

Multicultural Counseling and  
liberation psychology

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Decolonization of Mental Health

# Positionality

- Edil Torres Rivera positionality
  - Puerto Rican (Boricua)
    - Cisgender
  - Born in “El fanguito” (today’s “El Seco”) Mayaguez
  - Single Mother
  - Raised in Public Housing Projects (El Yaguez, Monte Isleño, Concordia)
  - Twelve Years US Army as enlisted soldier
  - First Generation College Student
  - Professor in six different universities (UNR, UB, UFL, TCSPP, SU, WSU)

# Abstract

- The literature posits that WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) concepts dominate the discourse regarding what research and knowledge should be and what is known about people. These conceptions about research and knowledge are problematic since they continue to perpetuate Western societies' ideas that undermine diversity, inclusion, and the development of critical thinking within academic spaces (Macleoud et al., 2020). Furthermore, this Western domination of geographical, political, and onto-epistemology is represented by the intersectionality of the economy, authority, gender, sexuality, knowledge, and power (Quijano, 2010).

# Helpful Definitions

- Colonization - Colonization is not a simple matter of real estate and political control. In fact it is a complex process that also involves colonizing the psychological and social worlds of the colonial subjects. These subjects include both the original inhabitants of particular geographic areas, but also those who come thereafter, subjugated by the colonizers' sociopolitical system (Tate & Torres Rivera, 2015).
- Ontology - How people interpret their reality (Moosa-Mitha, 2015).
- Epistemology - How people acquire knowledge (Moosa-Mitha, 2015).
- Decolonization – The process of decentering the power and influence of the social researcher over the research outcomes. The process of undoing colonization (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020).
- Decoloniality - The task of decoloniality after decolonization is redefined and focused on epistemology and knowledge rather than the state; or, in Western political theory that sustains the idea of the state. It still means to undo, but the undoing starts from “epistemological decolonization as decoloniality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018 p. 121).”
- Racism - Is a system of oppression that relies on the belief that one group or race is superior to another based on their biological characteristics (Singh, 2019).

# Helpful Definitions

- Liberation -- A process entailing a social rupture in the sense of transforming both the conditions of inequality and oppression and the institutions and practices producing them. It is collective in nature and transforms the individuals participating in the process (Montero, 2009)
- Praxis – The cycle of practicing-knowing-transforming, the cycle that builds the unity between knowing and doing (Flores Osorio, 2009)
- Internalized oppression – is when oppress people “turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the ... oppression of the (dominant) society” (Lipsky’s, 1987)
- Conscientization – When a person is transformed through changing their reality, by means of an active process of dialogue in which there is a gradual decoding of the world as people grasp the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization. Thus, opening other possibilities for action where knowledge of the surrounding reality leads to self-understanding about the root of what people are at present and what they could become (Burton & Kagan, 2009)

# Helpful Definitions (Continued)

- White Supremacy - (1) the belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races. (2) the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races (Mena, 2021).
- Liberation Psychology - “the use of psychological approaches to understand and address oppression among individuals and groups” (Martín-Baró, 1994, as cited in Torres Rivera & Comas-Díaz, 2020, p. 3).
- Oppression - The unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power (Mena, 2021).
- Social power is the basic, common element in politics, economics, and all other social relationships. It is possessed by all individuals and social groups and arises out of their connections to each other
  - Social power has two aspects:
    - The ability to influence others so as to further our own interests or desires
    - The ability to resist the activities of others

# Consider the Order of the Different Movement

- Cross-Cultural
- Multicultural
- Social Justice
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Decolonization \*\*\*

# Barriers to a Decolonize/Decoloniality of Mental Health Practices

- The believe:
  - That creation needs to be improved
    - That is behind the idea of the original sin, emotions, and weakness
  - The individual self is central
    - Individuals are responsible for their success or failure
  - Life is compartmentalized
    - Boundaries, individualism
  - Time is bounded
    - Time is real and absolute
  - Ownership is possible and desirable
  - Existence is hierarchical (Blume, 2020; Narvaez, 2021)
    - Creation is flawed therefore some humans are more perfect than others
- \*Power (Social Power)



