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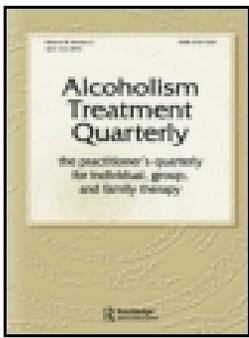
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Things Transformed: Inalienability, Indigenous Storytelling and the Quest to Recover from Addiction

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ABSTRACT

The impact that the systemic invisibility of indigenous people in the national narrative has on addiction and the recovery process cannot be overstated. An exploration of the nature of how this invisibility has evolved and is currently maintained may facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues. Understanding the importance of indigenous storytelling and identity can help us more effectively meet those working toward recovery. Anchoring such work, inalienability of indigenous identity and the wisdom of indigenous storytelling will be examined as it relates to a recovery process.

KEYWORDS

Colonialism;
multigenerational trauma;
indigenous people;
addiction; invisibility;
inalienability; storytelling

Invisibility

The focus of this article will be my indigenous perspective on the relationship between addiction and invisibility of indigenous people and the nature of how this relationship has evolved and is currently maintained. I consider it foundational for comprehending the ongoing systemic influences of colonialism in our perspectives and treatment. I will also be addressing the importance of narrative and identity in the recovery processes.

Our respective worldviews create conditions of comprehension that are unique and contextual. For example, when indigenous people are speaking of individual healing, we are also thinking of community healing and context. While we are considering the mental and emotional aspects, there are other aspects of physical and spiritual that are present in our thoughts (Anishinaabe Elders, personal communications, 1996–1998; Schroeter et al., 2017).

For some indigenous people, illness of any kind (whether it be spiritual, emotional, mental or physical in nature) may be seen as an out-of-balance situation or occurrence (Traditional Elders, AniYunwiya & Anishinaabe, Personal communications 1996–2017; Yurkovich & Lattergrass, 2008). There are many ways in which an indigenous individual today might find themselves in an out-of-balance situation, addiction being one of them. Addiction may be seen at the community and cultural level as a destroyer of life. The question of how this came to be and what makes it unique to indigenous people specifically lies in the narrative and context of experience and identity.

While the individual narratives may be different and unique, the collective cultural story is more pervasively consistent. As I have grappled with this question from my indigenous perspective, I will share the thoughts that have arisen in the hopes of fostering a growing

dialogue with others. I believe that the answer begins with the denial of our inalienability that ultimately led to our national invisibility. It was a tool of the initial colonizers, continues to be used as a weapon against indigenous people, and is one that we sometimes use against each other. I will attempt to articulate the reasons why I believe this is foundational in creating the conditions that lead to addictions and impede our ability to respond effectively to them. I will also be sharing a story to weave elements of the ideas presented, in order to create a context for readers in the journey we can take together beyond this article.

Some years ago, I was in a fiction-writing group and was given the prompt to write a short story that no one would ever read. As far as creative writing goes, this was a very freeing experience, because it allowed me to write without self-censoring or attention to the audience, and it released the inhibitions I would have otherwise had. As I am writing this, my thoughts return to this prompt, because it is central to what I believe is important to convey when discussing matters of indigenous perspectives on addiction and/or mental health issues. We as Native American people exist largely having the truth of our stories unknown to the larger society around us. The primary difference between the fiction writing prompt and the indigenous reality is that the former is a creative choice and tool meant to lead to a breakthrough, whereas in the case of the latter, no choice in the matter is involved at all. If our invisibility in mainstream society is a tool at all, it is one that was forged in colonization and is used to further disempower us and lead to a breakdown.

The narrative of the United States and our place in society has largely rendered us invisible to the mainstream. Even in attempting to support recovery, the narrative harkens to language choices that may inadvertently cast the individual in a negative light. “Disease model” or “addict” – such language is powerful, and we have a responsibility to our relations to shift this. These concepts may attempt to understand a phenomenon, but people are not a phenomenon and we run the risk of making people into predictable caricatures in an effort to neatly fit them into a model. Phenomena are, by definition, those things we observe to exist or are noticed (Phenomena, n.d.). The challenge here in our own post-colonialization existence is that we are likely to observe and notice things in familiar terms that fit our own accepted narrative.

One of the challenges that exist for many indigenous people is that the narrative has been cultivated and maintained in mainstream education that our history began at the point of colonization and virtually no other relevant information is provided regarding our identity as people. The rationale for this is often given that we did not have a written history. However, there have been ongoing efforts from the point of contact to eradicate what history and identity that we had.

