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Conducting Research in Indigenous Communities: Recommendations for Research Partnerships

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Conducting Research in Indigenous Communities: Recommendations for Research Partnerships

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Before conducting research in an Indigenous community, a researcher, especially a non-Indigenous researcher, must recognize and acknowledge not only the historical impact research has had on Indigenous communities but the current impacts that arise when research is conducted in Indigenous communities. Specifically, one must consider settler colonialism and its continuing impact on Indigenous communities today. Professor of Indigenous Education Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states: "The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary". Smith continues by linking research and Western imperialism and colonialism together, with research being a tool for imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, it is critical to identify how research and its processes have been used to justify the dehumanization of Indigenous people in order to gain and maintain power over Indigenous communities. Researchers must ensure that their research does not perpetuate unequal power dynamics and is based on a collective process. Suggestions for best practices for working with Indigenous people/communities are presented below.

The History of Indigenous People is Important and it has Influenced their Trust in Research(ers)

Although colonization happened long ago, the effects still exist in modern-day Indigenous communities. Two ways to understand the present-day existence of colonization is through *historical trauma* and *historical oppression*. Historical trauma refers to trauma that is progressive, vast, and persistent and is imposed on a group(s) of people (i.e., Native Americans) across generations (Burnette & Figley, 2016). Some examples of historical traumas include: theft of Native land, forced removal and relocation, assimilation, and genocide. It is through these historical traumas that Indigenous people have experienced extreme loss of their traditions, culture, beliefs, language, people, and trust of outsiders (Burnette & Figley, 2016).

Historical oppression is an expansion of historical trauma and refers to the continuous, prevalent, and intergenerational oppression that is experienced by Indigenous people. After historical oppression is experienced for long periods, it may become rationalized, forced, or adopted into the lives of those experiencing the oppression (Burnette & Figley, 2016). Historical oppression can occur not only among individuals but in families and communities as well. Furthermore, historical oppression can include both historical and contemporary traumas, although this differs slightly from historical trauma because of the focus on the proximal factors that maintain the oppression, such as discrimination, microaggression, poverty, and marginalization (Burnette & Figley, 2016).

Colonization – which produced historical trauma and oppression – also produced a social setting that devalued Indigenous people, their cultures, and worked to disempower them over generations (Kuokkanen, 2008; Weaver, 2009). The removal, relocation, and forced assimilation

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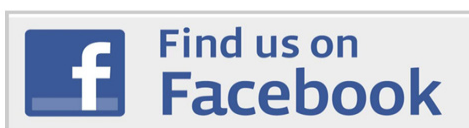
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into the dominant Anglo-American culture resulted in Native Americans' losing their valued traditions and beliefs, as well as the erosion of family and community supports. Further, the Anglo-American systems that replaced Native cultures are incompatible with Indigenous ways of living (e.g., the patriarchal Anglo-American is in direct contrast with the traditionally matriarchal structure of many Native societies) (Finfgeld-Connett, 2015).

Understanding the historical context of Indigenous people sheds some light on why there may be hesitation on behalf of Natives regarding participation in research or Native organizations in research partnerships. This historical context may cause mistrust of outsiders, including well-intentioned researchers, from coming into an Indigenous community (Wasserman, 2004). Wasserman (2004) states that non-Natives have historically depreciated Native Americans, including their way of living, through academic research by showing "empirically" that Native Americans are inferior to others.

Indigenous communities have *Indigenous ways of knowing*, and recognition of these ways is vital when preparing to conduct research in Indigenous communities; in fact, this might impact the research methodology that is best to use for certain research endeavors. For example, Marlene Brant-Castellano's Indigenous methodology explains that there are three ways in which Indigenous knowledge is found and shared: through traditional teachings (storytelling, etc.), empirical knowledge (through observations through many different community members and time frames), and revealed knowledge (visualizations, dreams, etc.) (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010). However, such methodologies frequently conflict with Western approaches to research (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010), where Western approaches to research often favor empiricism and view life experiences and storytelling as non-objective and therefore invalid. Additionally, some have suggested that Western methods of empirical research (i.e., especially quantitative methods) may not be the best way to describe Indigenous traditions and culture (Wasserman, 2004). Overall, it is essential that the researcher is familiar with Indigenous methods of research and knowing, and incorporate Indigenous methods into their project's design.