# Tools of the oppressor (Moana, 2003; 2014)

Tools	Colonialism	Patriarchy
Violence	Military and police violence	Battery Rape Harassment
Political exclusion	No voting rights Restrictions on assembly	Access to voting Attitudes
Economic exploitation	Seizure of land Low paid labor Charges/taxes	Ownership of wealth Low/unpaid labor
Control of sexuality	Control of marriage Enforced motherhood	Marriage laws Birth control
Cultural control	Control of education Stereotypes	Erasure from history Media images
Fragmentation	Enforced migration	Tokenism Competition

# Stages of Colonization (Enriquez, 1992; Laenui, 2000)

Stage/Tool	Characteristics
Denial and withdrawal /Violence	Indigenous people as people without culture, morality, or having nothing to offer as a culture
Destruction and eradication/Violence & Control	Physically destroying and attempting to eradicate all physical representations of the symbols of indigenous cultures
Denigration, belittlement, and insulting/Violence, Control, Fragmentation	Creation of new educational systems, health systems, legal systems, religions (churches) and by devilizing every aspect of the indigenous system
Surface, accommodation, and tokenism/Violence. Control, Political, Fragmentation	Indigenous culture have survived the onslaught of the earlier steps are given surface accommodation. They are tolerated as an exhibition of the colonial regime sense of leniency to the continuing ignorance of the natives
Transformation and exploitation/Violence, Exploitation, Political, Control	The colonizer have tried everything and the colonized people have resisted every attempt to assimilated or to died away, thus the dominant culture actually absorbed the dominated culture via exploitation and incorporation of some traditions and or folklore

# A General Approach to the Decolonization Process

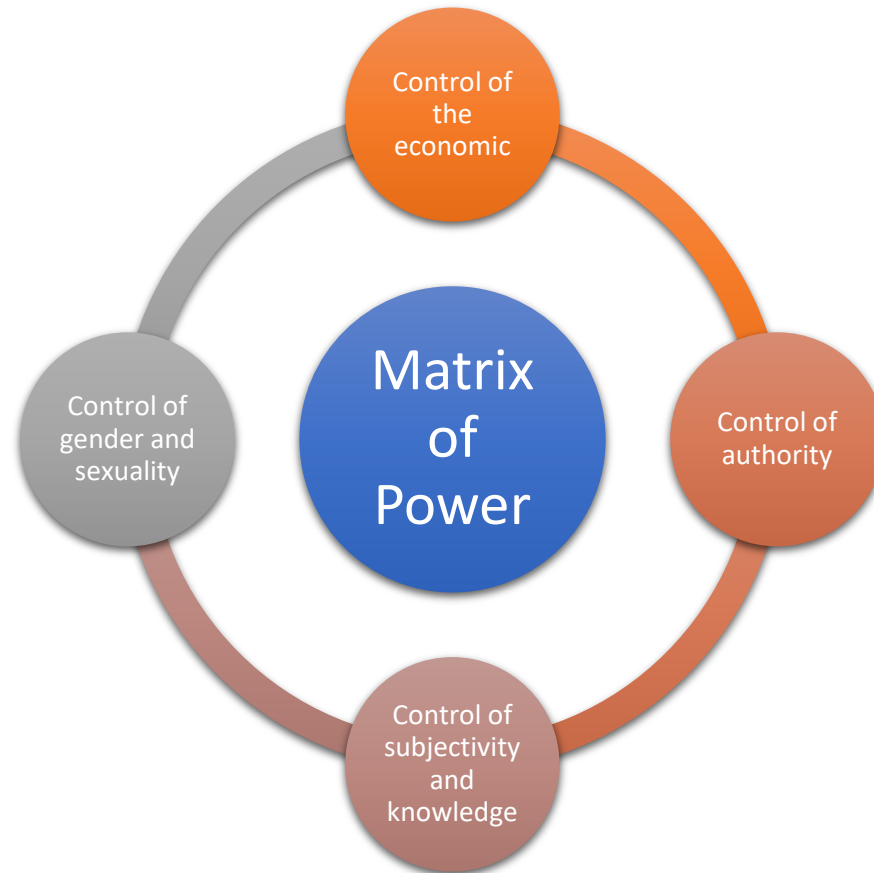
- Decolonizing mental health represents a crucial shift in understanding and addressing mental well-being beyond Western-centric perspectives. This movement advocates for acknowledging diverse cultural frameworks, challenging colonial legacies, and promoting inclusivity in mental health discourse and practices.
- Historically, mental health has been predominantly viewed through a Eurocentric lens, often neglecting the rich and varied cultural contexts that shape individuals' experiences. The decolonization of mental health seeks to dismantle these entrenched biases, recognizing the impact of colonization on indigenous and marginalized communities' mental well-being.
- This paradigm shift involves embracing traditional healing practices, fostering culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches, and dismantling stigmas associated with non-Western understandings of mental health. It calls for collaboration between mental health professionals and communities to co-create strategies that honor diverse perspectives.

