

# Truth and Reconciliation for Whom? Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in American Psychology

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In October 2021, the American Psychological Association apologized to people of color in the United States for its role in systemic racism. Spurred by a national racial reckoning, Indigenous Peoples have been regularly incorporated into initiatives redressing America’s legacy of racism. Although Indigenous Peoples have been racialized during the formation of the United States, this process is intertwined with colonization—the systematic dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous communities by Europeans. We first examine how the American Psychological Association (APA) has been complicit in colonialism by failing to oppose government policies that disenfranchise Indigenous communities, which it recently recognized in a separate apology to First Peoples in the United States in February 2023 ([American Psychological Association, APA Indigenous Apology Work Group \[APA IAWG\], 2023](#)). Second, we explore methods for APA to reconcile historical and contemporary wrongs inflicted on Indigenous Peoples through transitional justice, an approach to addressing human rights violations that seeks justice and opportunities for healing ([United Nations, 2008](#)). In particular, we consider the implications that Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have for Indigenous Peoples. Third, we provide recommendations for APA to repair relations with Indigenous Peoples in education, research, and practice. We specifically interrogate what possibilities for truth, reconciliation, and healing exist vis-à-vis transitional justice in psychology. We conclude with the potential that APA has to advance meaningful structural reforms while cautioning against superficial efforts towards reconciliation.

### Public Significance Statement

This article examines how APA can engage in meaningful efforts to restore and repair relations with Indigenous Peoples in light of psychology’s history of settler colonialism. It highlights direct and tangible actions that can ameliorate inequities among Indigenous Peoples in psychology.

**Keywords:** American Psychological Association, apology, Indigenous Peoples, reconciliation, transitional justice

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On October 29, 2021, the American Psychological Association (APA) formally apologized to people of color for “promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism, racial discrimination, and human hierarchy” (2021a, p. 1), including Indigenous Peoples (referred to hereinafter as the “2021 Apology”). In the context of a national racial reckoning following the COVID-19 pandemic and the police murders of Black people, Indigenous Peoples have been regularly incorporated into initiatives redressing the legacy of societal harms to people of color. American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians have been racialized as a part of the formation of the United States, and this process has been deeply entangled with *colonization*—the systematic dispossession, exploitation, and elimination of Indigenous Peoples by Europeans (Wolfe, 2006). In the 2021 Apology, APA (2021a) acknowledged that racism and colonialism coexist, stating that psychology must rid itself of its “racist and colonial roots” (p. 1).

In February 2023, APA took their efforts a step further: the APA Council of Representatives authorized an *Offer of Apology, on behalf of APA, to First Peoples in the United States* (American Psychological Association, APA Indigenous Apology Work Group [APA IAWG], 2023; referred to hereinafter as the “2023 Offer of Apology”). In this article, we build on recent attempts to repair harms against Indigenous Peoples in psychology. We first examine how settler colonialism has affected Indigenous Peoples, how APA has been complicit in colonization, and its efforts to address this history. We then explore how APA may reconcile wrongs via transitional justice, a process for responding to human rights violations through structural redress and reforms (United Nations, 2008). Finally, we provide action items for APA to mend relations with Indigenous Peoples in education, research, and practice. We foreground our analysis in self-determination

and sovereignty and question the extent to which APA can tangibly affect either via truth and reconciliation.

### Settler Colonialism in the United States

Although APA’s 2021 Apology includes Indigenous Peoples, it is regarding our racialized—not colonized—experiences. In a racialized society like the United States, Indigenous Peoples are primarily considered people of color; rarely are we recognized as sovereign nations with unique political status (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). To be Indigenous is to be subjected to both racial and colonial hierarchies (Glenn, 2015). APA’s 2021 Apology clearly addresses the former. However, it fails to provide proper context for settler colonialism and its effects on Indigenous Peoples. The 2023 Offer of Apology bridges this gap by outlining a history of maltreatment of First Peoples in the United States, which describes the significant harms Indigenous Peoples have endured because of settler colonialism (APA IAWG, 2023). In the United States, settler colonialism was foremost about Europeans acquiring, controlling, and settling land in the “New World” (Arneil, 1996). However, Indigenous Peoples already lived and thrived here; thus, dispossession proceeded apace.