Researchers need to understand that there has been a history of misrepresenting Indigenous ways of living, culture, traditions, and beliefs through the writings of non-Natives (Wasserman, 2004) and that Western research methodologies may perpetuate these misrepresentations. Although these unintended consequences of research in Indigenous communities have likely not (always) been intentional on the part of the researchers, it is necessary to understand this historical context before embarking on research endeavors in these communities. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to gain knowledge about Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as the culture, language, traditions, and beliefs of the Native American community they wish to work with *before* approaching the community about conducting research (Wasserman, 2004). These attempts may alleviate some of the mistrust among Indigenous communities, especially given their historical experiences.

Recommendations for Research Partnerships with Indigenous People and Indigenous Communities

It is from our respective perspectives as scholars working on tribal-researcher and tribal-practitioner partnerships (and as community-based participatory researchers in general) – and for three of us, from our position as Indigenous women – that we foreground the importance of the historical context of the Indigenous communities with whom we try to engage in research partnerships. In short, researchers who attempt to conduct research with Indigenous communities would be well-served to understand:

1. The importance of culture in Native American communities.
2. The importance of sovereignty of Native American tribes.
3. The importance of relationships, communication, and inclusivity when conducting research with Native Americans.

1. The Importance of Culture

There are over 500 federally recognized tribes within the United States and over 300 tribes that are recognized by the state (Wasserman, 2004). Therefore, it is improper to treat Indigenous people as a monolith, as each community speaks its own language and has unique traditions and beliefs. Doing so may cause researchers to overgeneralize, meaning that what is found in one tribe may be used to other tribes, creating a perception that all tribes are the same. Furthermore, Indigenous communities function differently than traditional Anglo-American communities. For example, Native American communities are traditionally matriarchal. In a matriarchal society, women serve in positions of leadership and the traditional roles within a Native community reflect egalitarianism (Weaver, 2009). Women and elders are greatly respected and are responsible for most of the decision-making, and elders, specifically elder women, tend to be the primary socializers who are responsible for cultural transmission (Weaver, 2009). Elders are the gatekeepers of the language and culture and Native youth learn from them to help keep the traditions, culture, and language alive over generations. Elders (i.e., grandparents) are also commonly involved in the upbringing of Native youth and may serve as sole caretakers. *Native cultures are inherently different from Anglo-American cultures, and there is substantial variation among the hundreds of Native tribes as well: be cognizant of these important differences. If you fail to recognize these differences, your results will not be correct, and you will further perpetuate the problem of misrepresentation and stereotyping of Natives.*

2. The Importance of Sovereignty

Native American communities (that are federally recognized) are sovereign nations. Sovereignty includes the ability to regulate their own communities, govern their people, establish their own criminal justice system, create and enforce laws for their community, and maintain their own cultures (Crossland et al., 2013). Essentially, tribal nations are a government inside another government (i.e., United States). Tribal sovereignty existed before the United States and prior to colonization, Native American communities had complete jurisdiction over their people (Crossland et al., 2013). That Native American communities are sovereign means that researchers must not only meet the requirements of their own institutional review boards, but beforehand, they must obtain approval from the tribal business council, which “speaks” on behalf of the tribe. Tribal nations are unique entities, and one must remember their history and hesitation of academic research. One of the first steps is to contact the tribal business council, which serves as the decision-making entity for the tribe, and request an informal meeting with the group (Wasserman, 2004). During this meeting, the researcher will bring their research proposal and discuss it with the business council. It is ultimately up to the business council to move forward with the project, and typically doing so will depend on how and if the project will benefit their people.