# Decolonial Epistemic Perspective

- Coloniality of Being: social classification of human population, racial hierarchization of human population. An invisible social pyramid emerged with superior and inferior people, sub-humans and even those totally denied humanity
- Coloniality of Knowledge: invasion of the mental universe of a people to impose a particular knowledge in the service of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism. Knowledge and education to by became to rule by, control others, exploit and dominate. European way of knowing became the only way
- Coloniality of Power: To govern the intended social and to exploit the conquered world, a modern “cartography of power” emerged which is colonial, imperial, heteronormative, sexist, racist, capitalist, Christian-centric, Eurocentric, and modern. Nothing is not subjected to this modern architecture and configuration of power
- Colonial Matrix of Power: a modern management device of modern system and its global order

# Colonial Matrix of Power (Quijano, 2010)

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# Intersectionality of Multicultural Counseling

- In addition what is been already addressed, traditional counseling arise from monocultural norms
- Western worldviews:
  - Universality of human condition
  - Disorders cut across societies
  - Mental health concepts are same everywhere
  - Often fails consideration of diverse cultures

# Intersectionality of Multicultural Counseling (Cont.)

- Due to Western worldviews:
  - Counseling/therapy inappropriate to diverse cultures
  - Cultural oppression
- Culture advocating movement:
  - Redefine counseling/therapy
  - Identify aspects of cultural competence

# Intersectionality of Multicultural Counseling (Cont.)

- Cultural competence
  - Maximized development of client/client systems
- Multicultural counseling competence
  - Awareness, knowledge, skills, and cultural humility
- Cultural humility
  - “way of being” not “way of doing”



# Where to Begin

Start –By understanding and making visible the colonization process via the tools of the oppressor

Dismantling the violence, in particular the structural violence

## Next Step

Networking – Listen,  
created dialogue,  
problematized

Question -> reflect ->  
act

# Problematization as a Decolonization Process (Montero, 2009)

Listening

Dialog

Participation

Communication

Humility and respect

Critique

Reflection

Action

As per Freire: Problematization -> Reflection -> Action

# Analysis of Power

- Basic Steps for power analysis
  - Who?
    - Actors
      - ✓ Whose voice(s) is trying to be heard?
      - ✓ Who is directly helping these voices to be heard?
      - ✓ With indirect support from whom?
      - ✓ To be heard by whom?
  - Organizations
    - ✓ Whose voice is trying to be heard?
    - ✓ Who is directly helping these voices to be heard?
    - ✓ With indirect support from whom?
    - ✓ To be heard by whom?
  - Institutions
    - ✓ Whose voice is trying to be heard?
    - ✓ Who is directly helping these voices to be heard?
    - ✓ With indirect support from whom?
    - ✓ To be heard by whom?

