

**MAPPING WHITENESS AND COLONIALITY
IN THE HUMAN SERVICE FIELD: POSSIBILITIES FOR A PRAXIS OF
SOCIAL JUSTICE IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE**

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Abstract: This paper explores how a dominant Western ontology rooted in white masculinity and coloniality is embedded in the systems and structures of professional helping in Canada. With a critical, post-colonial feminist analysis, this paper locates Canada's colonial history as fundamental to ongoing policies and practices in the human services and child and youth care (CYC). The implications of coloniality for CYC suggest that as practitioners we might consciously engage in deconstructing the theories, structures, and values that shape how we practice. Cartographies can assist us in reflexive and deconstructive endeavours. As one maps out the parameters and identifies the existing horizons, one might begin to envision how to then move beyond them. In examining the hegemony of professional helping, the intention is an invitation to work collectively toward models that foreground the social context of problems faced by individuals as well as creative, collective responses. Strategies of an engaged solidarity and a model of socially just, decolonizing praxis offer potential sites for affirmative and transformative social change.

Keywords: whiteness, colonialism, social justice, child and youth care, intersectionality

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This paper undertakes a cartography to bring to the surface how a dominant Western ontology rooted in whiteness and coloniality is embedded in the systems and structures of professional helping, including child and youth care (CYC). Given increasing disparities between the wealthy and the poor, ongoing violence against racialized and gendered minorities, and a non-profit funding model that pits community service agencies against one another in bids for limited resources, this is an important and relevant topic for CYC. The main goal of this paper is to provide a cartography in the hope it will provoke further reading and an intentional engagement to interrogate policies and practices that sustain the current status quo to the disadvantage of many. Elements of colonial history are foregrounded in order to highlight and begin to deconstruct how embeddedness in a dominant Western ontology has shaped the field of human services.

Cartographies can be useful for making clear the power structures of society. Cartographies can help us to see where we are situated so that we can then consider where we might like to go or how we might direct our energy toward change. In taking up this notion of the cartography, I will map out colonialism, whiteness and white privilege, the relevance and significance of neo-liberalism, and the construction of gender in a Canadian context. Nevertheless, given the scope of this paper, the complexities of these intersections will be explored to a limited extent. Drawing on a range of literature from within and outside of CYC, I also map “professionalism” in the human service sector. This discussion locates CYC and professional helping as products of, and embedded in, a Western ontology that privileges the normative values of whiteness and the coloniality of power. As suggested by Braidotti (2006), mapping out where we are situated or located provides a useful tool for productive, critical engagement for change.

In considering the implications for CYC, I discuss new possibilities for how we think about and enact support to individuals and communities. I discuss implications for shifting ways of knowing, doing, and being in CYC; I draw this term from White (2007) and her conceptualization of praxis as “ethical, self-aware, responsive and accountable action, which reflects dimensions of knowing, doing and being” (p. 226). How can we move across difference toward a model of praxis that seeks social justice through an intentional decolonizing stance and an affirmation of the complexity of life through solidarity? Such a shift would benefit from a cartography of the assumptions taken for granted and the values underpinning professional helping in Canada today. Mapping or making explicit these hegemonic elements of the dominant culture then allows us to begin to examine the places we encounter or embody privilege in our own lives. I invite readers to consider how they might push the edges of their own horizons to contribute to ever expanding possibilities of what might be, so that we can all move toward models that foreground the social context of problems faced by individuals and generate creative, productive collective responses.

Theoretical Orientation

I locate my analysis within a hybrid feminist epistemology informed by critical/anti-oppressive, queer, post-colonial, and post-structural theories. Feminist theory is important as gender is still used around the world as a pervasive category of discrimination (Cole, 2009).

“Patriarchy is the practice, phallocentrism the theory; both coincide in producing an economy, material as well as libidinal, where the law is upheld by a phallic symbol that operates by constructing differences and organising them hierarchically” (Braidotti, 1991, p. 213). The consequence to this is an entrenched system of male privilege against which any “resistance” or “difference” to the norm is negated. This paper is grounded in an understanding that “hegemonic practices are invisibly built into the ‘grand narratives’ of the dominant culture and are woven into the fabric of our daily lives in ways that make it difficult to uncover, track, resist” (Gilmore, Smith, & Kairaiuak, 2004, p. 280).

Feminism is polyvocal; there is no one defining perspective of feminism but rather, “many feminisms and feminist standpoints” (Maguire, 1996, p. 107). According to Haraway (1997), standpoints can be understood as “cognitive-emotional-political achievements, crafted out of located social-historical-bodily experience – itself always constituted through fraught, non-innocent, discursive, material collective practices” (p. 304). Femaleness is not a universal experience in that multiple and complex elements such as ethnicity and class shape gender. “Feminist post-colonial critique call[s] into question cultural, gender, and racial binaries among others” (Schutte, 2007, p. 167). An intersectional lens acknowledges all of these elements as complex, varied, and co-constituting one another (Carastathis, 2008). A conscious decolonizing feminist stance recognizes that practices and scholarship are “inscribed in relations of power” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). “The central issue is the critique of universalism as being male-identified and of masculinity as projecting itself as pseudo-universal and a critique of the idea of otherness as devalorization” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 159). An ongoing challenge for feminist scholars and practitioners is how to make transparent dialectical paradigms while recognizing that we can only do this from within our constrained location (Braidotti, 1991).

Queer theory expands possibilities for thinking about and doing social justice with its emphasis on disrupting dominant norms and creating openings that are more flexible and fluid by “interrogating the historical and cultural positioning of the unified ‘self’ characteristic of the Western constitution of the subject” (Watson, 2005, p. 68). Smith (2010) describes this as making “theory queer, not just hav[ing] theory about queers. For both academics and activists, ‘queer’ gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual” (p. 44).