If the tribal business council feels as though this project would be beneficial, they may then ask the researcher to come and present the proposal at a public meeting that is held monthly within the community. Alternatively, a member of the tribe may bring the research proposal to the business council; in either case, the council must sign off on the project before anything else can be done. It is during these meetings that community members, or outsiders, may present a request (e.g., research project, grant approval, change of services). Once the presenter is done, then the floor is open to the public to bring forward any comments or concerns they may have. If no objections are brought forward, then the business council takes a vote. This vote is the ultimate deciding factor on whether the project/research is approved to officially move forward. *The important message here is that you must get tribal council approval to conduct research, and this may take extra time and/or effort in both gaining trust and explaining your research procedures to the tribe.*

3. The Importance of Relationships, Communication, and Inclusivity

When wanting to work with a tribal nation, extra measures are needed to build a good working relationship. Once your research is approved by the tribal council, the process of relationship building begins, and this relationship extends beyond the tribal business council to the community and individual community members. If the research requires collaboration with agencies within the tribe, then relationships need to be established and built there, too. It is important to inform those that you are working with that the research is approved by the tribal business council, as that will give the “stamp” of approval to participate.

When working with the tribe and agencies within the tribe, transparency, communication, and inclusivity are extremely important. When any decisions need to be made, the researcher should make efforts to keep the business council apprised. This is necessary because the tribe may be more willing to participate in the project if they are involved throughout the duration of the project (Wasserman, 2004). For example, if the project involves a survey, a meeting can be requested with the business council so they can see the survey instrument. If a meeting is not feasible, then the survey should be sent via email. This is important because then the business council can examine the questions and bring forward concerns about any of the questions, or they may have insight into a better way to phrase a question so that it will be better received and/or culturally sensitive. Being culturally sensitive is extremely important to avoid bringing up negative experiences from past research encounters; further, the research will be better received by the community.

It is important – as with all “applied” research endeavors – that the community benefits in some way from the research. Past research endeavors have “left a sour taste in the mouths” of Indigenous communities because communities feel they were used for exploitation and to gain “fame” for the researchers (Wasserman, 2004). Therefore, if you want your research to be well received by both the tribal council and the community, then efforts should be made for the community to benefit from this research. For example, past research has found that high-quality health care is lacking in Native communities, but little effort has been made to rectify this deficit (Wasserman, 2004). If you feel that your research could create benefits (e.g., new funding opportunities, collection of data for funding applications, expansion of existing programs) then this information should be brought forward during the initial meeting with the tribal council. Additionally, do not hesitate to ask the tribal council if there are some existing issues or cause for concern within their community that you may be able to help with. In other words, when proposing your research, keep in mind that this should benefit the community, and if that means keeping an open mind to the possibility of your research changing, then so be it.

As a researcher, and ultimately an outsider, beware of the “savior” role – it is not your job to come into tribal communities and “save” people. Instead, you should be willing to offer your help with an existing issue or concern in the community, if possible, and offer culturally sensitive ways to respond to these issues/concerns. In other words, one should not ‘pathologize’ Indigenous people (i.e., identify all of the problems that exist in their community). Doing so may cause the tribal council to end the research. Ultimately, as the researcher, it is your responsibility to understand the culture, traditions, and beliefs of the tribe you are working with, which

should be expressed in your recommendations to the tribal council and community.

In conclusion, we believe there is much to gain in collaborating in meaningful research endeavors with Indigenous communities. Native voices are important to add to our research. We encourage scholars to consider our recommendations before embarking on research with Indigenous people and in Indigenous communities. Overall, there are a few key considerations for working with tribes and establishing a good working relationship. One, be sure to do some research on the community to ensure that the research/project respects the culture and traditions of that tribe. Remember, Native communities are not a monolith, and each has its own language, culture, traditions, and beliefs. Two, keeping the community involved as much as possible will create more trust and willingness to participate. Three, design the project in a way that will benefit the Native community, if they so choose to participate. Doing so will make the tribal business council more supportive of the project. Lastly, *Indigenous communities should be made to feel a part of the research, and not the subject of it.*

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Psychedelic Assisted Interventions with Criminal Justice Involved Populations: Food for Thought or a Bad Trip?