While many examples of this exist, one of the more striking early examples was in the 16th century Florentine Codex, where Bernardino de Sahagún spent some 40 years working on a document in the Nahuatl and Spanish languages. He worked with the indigenous central Mexican people to collect their stories and Nahua traditions explicitly for the purpose of understanding their worldview to more readily convert them to Catholicism and stop their indigenous practices (Bernardino, 1970). His superiors then ordered the confiscation the manuscript to ensure that no one would have access to the indigenous worldviews and traditions of the Nahua people in any form (Peterson & Trerraciano, 2019).

This war on cultural identity and rights has continued in different iterations since then. The history books commonly used in schools begin our story with colonization and often

the educational system fails to mention that we exist today. The United States government in treaties with tribes required that the tribes have a way in which to determine their citizenship that the government itself would accept as a legitimate way, as opposed to the historic ways in which tribes identified membership previously. In some cases, this resulted in the identification of ancestors on census rolls and extensive documentation of proof linked to their descendants (Haozous, Strickland, Palacios, & Arambula Solomon, 2014; Schmidt, 2011).

In many instances, blood quantum was established as a means to determine when an individual was no longer considered a member of a tribe, resulting in individuals who are tribally enrolled members now finding themselves parents of children who are not. To ensure that eligible children of parents from different tribes receive the most optimal benefit, parents sometimes need to make a decision of what tribe their child will be enrolled in because they cannot be enrolled in both, regardless of how the child will be raised. Added to this is the issue of disenrollment, a process by which several tribes have begun to change the enrollment criteria and families now find themselves disenrolled (Minke, 2016; Russell, 2017). There are also many indigenous people whose tribes have not received Federal recognition, or whose ancestors were not a part of the original census rolls. At times, this can result in circumstances in which we are not only invisible to the larger society but effectively invisible to one another.

In the absence of school-sanctioned textbooks articulating our truth or existence, with identities divided by enrollment (or lack thereof) and lands and contexts eradicated or disrupted, mainstream society has filled the void of our seeming-absence from their experience in the United States by re-imagining us and creating caricatures of indigenous people. Some examples of this would be mascots of prominent sports teams, stereotypical imagery in advertising and movies, culturally misappropriated objects used in the fashion industry and Halloween costumes purporting to be us (Krueger, 2019; Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015). These dehumanizing images exist for indigenous people, parallel to a narrative in which our stories are largely absent and at times right beside monuments surrounding us that extol mainstream cultural attributes and heroes that we recognize are not our own and are not a part of what we would consider positive.

Due to our omission from the National colonial narrative, except as novelties or curiosities at times, most often we are misidentified as being in another racial or cultural group, as most of us do not fit the constructed and stereotypic images. When we are identified or self-identify as being indigenous to these lands, we are often placed in the role of being perpetual educators of non-Native people. This frequently results in the necessity to correct false ideas of who we are, as opposed to engaging in genuine dialogue. This returns us once again to a status of not being fully seen as people, but as ready-made cultural ambassadors who exist primarily to attempt to educate non-Native people or be a historical place-marker or someone upon which to test out theories regarding stereotypes about us.

While many dominant society members often genuinely want to understand us, frequently what we say or share is questioned or challenged, owing to the fact that is it diametrically opposed to the colonized teachings they have come to accept as the truth. In fact, they do not understand that they too are victims of a colonizing system that requires their complicity in order to continue. In this system, the societal value of indigenous people is effectively relegated to being relics of the past and demands that the narrative of the relics

is clean, sanitized and fits the familiar stereotypes. It does not want us to be the mirror that we raise up to them. In fact, when we do raise it up, they blame indigenous people for the problems that we have, or worst still, pity us for the problems which they themselves are complicit with on a daily basis from the omissions of the very educational system and policies they knowingly and unknowingly support.

To make such statements as an indigenous person is to be labeled hostile, militant, angry or an anarchist, none of which are actually true, and all of which are narrative throwbacks to familiar rhetoric whereby we were characterized as hostiles and savages. While many of us are taught by our elders to be in the here-and-now as a value, in our dialogue with others, we are placed into a position of providing a brief summary of 500 plus years of colonization before we can even reach the here-and-now to have a discussion about the issues we would like to discuss today. The amount of energy and time it takes to engage in this is draining and takes time away from pertinent conversations regarding issues of indigeneity and the future.

