

# 9

## DECOLONIZING PSYCHOLOGICAL INQUIRY IN AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES: THE PROMISE OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

DENNIS C. WENDT AND JOSEPH P. GONE

American Indians constitute the fastest growing ethnoracial group in the United States (Witko, 2006). In the 2010 national census, approximately 2.9 million people (0.9%) identified solely as American Indian or Alaska Native, with an additional 2.3 million (0.7%) identifying as American Indian–Alaska Native and at least one additional race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Modern Native America is exceedingly diverse, tracing descent from hundreds of precontact societies, more than 200 languages, and dozens of religious traditions. There are currently 562 federally recognized tribes, with many others seeking federal recognition, that express limited powers of political sovereignty and nationhood (Gone, 2004). This diversity—which in many respects rivals that of Europe, with only a fraction of the population—is further complicated in light of ever-shifting identity politics and intergenerational tensions in many American Indian communities (Fowler, 1987; Jackson, 2002; Walters, 1999).

This fast growth and diversity of American Indians present serious challenges for psychological inquiry. On one level, these challenges are similar to research with other ethnic minority groups, in that ethnic minorities are included in less than 1% of the psychological literature (Bernal, Trimble, Burlew, & Leong, 2003, pp. 7–8). Moreover, when these populations are included, they are often essentialized (i.e., cultural distinctions are assumed

to be uniformly shared, relatively fixed, and sharply bounded) and compared (frequently as deficient) with the dominant culture (Phinney & Landin, 1998). For this reason, the very use of labels to describe groups can be difficult. In fact, we should note that we are not fully satisfied with our practical use of the political designation *American Indian* throughout this chapter; although it probably best matches our scope and audience, we do not intend to assume sharp boundaries from other groups or categorizations (e.g., Alaska Native, First Nations, Métis).

On another level, these challenges are distinctive to American Indians. The considerable heterogeneity among and within tribal groups makes representative research a staggering goal (see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In addition, little research (although somewhat more since the late 1990s) has explored the unique circumstances of urban-dwelling American Indians. In light of these complexities and this paucity of research, some may argue that the number one priority ought to be the accumulation of survey information that better describes the distinctions of American Indian groups. However, some may argue that less concern for “diversity” in general is in order so that additional investigation of basic psychological processes applicable to all people can proceed apace. From either line of argument, qualitative research may be viewed as a low-priority luxury or even a waste of time.

These concerns are understandable given the context of psychology’s historical privileging of variable analytic methods and nomothetic inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, as we discuss, these conventional, quantitative approaches are not only limited in investigating complex cultural issues but also remain inadequate, on their own, to account for the context of European American colonization that continues to profoundly affect American Indians. As a result, qualitative inquiry may play a crucial role for “decolonizing” psychological inquiry in American Indian communities. After briefly summarizing the qualitative research literature on American Indians, we introduce the importance of decolonization and discuss four general ways that qualitative research methods are particularly promising for contributing to this decolonizing project. We then offer four brief recommendations for the next generation of researchers who will use qualitative methods in “Indian country.”

## ORIENTATION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS WITH AMERICAN INDIANS

In preparation for this chapter, we identified and reviewed 166 articles and book chapters reporting qualitative research with American Indians. Because qualitative inquiry typically “crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject

matters” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2), our review consisted of a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary references from four social sciences/human services databases (PsycINFO, Social Science Citation Index, PubMed, and Social Work Abstracts). Our review was not meant to be exhaustive (e.g., we recognize that some qualitative studies are not easily recognized as such and may have evaded our search); however, on the basis of our knowledge of the literature, our identified sources appear to approximate the diversity of topics and approaches that are commonly used in qualitative investigations with American Indians in psychology. Because of space limitations, we provide only a brief summary of these topics and approaches here.

In terms of topics, more than half of the qualitative studies we reviewed are addressed to American Indian health concerns (including mental health), such as exploring Native experiences of specified problems (especially substance abuse, diabetes, obesity, and breast cancer) and understanding Native perspectives about health care and mental health treatment (e.g., doctor–patient communication, integration with traditional medicine, program evaluation). Other topic areas include education (e.g., educational disparities, career counseling, worldview differences), family issues (e.g., child care, domestic violence), identity (especially concerning mixed or changing roles for women), and organizational and social issues (e.g., gambling, violence, resource management).