# Analysis of Power II

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- Basic Steps for power analysis

- Where?

- ✓ Context

- ✓ In what context?

- ✓ Levels

- ✓ At what levels are voices trying to be heard?

- ✓ Individual, family, group, etc.

- ✓ Spaces

- ✓ In what kinds of “spaces” are voices trying to be heard? (e.g. formal/closed, invited, created/claimed from below)

# Decolonization Stages

(Enriquez, 1994; Laenui, 2000)

Stage	Characteristics
Rediscovery & Recovery	This phase sets the foundation for the eventual decolonization of the society. People who have undergone colonization are inevitably suffering from concepts of inferiority in relation to their historical cultural/social background.
Mourning	A natural outgrowth of the first phase is the mourning - a time when a people are able to lament their victimization. This is an essential phase of healing. Even in individual tragedies where one is a victim of some crime, has experienced death of a close loved one, suffered from a sexual assault, the victim must be permitted a time of mourning.
Dreaming	This phase is the most crucial for decolonization. Here is where the full panorama of possibilities are expressed, considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flooring for the creation of a new social order.

# Possible Decolonization Models (Enriquez, 1994; Laenui, 2000) (Cont.)

Stage	Characteristics
Commitment	In the process of dreaming, the people will have the opportunity to weigh the voices rather than becoming caught up with counting votes or bullets. They will be able to wade through the cult of personalities, family histories, and release themselves from shackles of colonial patriotism. They will now be ready for commitment to a single direction in which the society must move.
Action	This phase can be properly taken only upon a consensus of commitment reached in the 4th phase. Otherwise, the action taken cannot truly be said to be the choice of the people colonized.

# Final Step

Reflection – Using other decoloniality approaches, decoloniality been the process at the present time as an outgoing process

Decoloniality is the result of the interaction between the learners in the classroom or the interaction between the counselor/therapists and the client



# Other decoloniality Characteristics

Community and relationship are the main emphasis of the research

Other Ways of Knowing is celebrated and value

Family is important

Allow diversity and inclusion be part of the people at the table

Theories are view in a larger context of the profession

# To Re-emphasize

- **At its core, decolonization in mental health involves:**
  - **Inclusivity:** Creating a more inclusive and equitable approach to mental health that embraces different worldviews, experiences, and healing practices beyond Western norms.
  - **Community Involvement:** Actively involving communities in shaping mental health policies, programs, and services to ensure they are relevant, respectful, and responsive to local needs.
  - **Alternative Healing Practices:** Validating and integrating alternative healing practices that may exist outside mainstream Western therapeutic models, including traditional and indigenous methods.

## To Re-emphasize (Cont.)

- **At its core, decolonization in mental health involves:**
  - **Power Redistribution:** Challenging power imbalances within mental health systems, fostering collaboration between mental health professionals and individuals seeking support.
  - **Anti-Stigma Efforts:** Addressing and dismantling stigmas associated with non-Western understandings of mental health, promoting a more nuanced and compassionate approach to mental well-being.
  - **Holistic Perspectives:** Moving beyond a narrow biomedical approach and adopting a holistic understanding of mental health that considers the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit.

# Conclusion

- Psychological theories, in particular Western psychology, as well as Western academia (e.g., universities and colleges), gave us the tradition of creating "new" knowledge and giving everyone the impression that all that is known about psychology is of Western Society's creation. These impressions are powerful influences and set forth sociopolitical structures in which the profession would be built. Thus, the notions of what knowledge, reality, culture, language, power, and how knowledge is shared, though progressive in many important ways, are still nested within a Western colonial framework of universal, reductionist, and expert-based scientific thought. To provide new beginnings and a strong sense of community, our north should be the ongoing process of seeming knowledge where knowledge is and being able to accept history as it is and not as we want it to be.

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