There is a growing awareness of the isolation inherent in addiction (Lamis, Ballard, & Patel, 2014; Rapier, McKernan, & Stauffer, 2019; Segrin, McNelis, & Pavlich, 2018). As those who serve this population, we understand how such isolation is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the individual. Often as the addiction progresses, the individual becomes invisible, obscured behind the symptomatology of the addiction itself. Over time, the individual begins to lose the dignity and humanity of being seen as having positive attributes at all, becoming effectively invisible to those around them. What may be less well understood is the relationship between isolation and invisibility of indigenous people through systemic oppression and how this forms a fertile foundation for the development and maintenance of addictions.

As the addiction moves the individual away from opportunities, resources, friends, family, and community, there is a further split as they become increasingly separated from the person they thought they were and had been, now with the twin companions of shame and self-recrimination to accompany them in their solitude. In my experience as a therapist, community and family member, I have witnessed this and watched the pain experienced often reinforce the addiction. The true identity of the person before me is fragmented, disrupted and clouded.

Might addiction be seen as internalized colonization? We all know the terminology of internalized messages. Is it possible that indigenous people have internalized the messages of this settler society, its historic tenets and present-day aims (Duran & Duran, 1995)? Certainly, alcohol was initially introduced to Native American people early on as a tool of trade and subversion (Ishii, 2008). In terms of its modern-day branding, the marketing around alcohol provides a ready-made, culturally-sanctioned identity. As it is advertised, the premise is that to use alcohol is to be an acceptable part of something, which will purport to lend itself to the person being more appealing, powerful and popular. The presumption is that you must not have this and need this product to gain it in order to be seen as more refined, popular and connected.

Similarly, when people are not seen as they fully are, by virtue of their indigenous lineage, they face the reality of simply reacting to how they are perceived by others. When one's existence is linked to a pseudo or prescribed identity by the assumptions of the dominant society, individuals are faced with the choice of either denying the reality of their lineage and cultural identity or continually reacting to the discrepancy between who they are versus

how they are perceived. Put another way, indigenous people are camouflaged by the assumptions of mainstream society.

From a more holistic indigenous lens, we can look to the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical elements of the impact of colonization. Spiritually, the removal from our homelands, theft of our sacred objects, desecration of sacred sites and burial places, and denial of our rights to practice our precontact indigenous spiritual ways historically has had a ripple effect across time to present-day. Emotionally, the impact of multigenerational transmission of trauma (Duran & Duran, 1995) cannot be overstated. Involved in this has been the removal of children from families (Goldsmith, 2002), loss of resources and the very things necessary for life, being relegated to the sidelines and cultural erasure. Mentally, having our identity co-opted and replaced by the false mainstream assumptions also has its impact. Additionally, having our traditional leadership structures transmuted, our identities reconfigured and our values re-characterized by the demands of dominant society have a lasting impact on the psychological well-being of indigenous people. Physically, the trauma of the loss of homelands connected to our origins, history, traditional medicines and those spaces that anchor us to our traditional teaching stories are equally problematic. Added to this are ongoing issues regarding disproportionately higher rates of incarceration, food deserts, poverty and economic disparities relative to the larger society.

In writing this, I found myself being pulled into the role of attempting to educate on the extensive historical and present-day impact of colonialism. In an effort to intentionally shift this dynamic, I would invite readers to engage in a process of seeking out this information for themselves. Readers might begin by asking themselves what is the history of the land upon which they live. What were the names of the tribes and nations in these homelands? Where were their burial grounds? I would recommend moving beyond the accepted settler history narrative often found on historical society websites.

It may also be helpful to ask yourself; do you know where Native Americans are in your area today? There is a commonly held erroneous assumption that we only are primarily on reservations and not in urban settings. It is also helpful to orient yourself to the history of your workplace or school as it relates to Native Americans. Such an effort to learn these things may prove quite fruitful. Recently, a trend has emerged where these elements are being vocally acknowledged by non-Native American people in academic and public settings. While an admirable first step toward indigenous allyship (Mitchell, Thomas, & Smith, 2018), it is equally important to intentionally include us in the institutional leadership of such settings.