European diseases killed as much as 90% of Indigenous populations (Hall & Tandon, 2017), making forcible dispossession through wars of conquest and containment possible. Europeans and eventually Americans secured title to Indigenous land through international treaties that traded lands for promises of food, peace, goodwill, education, and health care. Treaties and subsequent legislation resulted in the creation of reservations (i.e., land reserved for our exclusive use) to endure in perpetuity, which were invariably violated when the settler demand for more land encroached on reservation boundaries. By 1871, the United States no longer engaged in treaty-making and coercively negotiated or unilaterally seized Indigenous lands (Helfrich et al., 2021). In the late 19th century, U.S. Congress declared that reservation lands held in common should be subdivided into stock parcels to be owned by individual Indians, with all remaining “surplus” lands opened up for settlement (Otis, 2014). Over 300 years, 98.9% of Indigenous ancestral homelands were taken (Farrell et al., 2021). In U.S. history, access to Indigenous lands as an occasion for Euro-American settlement looms large, entailing processes so fundamental to the emergence of the United States that it is described as a settler colonial nation.

Settler colonialism differs from the more “classic” colonialism in important respects (Veracini, 2011). Historically, “classic” colonialism entails establishing complex administrative systems in the colony to exploit resources and extract wealth for the metropole (Adas, 2001). In many instances, formerly colonized peoples have successfully declared independence, expelled colonizing forces, and organized new forms of self-rule. These nations are understood to



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have achieved a *decolonized* status, which is much different than the settler colonization of Indigenous populations in the United States (Tuck & Yang, 2012). First, as opposed to extracting resources for the metropole, settler colonialism is principally concerned with taking up permanent residence in new territories (Hixson, 2013). Second, settler colonialism entails a *logic of elimination* with respect to Indigenous presence and visibility, which occurs through genocide, land dispossession and displacement, coercive assimilation, and termination of Indigenous polities (Wolfe, 2006).

Third, national narratives and institutions must systematically *erase* Indigenous presence and visibility to avoid any dissonant acknowledgment of unjust national origins (Eason et al., 2021). Fourth, settler colonialism is not “finished,” but an enduring social formation facilitating the erasure of Indigenous lives from public visibility. Finally, settlers are never going home, making the prospects for decolonization unclear, with persistent acknowledgments of ongoing Indigenous survivance—that is, a sense of active Indigenous presence that counters stories of erasure (Vizenor, 2008)—that afford a bulwark against elimination. Make no mistake, race is critical to settler colonialism’s logic; racialization guaranteed that colonizing forces could permanently occupy what is now known as the United States. Yet, Indigenous Peoples are not a race per se but citizens of sovereign Tribal Nations with a constitutionally established relationship with the United States (Getches et al., 2017). Thus, entities seeking transitional justice and reconciliation must account for settler colonialism’s impact on Indigenous sovereignty and our daily lives.

### Historical Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

The psychological literature conceptualizes settler colonialism and its impact on Indigenous Peoples within the

framework of historical trauma (Hartmann et al., 2019; Heart et al., 2011). Historical trauma refers to the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma” (Heart et al., 2011, p. 283). Among Indigenous Peoples, historical trauma includes various events that are the product of settler colonialism (e.g., Trail of Tears). To date, several studies have documented the emotional, mental, and physical responses endured by Indigenous Peoples due to historical trauma events and subsequent losses (see Gone et al., 2019). This includes depression and anxiety (Armenta et al., 2016), posttraumatic stress, substance use, suicide ideation (Brockie et al., 2015), and chronic health conditions (Running Bear et al., 2019).

For example, family residential school attendance has been associated with suicide ideation and attempts among First Nations peoples living on reserves in Canada (McQuaid et al., 2017). Within the United States, grandparent relocation history has been related to the intergenerational transmission of depressive symptoms and delinquency (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012). More recently, a scoping review indicated the impact of historical trauma is most notable on individuals, but that families and communities are deeply affected too (Smallwood et al., 2021). It affects kinship bonds and community wellness—and in turn, the transmission of important protective cultural knowledge such as languages and ceremonies (Sasakamoose et al., 2016). However, being able to harness cultural, communal, and familial connections, despite historical trauma, has been associated with shoring up resilience (Hartmann et al., 2019). Thus, there is much to account for and apologize for regarding the legacy of settler colonialism, including by APA.