Critical feminist and queer theories have sought to foreground male and heteronormative privilege and disrupt “truth, objectivity, and certainty by a focus on ‘regimes of truth’” (Lather, 1991, p. 23), making explicit the relationship between authority, power, and taken-for-granted assumptions which constrain the potential for many groups of beings to live vital productive lives. The intention is not to correct or supplant one truth with another but rather to advocate complexity and multiple possible conceptualizations. My vision for social transformation rejoins Braidotti (1991) in that “the goal of the process of liberation is not to transform the powerless into the powerful; it aims to surmount the dialectical system in order to arrive at non-hegemonic form of consciousness” (p. 109).

The concept of cartographies, according to Braidotti (1994), provides “a sort of intellectual landscape gardening” where we can encounter the horizon, take our bearing. In other words, it is important to situate ourselves in the contexts of the structures and constraints and to draw as accurate a map as possible of existing structures, forces, dynamics, and interactions.

Braidotti (2008) proposes that cartographies act as “politically informed map[s] of one’s historical and social location, the purpose of which is to enable the analysis of situated formations of power and hence adequate forms of resistance” (p. 19).

This concept derives from Foucault’s (1975) cartographies of power. In this sense, cartographies can provide “alternative genealogies of thought [which] express a form of ethical and political accountability that requires an understanding of one’s specific location” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, this conceptualization also follows from Deleuze and Guattari who “stressed the importance of immanent analyses of the singular actualisations of concrete power formations” (as cited in Braidotti, 2008, p. 19). Ultimately, this exercise in mapping power relations and structural dynamics allows us to begin to consider possibilities for different ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Elements of a Western Ontology

Colonial history

In this section, I will take inventory of some key concepts of a Western ontology or world view and the normative values inscribed in the practices of professionalized helping. An understanding of coloniality and the dominant Western ontology is important because it is the hegemonic foundation and power base, contested persistently and daily through varied forms of interpersonal and collective resistance, of Canadian structures and institutions, including the human service field and CYC. Human service work is inherently colonial; its central goal is to control and discipline bodies and minds (Foucault, 1975; Skott-Myhre, 2004; Wade, 1995)

Colonialism, central to a Eurocentric settler world view (Razack, 2002), is still relevant to those of us in the helping professions because it is embedded in all contemporary structures and institutions of Canadian society, including the law, child welfare, education, psychology, and health. Razack (2002) emphasizes that all existing institutions in Canadian society evolved through a colonizer/colonized relationship. Post-colonial feminist scholars define colonization as “a relation of structural domination and suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 18) and as “the project of converting the natives to Christianity and of drawing colonized populations into European economic and political arrangements ... [to] enable these [groups] to benefit from ‘becoming like Westerners’” (Narayan & Harding, 2000, p. 94). Economic and social growth in Canada “continues to rely on the subjugation and relocation of entire Indigenous societies, which sustain a system of chronic poverty, social exclusion, and political and cultural disenfranchisement” (de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011, p. 363). These types of colonizing relationships persist in the institutions of Canadian society today, as demonstrated, for example, by the continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children in government care and the statistically poorer health outcomes for Indigenous people across Canada (Lavallée & Poole, 2010). Post-colonial theory, attempts to engage with “issues of identity, history, and culture that are the direct result of the colonial experience” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 172). Post-colonial theory engages critically with:

European colonization and its legacy at the material and discursive levels... the conviction that the relationships between the present and the past, the local and the global, [etc.] are much more intertwined and of longer duration than appears in many accounts of social sciences. (Venn, 2006, p. 1)

This lens makes it clear that colonialism is not a thing of the past and continues to operate in the institutions and policies of today.

Coloniality integrates an explicit analysis of the power of existing social structures and roots in colonial history. The coloniality of power is a concept advanced by Quijano (2007) as constituting the crux of the global capitalist system of power. Lugones (2007) explains, “what is characteristic of global, Eurocentered, capitalist power is that it is organized around two axes that Quijano terms ‘the coloniality of power’ and ‘modernity’” (p. 186). The concept of coloniality maps power as a force that colonizes the imagination and co-opts through access to pieces of the power system (Quijano, 2007). This concept effectively captures the intersection of colonialism with capitalism and their modernist roots, which underpin the dominant Western ontology. The modernist legacy includes the contradictory juxtaposition of “Enlightenment ideals of respect, freedom, and equality [against] gender domination, and western domination in the form of colonialism and imperialism” (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 4). Yet the very social contract that holds that all men are created equal is, in fact, predicated on the subordination of women and the racialized other (Pierson, 2005). “‘Universalism’ [has] come to dominate a politics centered on the subject of rights, thereby occluding the force of global capital and its differential forms of exploitation from the theorizations of subordinated peoples” (Butler, 2000, p. 36). The consequence of this for CYC is that historic political and economic struggles have been categorized into manageable units of individual disease or disorder (de Finney, Dean et al., 2011; Jakobsen, 1998; Kivel, 2002; McKnight, 1995; Szasz, 2002).