As it relates to cultivating your own evolving understanding of indigenous people, I would encourage a search of terms, those provided here not being an exhaustive list. Some terms to consider learning more about are; blood quantum, tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, missing and murdered indigenous women, indigenous food sovereignty, Relocation act, Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, Indian Child Welfare Act, Indian Boarding schools, disenrollment, indigenous water and environmental issues, economic and educational disparities, cultural and linguistic revitalization programs, and settler colonialism. It is recommended that you seek out indigenous sources of this information, with the understanding that there may be a multitude of perspectives as numerous as there are diverse indigenous groups themselves.

Inalienability

The loss of original homelands has created conditions whereby many indigenous people do not have ready access to the traditional medicines and sacred spaces we would have originally gone to in order to heal. Our relationship to the land and places is important to begin to understand this (Smithers, 2019). Our specific homelands provided indigenous remedies and medicines that can be utilized for our respective healing under the guidance of indigenous elders who have the traditional knowledge on how to use them.

Anthropologists have studied the inherent sacred relationship ascribed to certain lands and objects (Ferry, 2002; Kovacevich, 2013; Novotny, 2013). They have articulated this in a concept of inalienability, by which places and objects are imbued with power and cultural significance that can transcend time. They have also noted that removal of the object from the community or communal, original spaces does not diminish its sacred nature or power (Kovacevich & Callaghan, 2013). It posits that inalienability is related to land or possessions, both of which fall into the category of ownership or transferability in the archeological model.

It is of interest that the concept of inalienability has been used as it relates to what western thinkers would identify as non-sentient objects. In many indigenous cultures, origin stories and some beliefs hold that these are living, sometimes sentient relations that have a spirit, purpose, and identity. It is also notable that the same concept of inalienability is not necessarily applied to indigenous people themselves. If inalienability relates to sacred power, identity, and significance, imagine what would happen for indigenous people if we viewed ourselves (and were viewed by others) as having inalienability? How might recovery from addictions be different? Would we then reach a space of seeing ourselves carry forward the inalienable power of our indigenous identities and our value as sacred beings as undeniable (despite removal from original homelands) and inherent in us regardless of where we find ourselves? Might our communities begin to view those members newly in recovery and returning to us as a sacred gift restored to us in their return, one whose experience of separation from us due to addiction has not diminished their sacred nature or power?

What might it mean for recovery from addiction for the individual and community if we could recognize each other's inalienability and identity, regardless of tribal enrollment or phenotype? What might occur if we no longer subjected ourselves to the same divisions we were subjected to by the colonizers? What could happen if we stepped beyond the contrived borders of separation to embrace ourselves and each other as having the inalienable right to be who we are?

As it relates to identity, I see who we are as indigenous people as having inalienability. The challenge becomes one of facilitating connections more fully to our identity and power. There are many wonderful paths up that mountain for us, through language revitalization, traditional ceremonies and ways, and indigenous activism, to name a few. However, there can be a number of unique challenges for the individual to fully access these at times. I would like to suggest one beginning point is a return to our respective indigenous original stories.

Each indigenous group has their own respective precontact stories that were meant to be community teaching stories. Originally, these were oral traditions where people would come together to hear the stories told. Where available in print these days, they are often relegated to the moniker of being "children's stories," and are sometimes found in the

children's sections of bookstores. Despite this misnomer, they have a great deal of wisdom in them that is applicable for adults.

One of the most powerful Cherokee stories I have connected with is "Untsaiyi (Brass) – The Gambler," a precontact story recorded by James Mooney (Mooney, 1902). The Cherokee man, Ayunini, who was also known as Swimmer, is the likely person who shared this community story with Mooney. I would invite anyone to read it for the full story, but I am only sharing a summary here. It is one that I feel resonates with some of the themes discussed in this article but is meant only as a springboard for connection with other stories and other interpretations. It is also meant to connect us to a pre-colonization story in order to tap into the wisdom that existed for thousands of years before the point and time when most mainstream history books begin our stories.

The story begins with an unnamed boy. I do not know if Mooney was told the name of the boy originally, or if this was another rendition of the invisibility previously discussed. We are told that he is the son of a Cherokee mother in the east and that his father is Thunder in the west. It is of interest to me that we are not told his clan, which would have come through his matrilineal side, as that would provide for me a context for understanding the boy in relation to community. It is not possible for me to know the reason for the omission. However, as I am seeing this as a teaching story that relates to concepts of invisibility, inalienability, identity and a quest to healing, the boy's relative anonymity at the beginning of the story has its merits. He could be anyone, or any one of us, which makes him initially somewhat relatable.