### APA’s Complicity in the Settler Colonization of Indigenous Americans

There is growing acknowledgment of APA’s complicity in the settler colonization of Indigenous Peoples (APA IAWG, 2023). In APA’s 2021 and 2023 apologies, several instances are highlighted wherein APA promoted, perpetuated, or failed to challenge settler colonialism (APA IAWG, 2023). In the historical chronology that accompanies the 2021 and 2023 apologies, it is clear that psychology has existed alongside (a) programs and policies intended to eliminate Indigenous Peoples and (b) a national narrative in which Indigenous Peoples are conquered, broken, or vanished since the late 19th century. Significant federal policy eras concerning the civil and sovereign rights of Indigenous Peoples unfolded in tandem with the institutionalization, growth, and maintenance of American psychology (Howard University, 2023). Most eras reflect structural efforts to limit, control, or eradicate Indigenous sovereignty, including the creation of Indian reservations (*the Reservation Era*, 1850–1887), violently altering our customs through boarding schools and breaking



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up Tribal lands (*the Allotment and Assimilation Era*, 1887–1934), and dissolving Tribal Nations (*the Termination and Relocation Era*, 1953–1968).

Some of this information appears in the 2021 Apology. However, the 2023 Offer of Apology approaches it more scrupulously with its focus on First Peoples in the United States. The 2023 Offer of Apology resulted from APA's long-standing efforts to apologize for past failures. It was the culmination of APA President Sandra Shullman charging the IAWG to develop an apology by APA to Indigenous Peoples in December 2020. The IAWG's report (2023) described a meticulous process of carefully considering apologies by other psychological associations to Indigenous Peoples and close consultation with elders, leaders, and members of the Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP; as facilitated by two former Presidents of the Society), while noting the need for ongoing consultation. The 2023 Offer of Apology acknowledges that APA and American psychology:

Too often failed to respect First Peoples; failed to acknowledge First Peoples' contributions to our understanding of psychology; failed to respect Indigenous ways of knowing and being; and harmed and diminished Native individuals, communities, and Nations through serious acts of commission and omission. (p. 11)

These failures upheld “systemic inequities and structural forms of oppression” (APA IAWG, 2023, p. 12) that injured Indigenous Peoples through racism and discrimination, including cultural biases in research, education, and practice. Moreover, APA apologized for “failing to consistently advocate to change culturally destructive government policies and practices that hurt and marginalized First Peoples” (APA IAWG, 2023, p. 12). Beyond the apology itself, the 2023 Offer of Apology includes a history of U.S. maltreatment of Indigenous Peoples, psychology's harms to

Indigenous Peoples (in research and publication; education and training; practice, health, and well-being; and APA governance), an overview of actions taken (or not) by APA, a report of the work group's activities, and 46 recommendations for APA action toward remedy and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

As the 2021 and 2023 apologies have made clear, psychology was born out of the settler colonization of Indigenous Peoples. Psychology has upheld colonial policies and practices by categorizing Indigenous Peoples as a race and finding us inferior to Euro-Americans in reaction times and intelligence (Bache, 1895; Fitzgerald & Ludeman, 1927), personality traits (Pressey & Pressey, 1933), and decision making (Downey, 1927)—a nonexhaustive list. Psychology's scientific racism steadily created a narrative where Indigenous Peoples are incapable of self-governance. For instance, psychologists are complicit in the “firewater myth,” a term coined to describe the gross misconception that Indigenous Peoples “are more susceptible to the effects of alcohol and more vulnerable to alcohol problems due to biological or genetic differences” (Gonzalez & Skewes, 2016, p. 838). By describing Indigenous Peoples in dysfunctional terms, psychology gave further credence to the colonial ideology that Indigenous Peoples are incapable of thriving in modern America, a myth that persists today. Indeed, “coloniality of power produces coloniality of knowledge” (Aiello et al., 2021, p.20).

No doubt, apologies are crucial to mending these harms. Both the 2021 and 2023 apologies are initial steps of a supposedly larger and longer process, but what does that entail? The 2023 Offer of Apology calls for restorative processes, which seek reconciliation between offenders and victims. At least for now, part of this involves APA leadership formally presenting the apology to SIP at its annual convention in June 2023. As for actionable next steps, most of the 46 recommendations listed in the 2023 Offer of Apology report are aspirational (using words such as “advocate,” “affirm,” “encourage,” “honor,” “recognize,” “respect,” and “support”). Many echo the priority actions of the APA Racial Equity Action Plan tailored to Indigenous Peoples. However, the 2021 and 2023 apologies should be more than symbolic. To us, the 2021 and 2023 apologies *could* be the beginning of a more extensive transitional justice process for Indigenous Peoples, extending reconciliation broadly to Indigenous communities so as to possibly serve as a model for such efforts in the United States. To instigate this process, we imagine what possibilities for transitional justice exist via truth and reconciliation.