Our review also identified a variety of qualitative traditions (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fischer, 1999) that have been readily adopted for psychological investigations with American Indians. These traditions include ethnography (prolonged cultural engagement), phenomenology or hermeneutics (exploration of lived experience or meaning), grounded theory (generation of theory from codified field data), narrative analysis (focus on storied dimensions of life), and case study (in-depth analysis of single or multiple cases). These methods and frameworks are sometimes used within community-based participatory research, participatory action research, and program evaluation designs, as well as in combination with variable analytic methodologies (“mixed methods”). Several methods for gathering data have been employed, including open-ended and semistructured interviews, naturalistic and participant observation, focus groups, qualitative surveys, and archival searches.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS AS DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

Our review indicates that qualitative inquiry with American Indians is clearly on the rise; of the articles and chapters we identified, nearly all were published since 2000, and none before 1995. This explosion is due in part, no

doubt, to the rapidly increasing popularity of qualitative inquiry in psychology generally. With respect to American Indians and other historically subjugated groups, this increase also reflects the recent growing appreciation of qualitative inquiry as a decolonizing methodology (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The central goal of a decolonizing methodology is to uncover detrimental effects of European American colonialism and to assist historically colonized groups with preserving and reclaiming their distinctive cultural legacies, strengths, and institutions (see Smith, 1999). The reports we reviewed vary considerably in the extent to which they are centered on decolonization, but many, if not most, explicitly discuss the negative effects of colonization, and for some, a decolonizing agenda is deeply interwoven with the purpose and methodology of the study.

*Colonization*, widely considered to be an “all encompassing presence” in the lives of American Indians, refers to the exploitation and subjugation of indigenous people, lands, and resources, and the maintenance or expansion of the dominant culture’s power via its “behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies” (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 2; cf. Smith, 1999). The effects of European American colonization on American Indians are historically apparent in terms of the decimation of Native individuals, tribes, languages, lands, and customs. As a result of European contact, millions have died from disease, genocide, war, and dislocation (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). Further atrocities have been committed in terms of forced assimilation strategies, most notably boarding schools, in which Native languages and cultures were sometimes literally beaten out of children through abusive practices (Witko, 2006).

What may be less appreciated is the extent to which colonization continues to frame American Indian experience at both individual and communal levels (Kirmayer et al., 2000; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005). Although there may be a certain sense in which American Indians are a *formerly* colonized group (occupying a postcolonial status), there are other ways in which colonialist strategies of maintaining status quo inequalities, however unintentional, continue to structure contemporary American Indian life in profound ways (Gone & Kirmayer, 2010). Many scholars have demonstrated how most, if not all, major contemporary issues in Indian Country are inseparable from the history of genocide, violence, and discrimination that continues to harm American Indians (e.g., Jaimes, 1992). For example, one cannot adequately conceptualize substance abuse among American Indians without an awareness that problematic alcohol and other substance use began to occur only after European contact and that these problems are widely theorized to be a result of inadequate coping with the intergenerational trauma that has resulted from a history of colonization (e.g., Duran & Duran, 1995).

In fact, an underappreciation of the continuing impact of colonization for American Indians may be inherent in the historical positivism of the social sciences (Smith, 1999). Positivism is characterized by the dispassionate, objective pursuit of decontextualized, universal principles of human behavior, typically through experimental and correlational studies analyzed statistically (Arnett, 2008; Wendt & Slife, 2009). Although these methods have their benefits, their near-exclusive use is typically associated with a presumed value neutrality, which arguably serves to maintain the status quo comprising an unjust social order (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sasao & Sue, 1993; Smith, 1999). This critique does not necessitate an abandonment of conventional methods, nor does it imply that nonpositivist epistemologies are automatically innocent of an implicit colonization agenda (see, e.g., Smith, 1999). However, in our view, contemporary qualitative research frequently serves the critical function of decolonizing psychological inquiry within American Indian communities.

#### FOUR CONTRIBUTIONS OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

In this section, we describe four specific contributions of qualitative inquiry as a decolonizing methodology: (a) framing a context of colonization, (b) focusing on local cultural meanings, (c) providing “thick description” of cultural processes and practices, and (d) reporting results using participants’ own words.