The boy, we are told, is covered with scrofula sores and his mother tells him that his father is a powerful healer and can help him to heal from this. He needs to go out west to find his father. There are many attributions to cardinal direction and meaning that are unique to different tribes and teachings. When I read this, I ask myself what do I know about our meanings ascribed to this direction? What would it mean for me if I set out on a journey alone to the West, given this?

Along the way, the boy encounters The Gambler, also known as Untsaiyi or "Brass," who also invented the Gatayusti game we once played and gambled on. Brass invented the game and he usually wins, or so we are told. In many respects, Brass reminds me of colonialism, in that the same one who created the game often wins at playing it. He feels like a threat or distraction to attempt to deviate the boy from his quest.

In fact, Brass loves to gamble and tries to lure the boy into the game. The boy declines, saying he is looking for his father and has nothing to gamble with. Brass tells him he will play him for his scrofula sores. I wonder, is he baiting him by making fun of him or offering him an easy way to be rid of what troubles him? How often do we get derailed on our own quests in similar ways today? How often in addictions treatment are individuals only seen by through the lens of what they came to in to heal from, as opposed to being all that they are? In any case, the boy ignores this and continues to his father's home.

In some versions of the story, the boy indicates that he will see Brass again on his return or will be back. It is unclear why the boy says this to him, but in the saying of it, he is obliging himself to follow through and do it. I understand this as being more than simply a storyline mechanism meant to let the reader know there will be more, but I see it as potentially related to a teaching related to keeping one's word.

The boy finds his father, Thunder. Once there, he is told to sit in a thorny chair, to verify that he is Thunder's son. I laugh when I read this because it reminds me of the times I have gone for my own healings and felt a level of challenge preceding these. Once again, there is a feeling that this boy is relatable. The boy sits on the chair with no problem and is not injured at all by the thorns. This is where I believe it is important to note, his inalienability as the son of Thunder, his power and relevance are fully intact *despite the fact that he has not yet healed from the sores.*

Upon having confirmation that this is his son, Thunder agrees to heal him and asks his wife to make the preparations. She boils a pot of water and Thunder puts herbs and medicines in it and puts the boy right in, where the heat might boil another alive. He then directs his wife to pour the whole pot, with the boy inside, into the river. The boy emerges, and the scabs are all gone. I believe it is *the boy's inherent, inalienable identity that actually facilitates his healing* from the scabs.

After the boy is healed, his father's wife tells him that Thunder has new clothes for him to dress in and will ask the boy to select adornments to wear from a box. She advises him to reach in deep to the very bottom of the box for his. She also advises him that Thunder will send for his other sons (the Thunder Boys) to play ball against him and that they would play a game of Cherokee stickball. She lets the boy know that if he tires, he ought to strike out at a particular tree which is his father's favorite tree, and his father will end the game so as not to lose the tree.

Similar to how the boy is not named in the story, we are not given a name for Thunder's wife. However, she has accepted this boy and participated in his healing treatment. She anticipates what will occur and provides him with advisement that he could not otherwise know himself. She sees something in him that he also does not see in himself, which in my mind makes her special. She reminds me of adopted "Aunties" or trusted mentors I have known. She might be similar to those supporting an individual through the recovery process who know first-hand what lies ahead and holds space for the individual new to their healing journey, all the while having faith that the person will come to it on his or her own.

When Thunder arrives, he opens the box and the boy finds it is filled with living snakes. He reaches in and pulls out a rattlesnake to wear around his neck and copperhead snakes to wear around his wrists and ankles and proceeds to play the game. As the play is described, we come to learn that the boy is Lightning.

I chose to share this part of the story because I believe that what is necessary in order for us to shift addictions is, in part, to "reach in deep" as Lightning did. The story tells us that he was not afraid when he reached into that box of living snakes, yet I imagine this is the first time the boy ever encountered an invitation such as this! Keep in mind, he had only just healed and might not have been aware of what great things he was capable of.

There are times when people early in a recovery process are asked to do things that are new to them, now terrifying in the absence of their drug of choice. Yet in this story, before he even knows what he is expected to wear as adornments, the boy is given the directive to get right in there and do it. Recovery processes themselves are an act of faith for many entering into them. Ultimately, Lightning's inalienable qualities are proven in the challenges presented. *His power and lineage are not diminished because he has not yet fully healed and is only coming to know this aspect of himself.*

Early in the story, you will recall that the boy had told Brass he would return. Lightning tells his father of his encounter with Brass after the stickball game and Thunder devises a plan. He informs his son of particular actions to take and outlines a sequence of events that he expects will occur in gambling with Brass. Thunder lets Lightning know that there is a specific time and moment when he should call on his brothers to join him so that Brass does not get away.