Capitalism cannot be excluded from a discussion of Western ontology and professional helping. In terms of productive social change (Braidotti, 2008), Callahan and Swift (2007), Lugones (2007), McLaren (2000), Mohanty (2003), and Skott-Myhre (2008), among others, foreground the importance of considering the intersection of a capitalist economic system with a Eurocentric colonial history in mapping out where we are in order to contemplate where we might go next. Closely related to colonialism is the neo-colonial capitalist paradigm, neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism, the form that capitalism has taken in the last century, has significantly shaped policies and practices in human and social services and, thus, CYC. Neo-liberalism is a political as much as an economic ideology; it has shaped Canadian social, economic, and political systems under globalization (Callahan & Swift, 2007). Based on a logic of free market values and globalized economies, it “enshrines values of competition, privatization, individual responsibility, surveillance, and managerialism” (Phoenix, 2004, p. 228). Callahan and Swift (2007) note that under this ethos, economic growth takes precedence over living beings: “economic growth and maximum exploitation of the market are given priority over support and assistance to people ‘in need’ and...require that individuals decrease their demands on the state and simultaneously increase their activities as producers and consumers” (p. 159). Neo-liberalism, true to its modernist roots, advances the notion that everybody has equal opportunities to succeed whereas, in fact, entrenched systems of privilege facilitate or limit opportunities for mobility and status based on one’s social location in relation to intersections of class, gender, and race, among others. Mohanty (2003) asserts that, “the hegemony of neo-liberalism, alongside the naturalization of capitalist values, influences the ability to make choices on one’s own behalf” (p.

229). Cultural tools such as education, the media, and corporate marketing have a powerful influence in shaping subjecthood. Neo-liberalism is entrenched as a hegemonic world view and thus, “most people have [the sense] that not only is there no other alternative, but that this is the best system ever imagined...Inequities are simply swept out of sight” (Said, 2000, as cited in Phoenix, 2004, p. 228). Difference is acceptable in consumable units – furthering the illusions of an equal and just society (Braidotti, 2006; Jakobsen, 1998). “The phenomenon of globalization accomplishes a magician’s trick: it combines the euphoric celebration of new technologies, new lifestyles... with the complete social rejection of change and transformation” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 2).

Neo-liberalism has profoundly shaped the structures and institutions of Western societies, including professional helping and the construct of professionalization. Before examining this relationship in more detail, white privilege, another thread of the dominant Western world view, will be mapped out.

Whiteness and white privilege

What is the history of “white” identity and “white privilege”? Why is this relevant to consider? The concept of whiteness is intimately related to white privilege; white privilege underpins the structures and values of Canadian society. Whiteness is not only about skin colour but also about access to special privileges.

Whiteness initially differentiated “European explorers and settlers who came in contact with Africans and indigenous people... ‘white’ developed as an indication of difference based on skin colour” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 168). According to Kivel (2002), “whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (p. 15). Who qualifies as white is always a moving target, evolving with migrations of populations, politics, and economic factors. As Rodriguez (2000) emphasizes, “race is not a natural, fixed phenomena but rather a social construct whose one constant or guarantee is its changing significance and effects given its evolving historical interaction and intersection with the political” (p. 5).

Historically, race has interacted with class, gender, and location to shape the structures of North American society (government, education, housing, and health care) through government legislation and policies that have protected and entrenched the advancement of the white, heterosexual, male subject (Kivel, 2002; Martinot, 2003; Schick, 2002). White privilege is charted in our legal code. Canadians have only to look at our own government’s Indian Act to see an explicit example of where white privilege and colonial values entrenched protections for the dominant group through the systemic marginalization and disenfranchisement of entire populations. White privilege “is produced and rationalized as survey lines, deeds, boundaries, purchase prices, and mortgages – signs of ownership and belonging... [it] is also produced relationally against the Otherness of original habitants” (Schick, 2002, p. 106). Rodriguez (2000) demonstrates the complexity of how whiteness operates to sustain privilege and the positioning of the “other”:

Whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint”, a place from

which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 8)

Ultimately, whiteness and white privilege are unseen and unknown because of an assumption of normal. The invisibility of a dominant white ontology “colonizes the definitions of other norms, class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality, and so on – it also masks whiteness itself as a category” (Dryer, 1988, as cited in Harper, 2000, p. 129). Throughout the feminist literature, tensions between whiteness and racialization and gender are centred in an attempt to map and dialogue about how to rework these problematic intersections. One way we can begin to map out or increase our awareness of the “colonial construction of whiteness as an ‘empty’ cultural space, [is] in part by refiguring it as constructed and dominant rather than as norm” (Fuller, 2000, p. 82).

Stoler (1995, as cited in Skott-Myhre, 2008) considers intersections of race and sexuality in regard to “how whiteness is used disciplinarity [and] the ‘cultivation of a European self’ and how this self was ‘affirmed in the proliferating discourses around pedagogy, parenting...’” (p. 171). A willingness to question normalizing discourses in regard to learning and appropriate social behaviour is of particular relevance for CYC and human service practitioners as “much of the current research that underlies policy and evidence-based practice remains Euro-Western in its subject matter and methodological orientation” (de Finney, Green, & Brown, 2009, p. 161).

Fee and Russell (2007) note that, as Canada does not have the same overt history of slavery and violent racialized conflicts as the United States, many Canadians believe they are race-neutral. This presents additional challenges for raising awareness and engaging people in dialogue about the embedded nature of white privilege and white values in Canadian society. “Faced with an activist Other, some deny white privilege, asserting that all have equal opportunities now, and others respond with what has been called ‘liberal guilt’” (Fee & Russell, p. 192). The embeddedness of white privilege is evident in the human services sector where Western approaches are presented as “acultural—transcending considerations of culture. However, supposedly acultural models merely privilege Western culture” (Walker, 2004, p. 532).

Intersecting with colonial history, neo-liberal capitalism, and white privilege is the construct of gender. In the following section, I will link gender as an important element to consider as interwoven with the concepts explored above.