##### **Contribution 1: Contextualization of Colonization**

In recent decades, positivism has fallen out of fashion with most philosophers and many scientists, and one of the consequences of this fallout is a greater appreciation and use of qualitative methods in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kvale, 1996). This methodological shift has occurred to an extent in psychology, but scholars have observed that a nearly exclusive search for decontextualized factors via variable analytic methods—a remnant of positivism—continues to dominate and drive psychological research (e.g., Arnett, 2008; Wendt & Slife, 2009). This dominance is especially apparent in the increased use of specialized statistical designs, the ubiquity of highly abstract operational definitions, and the increased clamor for randomized controlled trials for clinical treatments (Green, 1992; Wendt & Slife, 2009).

Whatever the benefit of these methods may be, their near exclusive use in psychology runs the risk of misunderstanding or ignoring the contextual frame of colonization that continues to shape life in American Indian communities. Because these methods have historically sought for decontextualized

models of prediction and control, rather than contextualized understanding (Miller, 2004), it should not be surprising that they can easily be used in ways that alienate racially and culturally marginalized populations, including American Indians, for whom cultural and historical context is supremely important (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Although it is possible for quantitative research to be sensitively framed in the context of colonization, such contextual framing is not typically endemic to a positivist agenda.

Having grown out of nonpositivist epistemologies, most contemporary qualitative approaches are explicitly characterized by an interpretive, self-conscious, explicit reflexivity about context, including an awareness of the role of researcher and institutional values and motives and how they may differ from and even conflict with those of the research population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Suzuki, Prendes-Lintel, Wertlieb, & Stallings, 1999). As a result, qualitative researchers are prone to be reflexive about the context of colonization and its contemporary consequences such as poverty, discrimination, and unequal opportunity—as well as how this context highlights cultural strengths of American Indians in their resilient survival and adaptation. In this regard, it is not surprising that qualitative paradigms have followed civil rights movements in the moral and political causes of revealing formerly subjugated experiences and narratives of oppressed and disenfranchised groups (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

There are many examples of qualitative research that nicely contextualize American Indian concerns within the frame of colonization (e.g., Gone, 2009; Jervis, Spicer, & Manson, 2003; McCabe, 2007; Prussing, 2007). These examples indicate how themes of colonization are widely evident from interviews and ethnographic observations, as well as how researchers can be explicitly reflexive about the context of colonization. For instance, McCabe's (2007) phenomenological research with Native healers and clients is framed in a context of distrust of Western-imposed therapy approaches. The widespread delivery of these approaches, even those referred to as culturally sensitive, is seen by many American Indians as an extension of European American colonialism. In particular, as McCabe discussed, these approaches may be seen as undermining Native attempts for cultural reclamation through traditional healing approaches. McCabe's explicit reflexivity about this colonialist context, as reflected at every level of his inquiry, is crucial for his study's revealing of "a previously little heard voice: the Native community's voice about its own wellness and its own ability to heal itself from within" (p. 158).

## **Contribution 2: Focus on Culture**

As researchers position American Indian concerns in a colonization frame, they begin to recognize that a self-conscious, at times almost obsessive,

discourse of “culture” is widespread among Native groups. Many contemporary American Indians invoke culture to highlight the seemingly profound differences between Native and European American lifeways, as well as to mark a return to indigenous traditions (e.g., McCabe, 2007). However, culture continues to evade most conventional research in psychology. Although psychologists and other social scientists have paid more explicit attention to culture in recent decades, it is often viewed as a nuisance variable that gets in the way of systematized research programs, such as psychopathological diagnosis and treatment research (Gone & Kirmayer, 2010).

An additional problem is that conventional psychological research tends to collapse many diverse cultural communities into one of a handful of recognized ethnoracial groups (Sasao & Sue, 1993). This tendency is an outgrowth of European American colonialism, in which American Indian cultures are understood primarily in comparison to the dominant culture, rather than allowed to be understood in their particularities. Even in much of the multicultural literature in psychology, calls for “cultural sensitivity” or “cultural competency” are often limited to broad variables of American Indian culture—resulting in a generic and essentialized “Generokee” culture (Gone & Alcántara, 2010); moreover, these calls are arguably used simply to advance Western ends, such as more efficient delivery of mainstream health care practices (Dutta, 2007).

Qualitative methods are especially well suited to inquiries about meanings of culture that, because of their sheer complexity and irreducibility, challenge the colonialist project of constructing American Indian culture as an essentialized variable. Qualitative questions about culture might include the following: What do American Indians mean when they talk about culture? What aspects of culture do they focus on when differentiating indigenous and European American cultures? How does this discourse of culture play out in everyday life? To what extent does it vary among and within Native groups?