As I had mentioned earlier, I see Brass as being a bit like colonialism, in that he is tricky, and will invariably win the games he sets into play because he created them. In this instance, I see the story as providing some present-day guidance in this regard. Taking what we know about colonialism, are we able to outline the sequence of events that are likely to occur when dealing with its representatives and systems? Do we understand that expecting the individual (or community, for that matter) to go it alone into facing these systems will likely result in their losses? Are we all willing to step into the roles of brothers (or sisters) and take the actions necessary when the game plays out as anticipated?

Words are powerful. Words are what we use as therapists, as clients, to articulate an experience and to be understood and to understand. However, treaties, laws, and treatment all consist of words and we need to consider how these words further malign or render invisible indigenous people and our worldview. As you will have noted, I mentioned treatment as it relates to words and power.

We aspire to evidence-based treatments and often our funding streams require this, along with targeted goals and measurable outcomes. One challenge to this is that in order to get the money to provide the treatment, indigenous people need to fashion what is said into terminology acceptable to dominant society norms. They may be forced to re-characterize our wisdom and worldviews into terminology and structures acceptable to the existing systems. While this careful curation of words to fit grant aims may be effective for the short-term goal of obtaining the financial resources for treatment, the longer-term outcome of this is to inadvertently legitimize and endorse the very system requiring it of us. The additional risk comes in dominant society agencies then using these to justify future “indigenized” shortened treatments or attempting to generalize a treatment done on one tribe to all indigenous people.

Often in the context of managed care, time-limited treatment, and manualized interventions, there is a drive to truncate what is talked about in sessions in favor of “progress.” There is a drive toward treatment efficacy that moves in a linear fashion through prescribed treatment goals with clients. Treatment is frequently based on key factors, being relevancy, recency and research. Context is key in this regard, in that what is considered relevant, recent or is being researched is largely driven by settler worldview, agenda, and available funding.

The research base for most commonly accepted evidence-based treatments does not often have sufficient indigenous representation in the data to justify its use with the population. Further, while many Native researchers and scholars are diligently working to change this, we also need to see much greater authority at the community level regarding the decisions of legislation and funding of addictions treatment.

Recommendations are made to supplement treatment with a variety of pharmaceutical drugs available to alleviate the individual’s symptoms because these are seen as having an emotional or biological basis. While some use of medication can be helpful, there has been insufficient dialogue at the national level on two points. The first is the degree to

which research has adequately included Native American people sufficient to warrant a drug's use. The second is, if the use of pharmaceuticals to supplement mental health and substance use treatment may be simply medicating the population to better survive the ongoing effects of colonialism, rather than addressing the problem directly. *Will you see these constraints for what they are and step up to assist, as the brothers in the story do, when called upon to do so?*

At the end of the story, Thunder, Lightning and the Thunder boys succeed in putting Brass under deep water, spiked in place. We are told Brass cannot die until the end of the world, which means he could come back again, or perhaps he has already.

Things transformed

Many indigenous communities have our respective traditional teachings, wisdom, sacred spaces, medicinal knowledge, and stories. I believe that our precontact indigenous stories are viable teaching tools for each of us today as they were a thousand years ago. In my own life, I have found that by revisiting these in the context of my experience, my understanding grows. One way that I have used these in therapy has been to inquire if the individual has a teaching or a story from their respective tribe or nation that provides them with guidance or context when faced with a challenging situation. I am careful not to ask for details regarding the teaching or story, as that would potentially be culturally voyeuristic. Some tribes have specific protocols about when some stories are allowed to be told or who may be privy to them (Anishinaabe Elders, personal communications, 1996–1998; Younging, 2018). My inquiry is meant only to see if the individual can begin to tap into their own inalienability through the stories and re-ignite a sense of self-efficacy in the process.