Gender and colonialism

Race, gender, and sexuality are all clearly linked when considering a Western ontology through a critical feminist lens (Braidotti, 1991, 1994; Lugones, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Razack, 2002; Smith, 2005). “The central issue at stake at this level of analysis is the critique of universalism as being male-identified and of masculinity as projecting itself as pseudo-universal and a critique of the idea of otherness as devalorization” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 159). Gender is an ever-present construct that crosses borders of race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability, among others. According to Lugones (2007), “colonialism introduced gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, and ways of knowing. Heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other” (p. 187). According to Smith (2010), “the colonial status quo with its attendant

heteropatriarchy ... is the logic that makes the social hierarchy seem natural” (p. 47). A full analysis of the intersections of gender with race, whiteness, and coloniality is beyond the scope of this paper, but this section sketches an outline of how a gendered hierarchy operates in relation to coloniality.

Intersectionality is a concept that enables us to consider the interplay between multiple aspects of complex subjectivities such as gender, race, class, age, and ability (Carastathis, 2008). Lugones (2007) adds:

Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other. The move to intersect the categories has been motivated by the difficulties in making visible those who are dominated and victimized in terms of both categories. (p. 192)

White settler society has used place and space, including Canadian academic institutions and courts of law, to entrench the colonial norms of white, male privilege (Razack, 2002). Fuller (2000) notes that, “the intimate links between race, gender, and sexuality take place at the level of the body and in a social context of oppressions and privileges” (p. 91). The issue of women’s bodies as sites of violence is pervasive in today’s society; approximately one in three girls, women, and transgendered people will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime (Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, 2009). Deer (2009) explains further:

Rape and sexual violence are deeply embedded in the colonial mindset. Rape is more than a metaphor for colonization—it is part and parcel of colonization ... for many the oppression and abuse of women is indistinguishable from fundamental Western concepts of social order. (p. 150)

For women who are also Indigenous or racialized, gender intersects to further increase their risk of some form of violence and discrimination under a Western ontology (Downe, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) emphasizes that resistance to sexualized violence is integral to Indigenous women’s quest for sovereignty.

Several core, intersecting strands of the dominant Western ontology have now been charted: embedded values and practices from a colonial history, the dynamics and entrenched systems of white privilege, the very real presence of capitalism and a dominant neo-liberal socio-economic framework, and the entrenchment of a hierarchically ordered gender dichotomy. The next section will illustrate how these elements are rooted throughout current conceptualizations of professional helping.

Western Ontology, the Human Services, and Professionalism

Why is this discussion relevant to CYC?

Western ontology is deeply entrenched in the structures, policies, and beliefs underlying fields of professional helping in Canada. Canada is a white settler society, which, according to Razack (2002), “is one established by Europeans on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations [and] continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy” (p. 1). This socio-historic context has significantly shaped our thinking

about social problems and helping. Reyes Cruz and Sonn (2010), emphasize that “as a social science, community psychology is shaped by Western academic traditions, discourses and structures that reproduce historical power hierarchies intertwined with the legacy of colonialism” (p. 203). Human services work is inherently colonial, with the primary purpose being to control and discipline minds and bodies to “comply with the interests of the nation, the corporation, the family, or the agency... the task of forced assimilation is embedded within the dominant Euro-Western paradigm of the helping professions... under the guise of moral goodness and helping” (Skott-Myhre, 2004, p. 90).

Psychology, with its influence extending throughout the human services, has played a significant role in the minoritization and marginalization of others as it reproduces hegemonic norms (Lavallée & Poole, 2010; Morss, 1996). Wade (1995) notes the “very close and mutually supportive relationship between colonialism and the so-called ‘helping professions’” (p. 168), as demonstrated by residential schools and child welfare, for example. Walker (2004) proposes that “cognitive imperialism has been added to the goals of conversion and assimilation of the dominant governing society” (p. 531) and Skott-Myhre (2008) identifies the human service worker as, “an extension of the colonial or cultural machine [which] is always constituted in relation to the ‘other’” (p. 173). As Braidotti (2010) emphasizes, “the critique of universalism and liberal individualism is a fundamental starting point to rethink the interconnection between the self and society in a non-dualistic manner” (p. 410). The above discussion invites further reflection as to why and how we engage in various practices in CYC, the implicit values and beliefs underpinning these practices, and how we can support children and families in the here and now while, at the same time, not blindly (re)producing hierarchical colonial dynamics.

The business of helping

Our helping professions are, in fact, part of a broader system of neo-liberal structures which sustain the privilege and power of those deemed “normal” while all others, with their different ways of knowing and being, are minoritized. The devaluing of other ways of being and knowing is connected to the system of need and deficiency which has given rise to an expansive system of human services that aim to accommodate, assimilate, and rehabilitate all those who are “different” from the mainstream normative standards in all aspects of personal and social life. As we map out specific elements, it becomes clear that professional helping and the human services are embedded within the dominant Eurocentric ontology, one in which whiteness, coloniality, capitalism, and gendered oppression constrain possibilities.

The structures of professional helping have served to undermine individual and community capacity (Gilmore, 2007; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Kivel, 2007; McKnight, 1995; Rodriguez, 2007). One aspect of this problem is the establishment of government-funded services to those in need through a model of non-profit service delivery. Through his analysis, McKnight (1995) asserts that “these models presuppose an individualized definition of client need” (p. 46). Gilmore (2007) emphasizes that “non-profits providing direct services have become highly professionalized by their relationship with the state” (p. 45). This, Gilmore states, has reduced the parameters of helping and narrowed funding to “program-specific categories and remedies which make staff become technocrats through imposed specialization” (p. 46). Though at the present time non-profit agencies indeed provide useful and necessary supports to communities, they can also be viewed as part of the problem of perpetuating social inequities and

impeding social justice. How can we begin to think about models of care and justice that operate through different structures? In what other ways could we make use of resources so that community members' needs are taken care of while they are also engaged?