Serious attention to these kinds of questions requires deeper immersion in and understanding of local meanings of American Indian culture(s), rather than simply glossing and abstracting a generalized American Indian culture in the service of Western ends of efficient prediction and control.

An additional benefit of many qualitative methods (e.g., ethnography) is an ability to delve beneath overt discourses of culture. Cultural processes and practices are rarely, if ever, as simple as the way they are understood and represented in self-conscious descriptions (and as measured in response to self-report survey items). Rather, culture appears to be most influential at a deeper and more subtle level where its influence remains largely tacit or latent (Geertz, 1973). Just as most people are not reflexively aware of the formal grammatical rules that structure their own fluent use of their primary language, tacit aspects of one’s culture may “fly under the radar” and not be immediately

apparent, to both insider group members and outsider investigators. By examining these deeper aspects of culture, qualitative inquiry has the potential to reveal insights, nuances, complexities, looping effects, identity politics, and contradictions that may be sidestepped, overlooked, or ignored in respondent accounts.

This more nuanced attention to culture is crucial from a decolonizing standpoint in that both insiders and outsiders may remain differentially blinded to important convergences and divergences between and within indigenous and Western cultural practices. For example, Prussing's (2007) ethnographic research reveals nuanced and widely unrecognized discrepancies between younger and older Northern Cheyenne women concerning their explanations and understandings of addiction and recovery. A common refrain is that substance abuse treatments that incorporate disease-based conceptions of alcohol use and rely on emotional expression (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) are not culturally sensitive to American Indians. In general, this may be true, but Prussing's ethnography reveals that many younger Northern Cheyenne women have challenged this view through their own selective use of certain elements of mainstream addiction–recovery discourse (e.g., emotional expression). These women, whose road to sobriety was inextricably linked with cultural reclamation, “increasingly positioned emotional experience and expression as central arbiters” of Native identity (p. 499), thereby controversially challenging overly generalized descriptions of American Indian culture and treatment preferences. This example exemplifies how an attention to cultural complexities can challenge fixed stereotypes about American Indian individuals as well as assist Native communities in deciding whether and how to pursue integration of Western ideals and programs with indigenous values and traditions.

### **Contribution 3: Thick Description**

A focus on American Indian discourses of culture requires attending to *emic* aspects of community life (i.e., the accounting of culture in a way that is meaningful to insiders) rather than only *etic* aspects (i.e., the accounting of culture in a priori terms that can be compared with other cultures; Bravo, 2003; Phinney & Landin, 1998). There is an important place for the *etic*; however, from a decolonization standpoint, a predominant focus on the *etic* may draw attention away from the lived experience of the colonized group and instead frame phenomena only in light of normative categories that are created by and for the dominant culture (Phinney & Landin, 1998). This danger is especially important to recognize for American Indians, considering that a focus on *etic* research can make it difficult to see distinctions within and between tribal groups.

In contrast, qualitative methods are especially well suited for researchers to immerse themselves in an unfamiliar cultural context and thereby position themselves to understand cultural meanings in local (emic) terms. According to Geertz (1973), this immersion in context allows for thick description of cultural meanings. Whereas thin description accounts for behavior acontextually (etic), thick description helps to articulate the intelligibility of cultural meanings in service to cross-cultural understanding. The thickness of culture consists of “webs of significance”—symbolic, interwoven meanings that structure experience—that require cultural acquaintance to understand (p. 5). For example, one cannot interpret the differing meanings of an involuntary twitch, a wink, and a faked wink—to borrow from Geertz’s elaboration of Gilbert Ryle’s hypothetical example—without understanding how these communications are understood within a broader web of meanings via a shared social code. Such an awareness is often not possible from the detached observation called for by variable analytic methods: “Rather than disengaging, we throw ourselves more fully into the experience, as it were. There is a kind of search which involves being ‘all there,’ being more attentively ‘in’ our experience” (Taylor, 1989, p. 163).