I have introduced this in community meetings, with questions regarding what indigenous stories do we respectively have that could give us some insight into areas, such as: Who are our community threats? Who are our helpers? What do our stories teach us about how to resolve conflict? How might we be able to integrate precontact teaching stories into our daily lives? Having worked in an urban Native American community, it is a challenge because there can be multiple stories from different tribes. The goal is really to keep it that way, as opposed to imposing one tribe's stories for the sake of simplicity or ease of accessibility. Each respective tribe and nation that has their stories all have stories of value and that are rich in their truth and wisdom. All deserve a place in the circle.

An equally important element of our stories are that we are here, which is affirming and validating. We can share these and connect with each other and across time and space. Those stories can remain with us and are a part of us. They may help us because they speak to us and through us of our potential to activate our own sense of personal autonomy, authority, and power in the context of our own lives. How might we transform our world through the lens of our stories, if we remove the lens through which we view ourselves in the larger personal and social narrative? When we begin the shift of intentionally dismantling the embedded colonial narrative around ourselves and entertaining the idea that such narratives have not and never will serve us, what might happen? Do we enter the liminal state between who we once existed as and who we are meant to become?

Our present-day indigenous storytellers, authors, filmmakers, singers, writers, and poets are articulating concepts relatable and real to our indigenous people. They are putting into words our experiences and accurately conceptualizing a phenomenon. They are very special

to us because they collectively ensure our reality and personhood will be invisible and silent no longer. They are engaging in “things transformed.” They are writing, speaking, singing and manifesting their truths, as well as our own and healing us in the process. “Things transformed” (Fogelson, 1962; Freeman-Witthof, 1988) is a term I came across, a rough translation by some of what our process was in our sacred games and the preparations preceding them. Things transformed, in my mind, occurred when Lightning reached into that box of living snakes and pulled them out to wear them as adornments in order to go on to play the game.

What would happen if we did the same? What would happen if we faced those things we thought could destroy us and instead wore them boldly and allowed them to strengthen us? If we moved beyond the invisibility to embrace our own inalienability? It is notable that in the story, Lightning’s healing is *his own* (i.e. it becomes a part of him) but those fearsome snakes that could strike him down do not become a part of him, but are separate and living entities that he wears. I personally interpret this as a beautiful part of the wisdom of this story. I think this is important in the recovery process. We do not want to reach a point of allowing those things feared to become a part of us, only see our healing as an adornment (in effect, for show) and being separate from ourselves (not believing we fully are deserving of healing).

Not all of us still have the stories in their whole or complete form, nor do all of us know our teaching stories. In returning to them and considering them, their parts can potentially restore us to balance in restoring our knowledge and inalienability of identity. Have you returned to your precontact, pre-colonization stories? Do you look to them to gain insight into your problems today? What would it mean if you did? What might it teach you about living a life or addressing these challenges that might otherwise seemingly destroy you? You did not, your people did not, emerge out of the ethers as “American, in the Great Melting Pot,” because there was a time that this did not exist. Whose narrative do you choose as your own and why? We are very conditioned to accept a familiar narrative.

I have shared about our precontact indigenous stories and our present-day indigenous storytellers. I also believe that there is storytelling that becomes a part of the national and collective narrative. While there may be other examples, I will share the one that I am most familiar with and how I view these actual events as the creation of living stories that raise our voices in the national narrative.

I was blessed to have met elders such as Josephine Mandamin (Anishinabek Nation), who began the Water Walkers (McGregor, 2013) and LaDonna Brave Bull Allard (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), who supported the Water Protectors (Privott, 2019). These elders provided national momentum for the gatherings of indigenous people and our allies. These strong Native women were more than simply indigenous environmental activists calling us to protect the waters. They pulled us out of the slumber of colonialism and invisibility and brought us into the light. They were engaged in acts of cultural persistence that began long before them and will continue long after them.

There is something special here, this act of being seen and cared for as a whole and not parts. So, movements like the Water Walkers or Water Protectors are very powerful for us, in that they shift the national narrative and create new, living stories. We have the potential to become a part of the story. It is not singularly because we protect the waters and are committed to such causes. The real power of it is that these helped to transform us from being invisible in the national rhetoric to a place of visibility and into the light and gave us

hope. Further, they exemplified our inalienability through their actions. These elders taught us through example that we are powerful, capable people who come from powerful, capable people. It has been within us all along.

I listen to stories and write them as well, and everyone has their stories. We have our personal stories, family stories, community, and societal stories. Every one of these is important and needs to be heard and understood. Most therapists reading this will understand this. There may be a desire to integrate this into treatment. I would say that more harm can be done mandating reading of Native stories and imposing false identities on indigenous people seeking recovery.