Throughout the literature, professional helping has been critiqued to demonstrate its erosion of the innate capacity for community problem solving and local solutions (Gilmore, 2007; Kivel, 2007; McKnight, 1995; Newbury, 2010a; Skott-Myhre, 2005, 2008; Szasz, 2002). For example, McKnight (1995) makes explicit the assumption advanced through human service models that the professional, with presumed expertise garnered through formal education settings, "not only knows what [the client] needs, but also knows how the need is to be met" (p. 48). This underlying assumption embodies the paternalism and dominance of the colonial project. This view "defines citizens as people who cannot understand whether they have a problem – much less what should be done about it" (McKnight, p. 48). Minoritized populations (racialized, disabled, female, queer) remain the most frequent targets of professionalized and specialized human service interventions (de Finney, Loiselle, & Dean, 2011). Individualizing problems and labelling deficits "obscures the conditions that contribute to these problems and in so doing, diverts our attention from insisting on any changes outside of [these] individuals who are already marginalized" (Szasz, 2002, p. 22). This is part of the illusion of the neo-liberal global capitalist project – it devolves responsibility for social problems onto individuals while continuing to exacerbate those very social problems. How can we in CYC not consciously "replicat[e] the kinds of dominance we hope to alleviate; accommodating people to lives of poverty, and participating in practices that serve as social control" (Reynolds, 2010, p. 2)?

Benefits of professionalization?

The assumption that professionalized helping is better follows the natural logic of a Western ontology, with its inherent privileging of hierarchy, power, and a paternalistic stance. Professions are characterized by "monopolistic, patriarchal, elitist self-interest groups" (Lochhead, 2001, p. 75). Furthermore, according to Eisekovitz and Beker (2001), "the idea that acquiring the structural concomitants of professionalization will automatically lead to better service to clients is an assumption; it is not based on empirical proof" (p. 416). Eisekovitz and Beker point to the experience of at least one major allied field (social work) to suggest that there is no direct relationship between professionalization and improved services for clients. Lochhead (2001) and Garabaghi (2008) both assert that professionalizing is counter to the ethic and orientation of most CYC practitioners as it reifies artificial boundaries and disrupts authentic community relationships and networks.

McKnight (1995) identifies several structural consequences that exist as a result of professionalization and its focus on individual deficiencies, including the result of a sense of dependency and a loss of knowing how to be in community. "Professionals push out the problem-solving knowledge and action of friend, neighbor, citizen, and association" (McKnight, p. 106). Hillman and Ventura (1992) identify this same concern in their discussion about how the discourses emphasizing and elevating personal growth act as a substitute for meaningful work and satisfying, engaged political involvement:

Why do we need this ideal of the Norman Rockwell family, this make believe ideal that's so rampant in politics and therapy? ...it is keeping an ideal in place so

that we can show how dysfunctional we all are. It keeps the trade going; this would be Ivan Illich's view. We need clients. (p. 14)

Another structural consequence of professional helping is that it serves to reify existing educational and economic divisions. Professional helping has become a thriving economic force with the labelling and identification of individual difficulties prompting the need for specialized education and training of professional helpers, agencies, and offices from which to deliver services, and supervisors and unions to protect the rights and needs of the professional helpers (Kivel, 2007; McKnight, 1995; Rodriguez, 2007). "Professional efforts to certify work in the service area are stealing jobs away from the poor by putting these jobs in an elite status, requiring the kind of training and education that most poor people do not have [access to]" (McKnight, 1995, p. 99). What are the implications for ethical engagement with our clients and with our communities when our livelihood is dependent on the suffering and disenfranchisement of others?

In reflecting on the common threads throughout the literature, it is evident that professional helping and professionalization have limited, if any, actual merit beyond the short term, for supporting individuals and communities to improve or resolve social and health problems. By design, professional helping is set up to position individuals as responsible for their problems and for resolving them. Within models of professional helping, there is very little, if any, acknowledgement of or engagement with structural and systemic factors such as the law and social policy, or racialization, poverty, and gender-based discrimination. To engage in transformative social change requires us to challenge professional assumptions and models of helping in CYC and in the legal and socio-political contexts in which CYC operates.

Implications for Policy and Practice in Child and Youth Care

In order to foreground social justice in CYC praxis, it is necessary to make explicit the focus on individualized problems and work toward community-based solutions to transform the conditions and context of these problems, rather than just treating individual "symptoms". Like Braidotti (2006), Skott-Myhre (2005) proposes that we rethink:

the modernist individual subject, as a product of an earlier form of discipline ... if we are to utilize psychology as a meaningful tool in the ongoing liberation of human beings from forms of control, dominance, and exploitation within the emerging system of dominance and sovereignty in the twenty-first century. (p. 46)

In engaging with an ethic of social justice, what strategies will support the decolonization of ways of knowing, doing, and being? How can we work together for change in a way that is flexible and open to what might be that we cannot know now? Until recently, liberation projects embodying mainstream concepts of equality were organized by separate groups (women, gay and lesbian groups, specific racialized or ethnic groups) around discourses of the rights of the individual: multiculturalism and empowerment.

Beyond multiculturalism and empowerment

Multiculturalism and empowerment models promote equality among individuals yet have been inadequate at supporting change on a broader social level because they remain embedded and operate within the parameters of Western hegemony (Jackson, 2007).