In terms of qualitative inquiry as a decolonizing methodology, thick description can enable researchers to demonstrate how various behaviors are embedded within cultural frames of reference that inextricably link these behaviors to a history of colonialism. One example is Jervis et al.’s (2003) ethnographic research on boredom in a northern plains reservation setting. From a distance, boredom may seem like a transparently familiar, even mundane, occurrence. Through thick description, however, Jervis et al. showed how local meanings of boredom were surprisingly common even among adults, and “unquestionably related to the reservation’s postcolonial status” (p. 54). For instance, increased media marketing of the consumerist entitlement to modern individualist pleasures, coupled with this deeply impoverished reservation’s failure to satisfy them, often resulted in a boredom consistently associated with a turn to alcohol and “trouble.” Conversely, those who were not consistently bored were relatively older adults engaged in tribal traditions or community service. Had this study relied solely on the thin responses derived from survey research, these cultural distinctions relevant to decolonization may have gone unnoticed—in fact, the role of boredom may have been overlooked altogether, considering its importance was *discovered*, as opposed to *hypothesized*, by the researchers.

#### **Contribution 4: Giving Voice**

A final problem with conventional variable analytic methods relative to a decolonization standpoint is that they typically do not clearly give voice

to the experiences and perspectives of research participants. It is often difficult for participants to see their unique perspectives and experiences represented in the aggregated data of these methods, and this problem is further exacerbated by statistical and methodological jargon that is virtually impenetrable to most people. From a decolonization standpoint, these methods, especially when used in isolation, may reflect or at least communicate a devaluation and diminishment of Native voices, perspectives, and opinions. American Indians obviously are sensitive to this problem, in light of efforts to eradicate Native languages and customs.

Qualitative research typically allows for more sustained focus on the everyday language of participants. This focus does not have to exclude normative and aggregated data, but verbatim quotes are typically a crucial and sometimes dominant feature of qualitative reports. Inasmuch as qualitative interviews allow for open-ended responses within a trusting interviewing context, otherwise subjugated perspectives may surface that otherwise would remain hidden. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) spoke of qualitative research's crucial role in providing access to a "rising tide of voices"—"the voices of the formerly disenfranchised, the voices of subalterns everywhere, the voices of indigenous and postcolonial peoples, who are profoundly politically committed to determining their own destiny" (pp. 1115–1116). From a decolonization standpoint, the publication of these voices, using participants' own words, can be a source of empowerment for American Indians. The permanency of these printed voices can also help to facilitate the distribution of traditional knowledge and indigenous perspectives and thereby resist future colonial subversion.

Consider, for example, the moral force of the following excerpt from Gone's (2007) interview with Traveling Thunder, a Gros Ventre traditionalist on the Fort Belknap reservation, as he speaks of the possibility of referring tribal members for mental health treatment:

That's kind of like taboo. You know, we don't do that. We never did do that. . . . If you look at the big picture, you look at your past, your history, where you come from . . . and you look at your future where the Whiteman's leading you, I guess you could make a choice. Where do I want to end up? And I guess a lot of people . . . want to end up looking good to the Whiteman, I guess. Then it'd be a good thing to do: go to white psychiatrists . . . in the Indian Health Service and say, "Well, go ahead and rid me of my history, my past, and brainwash me forever so I can be like a Whiteman." . . . I guess that'd be a choice each individual will have to make. . . . I don't like it myself. (p. 294)

Because Traveling Thunder's own words are used, his perspective is much more prominent, powerful, and discernible than it would be in virtually any variable analytic study. His words not only help to contextualize American

Indian distrust of mainstream mental health services, they may send a powerful message to professionals who may not realize how well-intentioned efforts of “making psychology a household word” (Levant, 2006) are thoughtfully and understandably resisted as a form of cultural proselytization (cf. Gone, 2008; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN INDIAN COUNTRY

As we have discussed, qualitative research has great promise as a decolonizing methodology for American Indians. However, there are many struggles in conducting qualitative research, especially for those who have not been rigorously trained. These struggles are exacerbated by the recent explosion of interest in qualitative inquiry, perhaps leading to “zeal without knowledge” from some well-intentioned researchers involved with American Indian populations. Some may have the mistaken notion that qualitative research is simply a way of referring to interviews and open-ended surveys. Others may be drawn to qualitative research because they erroneously believe that it is easier to conduct than variable analytic approaches. For others, the continually evolving and complex state of qualitative research in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) may lead to the impression that qualitative inquiry is an anarchist, anything-goes approach to method or that it requires an avant-garde creativity or ineffable personal touch (Becker, 1996).