There also may be a well-meaning temptation for therapists to co-opt native stories and bring them into their work with indigenous clients. That may be cultural misappropriation or cultural voyeurism, depending upon the context (Younging, 2018). Rather, go to your own pre-colonization stories. Deconstruct the accepted colonial narratives that you yourself may have been subject to and begin anew. Walk that process through in order to understand it on a personal, visceral level. Ask yourself, what are our origin stories? What healed us? What were our community threats? Who are our helpers? What are our values? What is the story within the story? How can I apply this to my everyday life?

Remember that you, too, come with a story. One of the great strengths of Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12 step recovery programs is that these recognize the importance of being able to share one's story with others in a supportive environment of people who understand from lived experience. This can be important for indigenous people in recovery, given that there are few places within our current systemic structures that afford them such space. The value placed on a sense of community where people come together as equals in a circle also is familiar and resonates with many indigenous people.

One of the first things I learned working in an urban Native American community was that people will want to know who you are, where are you from, and why are you here (Urban Indigenous Elders, Senior Elder Luncheons, Personal communication, 1999). These are a natural starting point and are not derailment or distractions most times. It is not sufficient to provide a surface or glib answer to these often-unspoken questions, but to give a thoughtful reflection and authentic response. You both come with a story and become a part of a story.

The story of those indigenous people you serve did not begin with you. There may be a community experience of people in your role who often leave prematurely, and you may be seen through the lens of that reality. The individual before you may have had first-hand experiences of people who look like you; certainly, their tribe or nation has had collective experiences in a historical context of people you may represent to them. If you do work as a therapist, we are customarily trained to maintain boundaries and refrain from dual relationships. However, if you are working in the context of indigenous communities, this may be contraindicated in terms of gaining community trust and engagement.

Mental health and substance abuse stigma exist within indigenous communities, as is the case with other communities. It infiltrates and toxifies communities and it further separates the individual struggling with addiction from the very thing needed. I believe that what is needed is for communities to see themselves as a part of a collective recovery and process.

In my own experience, destigmatizing mental health and substance use treatment at the community level also meant normalizing having a therapist in the community at multiple levels. Simply put, people needed to see me volunteering and joining appropriate social

activities to get to know me as a person. Work with the community and approach such work with cultural humility and an open heart and mind to learn.

I would recommend if you do this to get consultations from someone who has done it before, to ensure that you are doing it in a balanced and culturally appropriate way. I would also suggest frank discussions with clients in advance regarding other roles you develop and maintain in the community so that they are not taken by surprise. It is also a good opportunity to discuss together how you will navigate that if you find yourself in other spaces together.

Not all indigenous people are connected with their respective community or collective community resources. Depending upon the setting, some may have had virtually no connection at all. It is difficult as an indigenous person to say you do not know your language or your traditions, if that is the case. It is particularly challenging to try to fathom a new relationship with community when entering into recovery. Engaging available community resources can be hard, owing to multiple community relationships. The individual may not want to access particular spaces because of community gossip or stigma. It is advisable to tread gently in these areas, as they cannot be forced.

As this article comes to a close, I am filled with a fear of what is left unsaid. Perhaps I forgot something critical to mention? Then, I remember. I am back someplace else, another time and place when I first encountered our stories. While it was new for me at that time, this was not a beginning, but a continuance of cultural persistence across generations. I recall not wanting the story or moment to end. What if I had not learned enough? Worse still, what if I forgot?

The funny thing is that while that moment and that story both ended, they were not really finished with me. It did not matter that I had not memorized every detail of the story. After first reading *The Gambler*, I could never really see *Lightning* or *Thunder* again in the same way. It connected me in a way it never had before. They became for me so much more than they had been before and gave me pause and wonder anew. Each time I saw them, I was once again in the story and in those moments, the stories came to life for me again.

These stories connect me to our precontact worldview and my place in it, my family's place in it and those of all my relations, across time. They remove the false separation between me and the world, and in doing so, helped me to acknowledge all of our relations. The stories removed my own colonized blinders and helped me to see their inalienability. Such moments of awareness bind and connect. When shared with others, they form new stories and from those, new memories that strengthen our connection to each other, to the world and our own inalienable identity within it.

With that being said, I have to believe that the same will happen for you. You are finished with this article, with this special issue related to indigenous worldviews, but is it finished with you?

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