A multicultural discourse of “embracing difference” too often defaults to essentialized images that inevitably foreground those who represent the dominant traditions or practices of the group, while further marginalizing those who do not fit within the prescribed boundaries (Pereira, 2008). Furthermore, as noted by Fee and Russell (2007), because of our less violent and divisive race history when compared to the U.S., Canadians “typically represent themselves as tolerant and polite [creating a] mythology of racelessness” (p. 193). This presents a serious challenge to making transparent intersections of racialized and gendered violence and inequity. As Rodriguez (2000), quoting McLaren (1997, p. 262), notes:

color-blind discourse is not a racial project of benignly looking past race to the person under the skin motif... it is a project set up to “protect” white privilege and power by permitting “white people to construct ideologies that help them to avoid the issue of racial inequality while simultaneously benefiting from it.” (p. 9)

The concepts of “empowerment” and “liberation” have limitations for achieving what they set out to do as they are inevitably constituted by a colonial history and a modernist-derived neo-liberal construction of the “individual” as an actor capable of social change (Jackson, 2007). For example, Freire’s work is built on “assumptions about the individual capacity for change through critical reflection” which ignore that “our life chances may certainly be determined by racism or sexism” (Jackson, p. 208) and further contextualized by structural power and economic inequities. Mohanty (2003) explicitly interrogates the neo-liberal ideology embedded in this notion that increased consciousness can enable an individual to change the structures of oppression and inequity. This implicit pressure on individuals to ameliorate their life circumstances often results in feelings of powerlessness, inadequacy, and an acceptance that compromise is the best or only way to achieve change for individuals who try to tackle social issues (Jackson, 2007) in the face of deeply entrenched institutional structures.

It is time to shift from focusing on problems at the margins to centring whiteness and taken-for-granted norms in order to interrogate how these perpetuate social problems. Rodriguez (2000) advocates the positioning of whiteness within multiculturalism discourses in order to shift the focus from the “other” and to centre “critical analyses of whiteness as an invisible norm” (p. 3). Harper (2000) emphasizes that it is important to consider “issues of power and powerlessness in relation to how racialized identities are produced and normalized” (p. 129). In centring whiteness and foregrounding issues of power, we can better map out the structures and practices that reify forms of discrimination that lead some groups to be overrepresented in our systems of care and justice.

Critical feminists have struggled to conceptualize issues of social justice in the wake of the disruptions to identity categories through post-structural analysis. Lorraine (2007) states that “many feminists share [the] concern that poststructuralist feminist theory’s antifoundationalist wariness of overarching principles does not provide adequate grounding for the kind of social critique necessary for feminist change” (p. 268). Lather (2008) raises this tension as well:

“essentialism and identity politics might be bad objects from the vantage point of anti-foundational theory, but they are often seen as the only, if not the best, strategy for advancing minority-based claims” (p. 223). Wood (1995, as cited in McLaren, 2000) cautions against the risk to social justice presented by post-structural ideas:

We should not confuse respect for the plurality of human experience and social struggles with a complete dissolution of historical causality where there is nothing but diversity, difference, and contingency, no unifying structures, no logic of process, no capitalism and therefore no negation of it, no universal project of human emancipation. (p. 153)

Lather (2008) identifies that a “tension around a realist position that mediates the essentialism of identity politics is a mark of postcolonialism in its use of histories of exploitation to foster strategies of resistance” (p. 222). Like Braidotti (2006), Lather underlines the value in mapping out what is, in order to see how to uncover, track, and resist privilege and structural power to begin to work for change. Ultimately, this tension is captured and summarized in Braidotti’s (2009) reflection: “how [do we] engage [in] affirmative politics, which entails the production of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which means resisting the present?” (p. 42).

The invitation here is to consider productive strategies for working toward social justice by confronting existing structural inequities, while simultaneously thinking with complexity to conceptualize social change at the level of cultural transformation that eventually takes us beyond rigid identity categories and into new ways of knowing, doing, and being. In order for significant social transformation to occur, it is perhaps time to consider an ontological orientation that moves beyond a focus on human emancipation and makes conscious connections between human, animal, and plant ecologies. All life forms are interconnected (Braidotti, 2006; Haraway, 2008) and it is the modernist project that has entrenched a hierarchy and disconnection between different categories of beings. A stance of co-implication (Mohanty, 2003) also resonates with many Indigenous world views, for example the Nuu-chah-nulth concept “heshook ish tsawalk” or “everything is one” (Atleo, 2004, p. 10).

Decolonizing practice

In contemporary settings, decolonization is the term frequently used to describe the reclaiming of a proud identity by Indigenous people who have suffered the ravages of colonialism. With a decolonizing stance and vigilant critical reflection, we can begin to poke at and peel away layers of convention – social and professional practices – to disrupt privilege and make explicit how neo-colonialism continues to operate in normative ways of knowing, doing, and being in professional helping and CYC. Decolonization “involves profound transformations of the self, community, and governance structures [and] can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination... a historical and collective process” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7). The literature suggests that it is time to move away from the dominant conceptualization of “helping” as a benign phenomenon, to think critically and creatively in order to “step outside the frameworks of colonial youth work and engage a different set of ideas, beliefs, and practices” (Skott-Myhre, 2004, p. 92). The link between solidarity work and decolonization must be explicit and “can only be achieved through ‘self-reflexive collective praxis’” (Schutte, 2007, p. 172). As Laenui (2000) asserts:

true decolonization is more than simply placing Indigenous people into the positions held by colonizers. Decolonization includes the re-evaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the colonized people. (p. 155)

Decolonizing praxis is not about substituting a new set of rules or codes but rather mapping out new, engaged methods to uncover, track, and resist these hidden hegemonic normative values and practices.

Adopting a decolonizing stance demands an openness and willingness to map out coloniality and to dialogue with Indigenous and other minoritized ways of knowing, doing, and being in a praxis of solidarity and social justice. This is crucial as “silencing Indigenous worldviews has been and continues to be one of the major tools of colonization” (Walker, 2004, p. 531). Nevertheless, how do we engage authentically with Indigenous wisdom and ways of knowing in ways that might benefit new approaches to relating and thus practice, without appropriating or recolonizing this knowledge?