Considering that many, if not most, psychologists continue to be suspicious of or uninformed about qualitative inquiry, it is all the more important for qualitative researchers to be painstakingly rigorous (Fischer, 1999). Toward this end, we offer four brief recommendations for improving the quality of qualitative research with American Indians, thereby enhancing its impact relative to decolonization. We focus primarily on the reporting of qualitative research, but these recommendations bleed into every level of inquiry.

### **Recommendation 1: Provide Clarity About Adopted Approaches**

One of the difficulties with qualitative research is that theoretical approaches are frequently merged and adapted in increasingly complex ways (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). We encourage novice qualitative researchers to consider working generally within the framework of one of the major qualitative traditions used in psychology (mentioned earlier), or another framework with clear standards for theoretical formulation, sampling, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting. When researchers report qualitative inquiry using a generic label (e.g., “qualitative research”) or merely in terms

of the basic methods used (e.g., semistructured interviews or focus groups)—as is the case too often in the literature we reviewed—it may cast a cloud of suspicion over the integrity and credibility of the research.

At the same time, we recommend that qualitative researchers do more than simply mention the specific approach being used (e.g., “grounded theory”). Transparency of methodology is perhaps best achieved when specific approaches are clearly described and referenced, especially for journals that do not specialize in qualitative research. We stress this point because some novice researchers may not recognize or use specific procedures and checkpoints required for using a specific approach. As Fischer (1999) explained,

One would not say that a phenomenological method was used when all that was meant was that experience was attended to, or that grounded theory was used when all that was meant was that three sources of data were used. (p. 110)

A related complication is that multiple schools of thought often coexist within a single methodological tradition or approach (Fischer, 1999); for example, two major strands of grounded theory differ considerably (see Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, several kinds of content analysis can often be used within a broad approach (e.g., various case study analyses; see Yin, 2009).

## **Recommendation 2: Report Adequate Methodological Detail**

Many qualitative publications in psychology, including many of the articles with American Indians we have consulted, disclose little in the way of methodological detail. The result is that the rigor of the research is in question, and other scholars lack the details they need to conduct research using the same or similar designs. This situation is unfortunate because qualitative research generally lends itself to greater transparency of the researcher’s involvement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, because editors, reviewers, and readers of psychological journals may have little knowledge about qualitative research, it is all the more necessary to describe methodological procedures in appropriate detail (Fischer, 1999). Not only does this practice make for better research, it may also contribute to decolonization by facilitating the rigor of future research and demystifying scholarly inquiry for American Indian communities.

To provide adequate detail, qualitative researchers might consider guiding the reader through the study’s major procedures. Although the amount of necessary detail may vary depending on the approach, research question, and journal, we recommend that qualitative reports include the following: why the particular methodology was used; how participants were recruited and

selected; how interviews or field observations were conducted (including details on the setting, number of interviews, and time span); who was interviewed (e.g., demographic data, contextual descriptions); how data were recorded, transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted (including any software used); and what validity checks were implemented (e.g., independent coders). It is probably clearest when these details are provided in first person and the active voice (Fischer, 1999, pp. 110–11). (For examples of how these tasks have been reported in the second author's research, see Gone, 2009, and Gone & Alcántara, 2010.)

### **Recommendation 3: Select the Appropriate Journal and Negotiate Print Space**

When preparing qualitative reports, and even in the beginning stages of research, we recommend considering the pros and cons of publishing with four different kinds of journals. First, interdisciplinary journals (e.g., *Ethos*, *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, and *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*), which published the vast majority of the literature we reviewed, allow scholars to communicate with others familiar with a particular topic. Second, journals devoted specifically to qualitative inquiry (e.g., *Qualitative Health Research*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Research*, and *Qualitative Research in Psychology*) allow for more print space and communication with scholars familiar with qualitative approaches and conventions. Third, journals specializing in American Indian issues (*American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *American Indian Quarterly*, and *Wicazo Sa Review*) are (somewhat) more likely to be circulated in Native communities.

