natives to govern themselves. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Indian tribes as distinct governments and they have, with a few exceptions, the same powers as federal and state governments to regulate their internal affairs.
- **Self-determination** refers to the social movements, legislation, and beliefs by which American Indian and Alaska Native tribes exercise self-governance and decision making on issues that affect their own people.

SOCIAL WORK + NATIVE NATIONS

TIMELINE COMPARISON

Social Work with Native Populations

- 1887: National Conference of Charities and Corrections
 - 1892 first committee and report on Indian policy
- 1893 – 1927: Time of little interest
- 1927 – 1935: Social welfare again takes notice
 - 1927: first conference-level report informing national membership of direct practice with Natives.
 - 1930s: conference recognizes limited progress the profession has made with Indigenous peoples.
- 1930 – 1960s: little attention to Natives (WWII and beyond)
- 1960 – 1980s: Indigenous social workers demand their own voice
- 1980s – present: Indigenous peoples define SWK practice that is more than culturally competent, but a product of the culture it assists

Federal Indian Policy Timeline

- 1770s-1820s: Sovereign to sovereign (nation to nation)
- 1830s-1850s: Relocation and Removal
- 1850s-1890s: Reservation -- Reservation treaties
- 1870s-1930s: Assimilation and Allotment -- End of treaty making
- 1930s-1950s: Reorganization (renewed trust relationship; quasi-sovereign)
- 1950s-1960s: Termination
- 1960s-present?: Self-Determination + Self-Governance

WHY SOCIAL WORK SHOULD CARE

- “It is essential that social workers understand the source of what can appear as dysfunctional behavior of Indigenous peoples and families. The loss of family, communities, and cultures has left a legacy of death, pain, and devastation that affects the Indigenous peoples today in the form of multi-generational trauma”
- Social workers need to be aware of the effects of colonization and work to create less oppressive ways of delivering social service

Tamburro, 2013

PRESENT DAY PROBLEMS

RESEARCH

Evidence-Based Practice

- Government funding agencies push for evidence-based practices in order to relocate professional practice from one's clinical experience into scientific evidence
- Majority of EBPs are built on assumptions of a western medical model which emphasize **distress** and **dysfunction**

“You cannot be the doctor if you are the disease”

(Daes, 2000, p. 4)

Decolonizing Research Methodologies

- Evidence mapping
- Recommendations
 - Co-construction of methodology
 - Community driven
 - Rejecting the RCT gold standard
 - Context matters
 - Dissemination – not just reporting back
 - Rejecting interventionism: clinical colonization

TEACHING

Native Social Work Education

- Legacy of boarding schools
 - Education historically a tool for assimilation
- Lack of inclusion in social work curriculum
 - Less than half have a dedicated course with at least half of the focus on American Indian populations
 - Lack of courses on Native topics, including textbooks with Native content
- Address gaps in social work education
 - Understand alternate worldviews, incorporate Native perspectives and content

Indigenous Knowledge + Epistemologies

- Indigenous teaching methodologies
 - Talking circles
 - Learning with the heart and mind
 - Land-based education, planting the seed
- SWK curriculum should include Indigenous knowledge, skills, and values in all aspects of the curriculum
 - policy, practice, values and ethics, diversity, human behavior in the social environment, and research.

PRACTICE

Native Mental Health

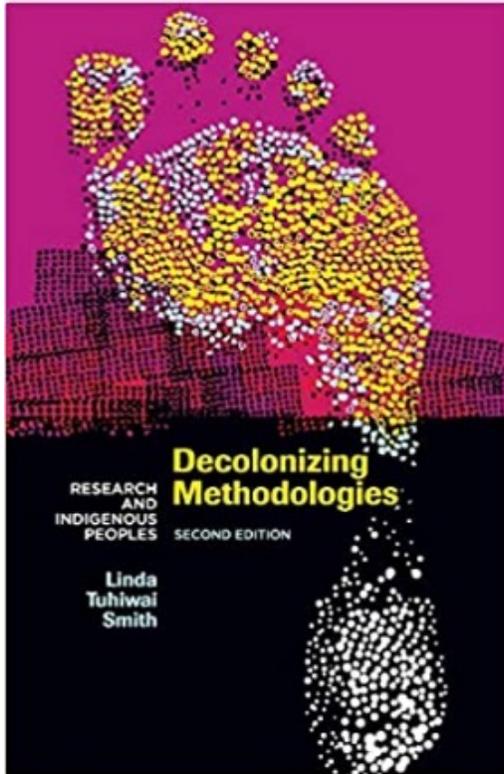
- Overrepresentation in the DSM
 - Inconsistent treatment of culture
- Field lacks even the most basic information about relative mental health burdens of Native populations
- Barriers to treatment
 - Lack culturally appropriate treatment
 - Stereotyping, discrimination, stigma

Indigenous Concepts of Wellness

- Community-defined treatments
- Decrease and address pathologization that occurs with Indigenous clients.
- Indigenous conceptualizations of wellness
 - Traditional healers and healing
 - Role of ceremony
 - Relational worldview (ex: medicine wheel + four directions)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - RESEARCH



- Questions to ask:
 - Whose research is it?
 - Who owns it?
 - Whose interests does it serve?
 - Who will benefit from it?
 - Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
 - Who will carry it out?
 - Who will write it up?
 - How will its results be disseminated?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - TEACHING

Recommendations to increase resources for Native students and faculty + improve curriculum

- Increase integration of Native content in social work curriculum
- Offer relevant field placements for Native students
- Encourage the development of American Indian Studies Programs or collaborate with existing programs
- Support the development of student resources in social work programs
- Support the development of alternative curriculum delivery models to educate Native students (online modalities for distance learning)

Status of Native Americans in Social Work Higher Education (CSWE)

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - PRACTICE

Systemic Change

- Learn about and incorporate Indigenous conceptions of wellness into your practice
- Understand effectiveness of community-defined treatments
- Increase comfort in referring to community resources
- Increase Native representation in providers
- Advocate for increased resources for Natives in your community

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

Dr. Weaver's best practices for Indigenous People and the Social Work profession

- **Knowledge:** aware of the history of Native life – treaties, sovereignty, federal Indian policy, oppression, colonialism, and racism
- **Skills:** active listening, tolerating silence, decentering one's own world view.
- **Values:** helper wellness (helping professional must be strongly grounded in their own community and value system), respect, open-mindedness, general willingness to decenter one's self.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

Final thoughts

- Culture as the ultimate intervention
 - How can social work empower Native communities to reconnect and honor that process of reconnection to culture?
- Nothing about us without us
 - Following up on decentering one's self.. Kindly get out of the way.
- Active efforts
 - We can't will colonization and white supremacy away. It takes concerted and consistent action.

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Nea'ese!

Thanks so much for having me!

Feel free to reach out or send any questions to autumn.asher@wustl.edu

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Follow me on Twitter!

 @AsherBlackDeer

REFLECTORS / Q + A TIME