A question of justice

In her discussion of social service work with marginalized and minoritized people, Reynolds (2010) claims “this inherently political work requires an Ethic of resistance that takes a position for justice” (p. 5). Similarly, Newbury (2010a) critiques “the dichotomy between care (as emotional and private) and justice (as rational and public) [as] false. Care is justice” (p. 21). This has powerful implications made clear in Reynolds’ (2010) assertion that neutrality is not possible; it is in itself an ethical stance not to work for justice. As Derrida (as cited in Caputo, 1997) advances, “the condition of possibility of deconstruction is a call for justice” (p. 16) and yet he also advanced the idea that one can never be just; “the only thing that can be called ‘just’ is a singular action in a singular situation” (as cited in Caputo, 1997, p. 138). This requires that one who seeks to be just must remain engaged, alert, and self-reflexive. What implications does this hold for CYC practitioners? How can we cultivate practices to track how we enact justice (or not) in our work with children, families, and communities?

In her call for making social justice explicit in CYC, Newbury (2010a) discusses how the social service field conceptualizes its role as helping people to overcome “their” problems (care), which then renders invisible the fact that these are “our” problems. This latter stance, of acknowledged collective ownership of social problems, allows us to begin to think in terms of social justice and productive social change. Kivel (2007) differentiates: “social service work addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of institutional systems of exploitation and violence... social change work addresses the root causes of exploitation and violence” (p. 129). It is critical to adopt a praxis of solidarity and social justice to promote concepts that go beyond “service work” or “helper” to open up possibilities for individual healing that are grounded in a broader context of social transformation.

As McKnight (1995) states, “human service is only one response to a human condition. There are always many other possibilities that do not involve paid experts and therapeutic concepts” (p. 103). Furthermore, it is because of the influence of neo-colonial and modernist concepts of regulation and control of environments that services have evolved with medicalized,

formulaic, and standardized approaches to helping, in turn facilitating the development of experts, but which do very little to mitigate or change the circumstances of individuals struggling amidst the racialized, gendered, and economic inequities of Canadian society (Scott, 1998).

Solidarity as strategy

An orientation to a praxis of social justice requires that we make explicit the connections between the challenges faced by individuals and collective experiences, given the Western hegemony entrenched in Canadian social, political, and economic structures. This next section explores strategies and actions to propose some beginning possibilities for mobilizing a socially just praxis.

As discussed above, Western ontology has strongly shaped existing models of human service which has led to professionalization and regulation which, through specialized technical interventions, have resulted in the growth of the non-profit and professional helping sectors but which have not succeeded in resolving issues of inequity and injustice such as inadequate and unequal access to health, housing, food, and education, or issues of interpersonal violence, mental health, and substance abuse. McKnight (1995) calls for a commitment “to reallocation of power to the people we serve so that we will no longer need to serve” (p. 100).

Solidarity strategies for mobilizing across identity groups against global capitalist inequities offer some potential for moving beyond “the binaries that structure liberatory struggle [as] ‘us versus them’ and ‘liberation’ versus ‘oppression’ to a multi-centered discourse with differential access to power” (Lather, 1991, p. 25). As Mohanty (2003) advocates, we must “move away from the ‘add and stir’ and the relativist ‘separate but equal’ (or different) perspective to the co-implication/solidarity one. The solidarity perspective requires understanding historical and experiential specificities and differences” (p. 242). Mohanty promotes a feminist solidarity which foregrounds the intersection of gender with colonial repression and white dominance. May (2009) notes “the damage done by identity politics, and [that] it no longer holds the imagination of many... as early as the misnamed ‘anti-globalization’ movement, really an anti-neoliberalism movement, solidarity began to return to the scene in place of ghettoized identities” (p. 2).

Rancière (1999, as cited in May, 2009) presents an alternate construction of equality to support a solidarity approach to social change: “For liberals, equality is what must be granted and/or preserved by state institutions with regard to citizens. For Rancière, equality is what is presupposed by those who act” (p. 9). This alternative provides a “bottom up” view of equality allowing “people [to] act collectively out of the presupposition of their equality, both to one another and to those in [power] that are said to be superior ... Equality, then, cuts against individualism and toward solidarity” (May, p. 9).

McLaren (2000) sees the anti-capitalist struggle as a site of common ground from which to organize “revolutionary praxis and social transformation productively [as in this way] agency is neither limited to nor does it exclude agential spaces of ethnic struggle” (p. 155). This is liberating as it opens up possible ways of being with increased accountability and engagement in everyday life to and with one another as a viable and vital alternative to the current dominant, individualistic culture of self-interest.

Socially just praxis

Praxis is a concept that offers constructive possibilities for a solidarity-focused, decolonizing practice that is dynamic and responsive and mobilized through an ethic of social justice. White (2007) defines praxis as:

the integration of knowledge and action (theory and practice ... Specifically, theory and practice are integrated and one does not precede nor hold greater value than the other (Carr 1987). Praxis is creative, “other-seeking” and dialogic (Smith 1999). It is the place where words and actions, discourses and experience merge... Praxis is expressed in particular contexts and thus can never be proceduralized or specified in advance. (p. 226)

Considering all the elements of this definition, praxis can be viewed as a potentially constructive model for anti-capitalist, solidarity work toward social justice. Transformative or liberatory models of praxis strive to engage community members in shifting from an individualized view of an issue or problem to one that is more collective and politicized (de Finney, 2007; Lang, 2005; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Reynolds, 2010; Skott-Mhyre, 2005; Wade, 1995; White, 2007). A socially just model of CYC praxis will require an approach that integrates theorization and practice rooted in working and thinking collaboratively with diverse community members (de Finney, Dean et al., 2011). Conscious awareness and a commitment to socially just praxis offer a site of possibility for transforming practice and supporting change at broader levels by connecting those who are currently pathologized on an individual basis to collective endeavours, and supporting meaningful engagement in regard to issues of concern to them.