An important downside of these first three types of journals is that they may be less likely to be noticed by mainstream psychologists and thus less likely to contribute to the badly needed decolonization of psychological inquiry. Conversely, articles in high-profile psychology journals—the fourth category—are of course more likely to have a higher impact within psychology. Unfortunately, only a few articles we reviewed (e.g., Gone, 2009; McCabe, 2007) were published in this category of journals. We therefore strongly encourage submissions to these journals, especially those with a recent history of publishing qualitative reports. Unfortunately, the concise report formats called for in most psychology journals cater to conventional variable analytic methods. Qualitative researchers thus are often in the unenviable position of requiring extra space to justify and describe their methods (as discussed earlier), as well as to provide necessary and sometimes lengthy respondent quotations. Although the tightening of lengthy manuscripts is often in order (Wolcott, 2001), we encourage authors to appeal for additional print space when it is

needed, explaining to editors why extended length is typically needed for the rigorous reporting of qualitative research. We likewise encourage journal editors and publishers to be sensitive to this need and to provide additional space when possible.

#### **Recommendation 4: Forge Community Partnerships**

Finally, we recommend that more qualitative researchers forge community partnerships with American Indian groups who will assist with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data. From the literature we reviewed, relatively few studies reported this kind of community collaboration. From a decolonizing standpoint, one of the many strengths of qualitative research is its flexibility in enabling community members to serve as research partners. Such partnerships are likely to enable researchers to understand what is most important to a given Native community and thus may serve as a buffer against the colonialist tradition of research that is too often exploitative of the indigenous groups it studies (see Smith, 1999). In addition, when community members serve as coanalysts of data, it can help provide a check against researcher biases and blind spots. Even “insider” researchers can benefit from community coanalysts of data, especially considering that nearly all researchers are in relative positions of power and typically are at least somewhat removed, owing to their specialized education and academic socialization, from the community life of their participants.

Another benefit of community partnerships, related to decolonization, has been termed *capacity building* within American Indian communities. *Capacity* refers to “the characteristics of a community that affect its ability to identify, mobilize and address social and public health problems” (Báezconde-Garbanati, Beebe, & Pérez-Stable, 2007, p. 113). Community partnerships enable more Americans Indians to gain experience and learn skills that can be used in the future to work independently toward developing a local knowledge base in service to tribal self-determination. A related goal of capacity building is an increased understanding and recognition of unique cultural strengths of American Indian individuals and communities.

### CONCLUSION

The complexity and diversity of Native America poses challenges for psychological inquiry that cannot be resolved through the sole use of variable analytic methods. Psychology’s nearly dominant use of these methods is inadequate for understanding, and likely has contributed to, the European American colonization that continues to profoundly affect American Indian communities.

Qualitative research shows promise for decolonizing psychological inquiry in these communities, and a variety of qualitative traditions and methods have been used in recent years. Qualitative researchers assist with the project of decolonization by incorporating colonization history as a contextualized frame, focusing on locally salient discourses about “culture,” revealing emic aspects of cultural processes and practices through thick description, and “giving voice” by reporting results using participants’ own words. We encourage researchers to provide more clarity and detail about their qualitative approaches and procedures, to strive to publish results in high-profile psychology journals in addition to other outlets, and to forge community partnerships.

## REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2008). The neglected 95%: Why American psychology needs to become less American. *American Psychologist*, 63, 602–614. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.63.7.602
- Báezconde-Garbanati, L., Beebe, L. A., & Pérez-Stable, E. J. (2007). Building capacity to address tobacco-related disparities among American Indian and Hispanic/Latino communities: Conceptual and systemic considerations. *Addiction*, 102(Suppl. 2), 112–122. doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2007.01962.x
- Becker, H. S. (1996). The epistemology of qualitative research. In R. Jessor, A. Colby, & R. A. Shweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and human development: Context and meaning in social inquiry* (pp. 53–71). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bernal, G., Trimble, J. E., Burlew, A. K., & Leong, F. T. L. (2003). Introduction: The psychological study of racial and ethnic minority psychology. In G. Bernal, J. E. Trimble, A. K. Burlew, & F. T. L. Leong (Eds.), *Handbook of racial and ethnic minority psychology* (pp. 1–12). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bravo, M. (2003). Instrument development: Cultural adaptations for ethnic minority research. In G. Bernal, J. E. Trimble, A. K. Burlew, & F. T. L. Leong (Eds.), *Handbook of racial and ethnic minority psychology* (pp. 220–236). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1–32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Dutta, M. J. (2007). Communicating about culture and health: Theorizing culture-centered and cultural sensitivity approaches. *Communication Theory*, 17, 304–328. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00297.x

