Decolonizing Nutrition Science

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“Why has a people with an extraordinarily large land base, cultural tradition that values community engagement and personal health, heritage of self-sufficiency, and history of effective self-governance come to find themselves with inarguably the poorest health, diminished life expectancy, crippled economy, inadequate access to healthy foods, and minimized control over their land and other critical assets?”

Indigenous Food Contributions
Jacque Cartier depicted in a 1535 Expedition

Indigenous knowledge saved Europeans from Scurvy
Colonization

• Physical occupation
• Domination/control of indigenous people & the environment
• Cultural, social and economic assimilation (includes Eurocentric sciences)
• Religious indoctrination

- Neil Cantemaza McKay, U of M Department of American Indian Studies, 9-17
Patterns of Colonization

• When you have gained some understanding of Indigenous histories, of the brutal and uneven nature of colonization in North America, and of the ways that scholarly knowledge production has contributed to those processes, it is impossible not to be aware that *colonialism and racism continue to structure a great amount of present-day writing and research.*

Embedded Patterns of Colonization

- We now recruit indigenous students into Eurocentric nutrition & dietetics programs, but give little attention toward understanding (or even acknowledging) indigenous knowledge of food and health.
1st Step in Decolonizing

• Recognize colonizing patterns

“A problem with Western Science, that is inherently its own problem, is that in so many ways in its quest for excellence, it makes the mistake of running over or not noticing what other people may have to contribute, in its effort to not only to do ‘good research’, but also to protect what scientists feel is the integrity of the scientific process.”

• Paul Schultz, 2009, People Protecting Manoomin, Manoomin Protecting People
Decolonizing:

Acknowledge problems

“Regardless of what Indians have said concerning their origins, their migrations, their experiences with birds, animals, lands, water, mountains, and other peoples, the scientists [i.e., Western academics] have maintained a stranglehold on the definitions of what respectable and reliable human experiences are. The Indian explanation is always cast aside as a superstition”

WHOA! LISTEN TO THIS:
“NATURE IS COMPLEX.”
“INTERWOVEN.” “CONNECTED.”

WHAT WILL THEY “DISCOVER” NEXT?

NO WAY!
2nd Step in Decolonizing: Cultural Self-Study

• Interrogate our own thinking as an object of study
  • Critical self-reflection
  • Mindful critical thinking
  • Hunt and surface embedded assumptions, presuppositions and cultural values

• Interrogate implicit institutional patterns
  • Academic, health, agriculture, human service and legal institutions
Subject the work to Peer review

Interpret the results

Collect Data

Conduct Research

Design a Test of my hypothesis

I formulate an “Hypothesis” using my expertise

Our interpretations influence our ideas and questions

Hidden Subjectivities (assumptions and values that frame inquiry)
Web of ‘Hidden Subjectivities’

- **Story of separation**: mind/body, scientist/nature, subject/object dualism
- **Academic knowledge as universal**
- Humans set *over/against* an objectified, inanimate natural world
- **Mechanistic** thought/models
- Attachments to **materialism, reductionism** and **measurement**
- **Linear, unidirectional** time; from beginning to end.
Challenges for Professionals

• We are seldom aware of our own culture as such but normalize it as “the way things are”.

• We don’t often see the cultural grounding of our scientific inquiry; rather we normalize it as the ultimate reference point for understanding natural phenomena.

• If we are unaware of these dynamics, intercultural understanding of cultural resources and challenges is compromised.
Native American Food Pyramid

http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/Fpyr/NAmFGP.html
Colliding Worldviews: Wild Rice
Our Vision of Lasting Relationships ...

• Acknowledging our histories, the injustices ....

• Recognizing the sacredness of human dignity ....

• Listening with openness to our stories, stories that story us ....

• Moving to the ground of mutual respect and sharing ....

• Knowing and living the learning in bridging worldviews ....

• Taking action together to preserve our humanity and protect the world for future generations.
What Might Decolonization Look Like?
Indigenous Teachers

• Woodlands Wisdom
• Dream of Wild Health
• Nibi & Manoomin Symposia
• Cultural Wellness Center
• Nibi Center
• Medicinal Herb Network
• Seeds of Native Health
• Minneapolis American Indian Center
Thank You!