For white practitioners, our everyday interpersonal interactions and habituated responses warrant critical attention. As Bordo (2008) writes, “white people, even those who theorize with sophistication about ‘cultural difference’ and the perils of ethnocentrism, are often clueless when it comes to the practical, concrete ways race matters” (p. 410). It is critical that “white settler societies transcend their bloody beginnings and contemporary inequalities by remembering and confronting the racial hierarchies that structure our lives” (Razack, 2002, p. 5). Here is a further invitation to interrogate instances of (white, male, class, or heterosexual) privilege in our own lives and practice. It can be a painful process requiring courage and compassion for oneself in order to begin the deep and honest examination of the ways in which privilege is reified through how we speak, move, take up space, and the assumptions that underpin our judgements. Derrida’s (as cited in Caputo, 1997) thinking could be useful with regard to this dynamic and dilemma. Like hospitality and justice, the importance and possibility of being conscious of and disrupting privilege, is “sustained by its impossibility” (p. 111). This edge or tension requires us to always be vigilant in our reflexivity and endeavours to map out inequities and our complicity, and to make a commitment to integrate an ethic of social justice in an engaged and vital model of praxis.

Practitioners must be willing to cultivate an engaged practice of reflexivity: seeing oneself and other, oneself in relation to the other, interrogating assumptions, and remaining open to possibilities. As Derrida says “the condition of the relation to the other” is that we can never

know the other (as cited in Caputo, 1997, p. 14). This speaks to the importance of a fastidious practice of reflexivity in relation to interactions with others. As Newbury (2010b) states, “self-reflection is at the heart of responsible and ethical practice” (p. 32), and for socially just praxis it is the tool that can help us to uncover, track, and resist hegemonic narratives and practices with intention.

Post-structural ideas offer some promising possibilities for CYC practice. Skott-Myhre (2005) envisions a transformation in practice in which “the metaphors of containing/controlling pathology and healing damage give way to an exploration of the potentials of flow and movement... recuperation and recovery of the afflicted ‘self’ would be abandoned in the discovery of multiple identities with infinite alterneity” (p. 48). This resonates with the potential for moving beyond dualistic constructions such as victim/perpetrator, good/bad, and mentally ill/healthy.

Analyzing practices at the micro level can be helpful in terms of how to focus our reflections and to further map the effects of coloniality and privilege in professional helping roles. For example, it is also important for practitioners to be conscious of their power in the role of helper (de Montigny, 1995), to rename unconventional ways of being as resistance in contrast to “disorders” (Wade, 1995), and to draw out strengths in the stories of those with whom they work (Anderson, 2004). Madsen (2007) invites practitioners to take up the stance of “appreciative allies ... a relational stance characterized by respect, connection, curiosity, and hope [and] a way of being that we actively attempt to bring forward in our interactions [with others]” (p. 22).

In adopting an ethic of justice and a commitment to a praxis of social justice, it is important to ground post-structural ideas of difference and possibility in an analysis of the coloniality of power which acknowledges the structural and material realities that exist in today’s society under a dominant Western ontology.

Conclusion

The field of CYC exists within a broader context of professional helping embedded in a Western world view founded in the privileging of capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and whiteness. Solidarity in the form of coalitions organized around anti-capitalist resistance, decolonizing praxis, and an ethic of social justice all demand that we continue to map out the ways in which this dominant Western ontology underpins the policies and practices of CYC. Disrupting hegemonic discourses with Indigenous and minoritized ontologies (including feminist, queer, Majority World, and non-human) is not just of benefit to Indigenous peoples but holds the potential for a productive, liberatory, cultural transformation that would also benefit those who are located outside of the minority represented as the normative subject (affluent, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, male). A commitment to social justice and to a decolonizing praxis necessitates a further commitment to engage in solidarity, to endeavour to disrupt and open to new possibilities the structures and institutions that currently sustain practices of inequity and privilege, and to explore alternative ways of knowing, doing, and being. As well as engaging in collective strategies for change, in the meantime each of us can engage critically with ourselves and the world around us, to interrogate our ways of knowing, being, and doing through critical reflection in order to begin to uncover, track, and resist taken-for-granted values and norms and to cultivate a praxis of social justice.

Toward unknown (forgotten or ignored) ways of knowing, doing, and being

Ultimately, this cartography of the dominant hegemonic practices and beliefs embedded in CYC represents but one layer of an overall commitment to justice and search for possibilities for sustainable living that embrace and nurture the complexities and interactions of all life forms. I am inspired to think beyond the bounds of this paper to truly revolutionary social change, which does not hold as an end goal human equality but rather harmonious cohabitation across species (Braidotti, 2006; Haraway, 2008). Opening up to the legitimacy and wisdom of Indigenous (as well as other minoritized, queer, and feminized) knowledge that has been historically pushed to the margins offers further possibilities for us to fully engage with the non-human world in negotiating more sustainable co-existence for all beings.

The emerging post-humanist literature offers possibilities for further deconstructing our Western ontology in terms of transgressing normative constructions that have sustained an understanding of human as superior to all others. This is expressed in Braidotti's (2006) statement that "a sustainable ethic for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including non-human or 'earth' others, but removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism" (p. 28). Haraway (2008) further illustrates this ethic with her example that "ducks deserve our recognition of their nonhuman culture, subjectivities, histories, and material lives" (p. 162).

It is daunting yet exciting to consider the possibilities for a transformed world and way of being if we could take up Rancière's idea that "equality is what is presupposed by those who act" (as cited in May, 2009, p. 9) to open up dynamic, interdependent, and creative networks for communication, support, and sustainable living that respect difference and embrace complexity not just across the human spectrum but across species.

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