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Overview

Criminal recidivism rates have remained stubbornly high for decades (Beck & Shipley, 1989; Durose et al., 2014; Langan & Levin, 2002). Notwithstanding this pattern, there is a rich history of criminological research on interventions to reduce recidivism (Latessa et al., 2020), with a notable focus on fostering desistance through (1) inculcating positive changes around one's view of self, (2) facilitating feelings of motivation and hope for change, and (3) shifting emotions, meanings, and attitudes concerning criminal behavior (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). One of the most popular approaches to achieving these goals is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which has been found to reduce recidivism by 25% to 50% (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005). Accordingly, evidence suggests that the implementation of interventions that can facilitate both quick and long-lasting positive cognitive change holds much promise as a criminal justice intervention to reduce recidivism.

The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to emerging research on psychedelic-assisted therapy as a potential mechanism to foster long-term behavioral change and aid in the desistance process (Aday et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2008, 2011; MacLean et al., 2011). In doing so, the following sections (1) define psychedelic-assisted therapy, (2) introduce criminologists to historical and contemporary research on psychedelic therapy as means to induce positive behavioral change, (3) highlight the relevance of psychedelic-assisted therapy to existing criminological theories of desistance, namely those pointing to cognitive shifts and identity transformation as essential to the desistance process, and (4) document the potential challenges and ethical issues with the implementation of psychedelic-assisted therapy among criminal justice populations.

Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

The history of psychedelic drug use among human populations for healing purposes dates back hundreds of years (Aday et al., 2020; Jay, 2019). Contemporary psychedelic-assisted therapy refers to the clinical implementation of psychedelic substances in conjunction with a psychotherapeutic intervention. Typically, trained therapists administer psychedelic substances—most commonly psilocybin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), or 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)—alongside traditional and innovative therapeutic practices to encourage participants to have inward directed experiences, while providing emotional support for the thoughts, sensations, and memories that arise, as well as ensuring safety and assisting participants with any immediate needs (Sloshower et al., 2020). Clinical research occurring during the 1950s and 1960s found administering psychedelics was associated with several positively valued experiences, with few adverse psychological responses (Leary et al., 1963; Metzner et al., 1965; Pahnke et al., 1969). However, in response to the war on drugs, academic research largely ceased for nearly four decades, only to recommence in recent years (Griffiths et al., 2006).

The reemergence of the scientific study of the efficacy of psychedelics has been buttressed by the opening of dedicated research centers at top U.S. universities, including the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic & Consciousness Research and UC Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics. Dozens of clinical trials demonstrate promise for psychedelic-assisted therapy as an intervention for psychological and behavioral challenges that require significant cognitive and motivational shifts to produce change. For instance, prior research finds potential benefits for psychedelic-assisted therapy for promoting smoking cessation (Johnson et al., 2017; Noorani et al., 2018), alcohol cessation (Bogenshutz et al., 2015; Garcia-Romeu et al., 2019; Krebs & Johansen, 2012; Nielson et al., 2018), as well as alleviating depression and anxiety (Davis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Griffiths et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2016), obsessive compulsive disorder (Moreno et al., 2006), end of life distress (Griffiths et al., 2016), and post-traumatic stress disorder (Krediet et al., 2020). The mechanism behind these benefits for dramatic behavioral change lies in evidence suggesting that psychedelic-assisted therapy can engender profound experiences which facilitate long-lasting positive changes in attitudes, mood, altruism, behavior, psychological functioning, life satisfaction, and key personality domains such as openness (Griffiths et al., 2008, 2011, 2018; MacLean et al., 2011). Moreover, findings from studies have also demonstrated that the positive and long-lasting changes often result from just a single dose of a psychedelic substance (Aday et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2006; 2011; Krebs & Johansen, 2012; MacLean et al., 2011), suggesting that such interventions may be more efficient, low cost, and long-lasting than many existing criminal justice interventions.