- Fischer, C. T. (1999). Designing qualitative research reports for publication. In M. Kopala & L. A. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology* (pp. 105–119). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fowler, L. (1987). *Shared symbols, contested meanings: Gros Ventre culture and history, 1778–1984*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Gone, J. P. (2004). Mental health services for Native Americans in the 21st century United States. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35, 10–18. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.35.1.10
- Gone, J. P. (2007). “We never was happy living like a White man”: Mental health disparities and the postcolonial predicament in American Indian communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 40, 290–300. doi:10.1007/s10464-007-9136-x
- Gone, J. P. (2008). Introduction: Mental health discourse as Western cultural proselytization. *Ethos*, 36, 310–315. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1352.2008.00016.x
- Gone, J. P. (2009). A community-based treatment for Native American historical trauma: Prospects for evidence-based practice. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77, 751–762. doi:10.1037/a0015390
- Gone, J. P., & Alcántara, C. (2010). The Ethnographically Contextualized Case Study Method: Exploring ambitious achievement in an American Indian community. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 16, 159–168. doi:10.1037/a0013873
- Gone, J. P., & Kirmayer, L. J. (2010). On the wisdom of considering culture and context in psychopathology. In T. Millon, R. F. Krueger, & E. Simonsen (Eds.), *Contemporary directions in psychopathology: Scientific foundations of the DSM–V and ICD–11* (pp. 72–96). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Green, C. D. (1992). Of immortal mythological beasts: Operationism in psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, 2, 291–320. doi:10.1177/0959354392023003
- Jackson, D. D. (2002). *Our elders lived it: American Indian identity in the city*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press.
- Jaimes, M. A. (1992). *The state of Native America: Genocide, colonization, and resistance*. Boston, MA: South End.
- Jervis, L. L., Spicer, P., & Manson, S. M. (2003). Boredom, “trouble,” and the realities of postcolonial reservation life. *Ethos*, 31, 38–58. doi:10.1525/eth.2003.31.1.38
- Kirmayer, L. J., Brass, G. M., & Tait, C. L. (2000). The mental health of Aboriginal peoples: Transformations of identity and community. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry/La Revue canadienne de psychiatrie*, 45, 607–616.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Levant, R. F. (2006). Making psychology a household word. *American Psychologist*, 61, 383–395. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.61.5.383

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (2005). Epilogue: The eighth and ninth moments: Qualitative research in/and the fractured future. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1115–1126). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McCabe, G. H. (2007). The healing path: A culture and community-derived indigenous therapy model. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 44, 148–160. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.44.2.148
- Miller, R. B. (2004). *Facing human suffering: Psychology and psychotherapy as moral engagement*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/10691-000
- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 7–22.
- Phinney, J. S., & Landin, J. (1998). Research paradigms for studying ethnic minority families within and across groups. In V. C. McLoyd & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Studying minority adolescents: Conceptual, methodological, and theoretical issues* (pp. 89–109). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Prussing, E. (2007). Reconfiguring the empty center: Drinking, sobriety, and identity in Native American women's narratives. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 31, 499–526. doi:10.1007/s11013-007-9064-0
- Sasao, T., & Sue, S. (1993). Toward a culturally anchored ecological framework of research in ethnic-cultural communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 705–727. doi:10.1007/BF00942244
- Slife, B. D., Smith, A. M., & Burchfield, C. (2003). Psychotherapists as crypto-missionaries: An exemplar on the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy. In D. B. Hill & M. J. Kral (Eds.), *About psychology: Essays at the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy* (pp. 55–72). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Suzuki, L. A., Prendes-Lintel, M., Wertlieb, L., & Stallings, A. (1999). Exploring multicultural issues using qualitative methods. In M. Kopala & L. A. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology* (pp. 123–133). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Overview of race and Hispanic origin: 2010* (Census 2010 Brief). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity—A supplement to Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: Author.

- Walters, K. L. (1999). Urban American Indian identity attitudes and acculturation styles. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 2, 163–178. doi:10.1300/J137v02n01\_11
- Waziyatawin, A. W., & Yellow Bird, M. (Eds.). (2005). *For indigenous eyes only: A decolonization handbook*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.
- Wendt, D. C., & Slife, B. D. (2009). Recent calls for Jamesian pluralism in the natural and social sciences: Will psychology heed the call? *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 30, 185–204.
- Witko, T. M. (Ed.). (2006). *Mental health care for urban Indians: Clinical insights from Native practitioners*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/11422-000
- Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.