### Truth and Reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples

In the last 40 years, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have emerged as significant mechanisms for pursuing transitional justice and fostering nation-state redress for human



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rights violations (e.g., colonization; Jung, 2009). According to the United Nations (2008):

Transitional justice provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses. A transitional justice approach thus recognizes that there are two goals in dealing with a legacy of systematic or massive abuse. The first is to gain some level of justice for victims. The second is to reinforce the possibilities for peace, democracy, and reconciliation. (p. 1)

TRCs are generally concerned with two objectives. First, TRCs advance truth seeking and bearing witness to survivors' experiences as vital to providing (a) a historical archive to safeguard against denialism, (b) a legal and official record, and (c) public knowledge as a precaution against future violence (Balint et al., 2014). Second, TRCs advance reconciliation—"a complex set of processes that involve building or rebuilding relationships" (Seils, 2017, p. 1)—after human rights violations have occurred. Regarding state-based mechanisms, reconciliation tends to take the form of restorative (e.g., opportunities for witnessing, truth telling, apologies, amnesty) and reparative (i.e., financial compensation, memorials) practices. With APA aiming to expose, understand, and dismantle structural inequities like settler colonialism, mechanisms of transitional justice, namely, truth and reconciliation, are likely to be relevant.

The first TRC occurred in Bolivia in 1982, but such mechanisms were not globally popularized until the TRCs of Chile (est. 1990) and South Africa (est. 1995). Since then, various commissions and tribunals have begun addressing Indigenous Peoples' rights. In New Zealand (Aotearoa), the Waitangi Tribunal (*Te Rōpū Whakamana i te Tiriti o Waitangi*; est. 1975) is a permanent commission investigating claims by Māori against the New Zealand Crown. In recent

years, the Waitangi Tribunal has launched inquiries to address Māori health inequalities, which resulted in recommendations for a new health care structure that influenced psychology education and training (e.g., remedying underrepresentation of Māori students), research (e.g., developing a Māori psychology), and practice (e.g., increasing the Māori psychologist workforce; Waitangi Tribunal, 2019).

In 2016, after years of advocacy by Indigenous psychologists in Australia, the Australian Psychological Society apologized to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, acknowledging psychology's historical involvement in the erosion of Indigenous culture and the mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples. In 2017, the Uluru Statement from the Heart was also released, a petition by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people calling for constitutional changes and a national truth-telling process (Referendum Council, 2017). This was a major milestone and a powerful call to action by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for reforms in Australia. (After Australia's federal election in 2022, the government made a commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart.) Subsequently, significant national initiatives emerged in psychology, including the Australian Psychological Association Reconciliation Action Plan addressing Indigenous cultural awareness, responsiveness, and safety; education and employment; relationships; and governance. The Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project is an example of a program that emerged in direct response to this plan, aimed at addressing these commitments among psychology program leaders across Australia. These initiatives have garnered support from mental health leaders, including the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association.

Finally, the TRC on Indian Residential Schools (TRC-IRS) was established as part of a legal settlement in a class action lawsuit brought against the federal government in Canada from 2008 to 2015. Residential schools were a product of colonial assimilationist policies to undermine Indigenous Nations and had profound impacts on the mental health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples (Burrage et al., 2022). The purpose of the TRC was to document the history and impacts of the residential school system. The final report provides calls to action to address the effects of residential schools in legacy areas such as child welfare, education, language and culture, and health and justice, as well as numerous other domains (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The TRC also recommended implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2011) and addressing health, education, social, legal, and environmental injustices affecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Despite providing promising recommendations, TRCs are constrained by numerous factors and are subject to critique, including by Indigenous Peoples. For instance, restorative practices—apologies, truth telling, and amnesty—are often

constrained by the politics of specific mandates and legislated emphases (Jung, 2009). Other concerns are that such “official” processes tend to have the effect of making public performative aspects of reconciliation (i.e., public apologies), with little action on the substantive and material changes that are needed (i.e., reparations, the regulation and abolition of certain practices). For example, despite engaging in a rigorous TRC process, the province of Ontario has recently claimed that it does not owe First Nations peoples reparations for broken treaty obligations (Forester, 2023).

Similar to the Waitangi Tribunal and the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the TRC of Canada had major implications for Canadian psychology that continue to reverberate through the profession (see Ansloos et al., 2022). For instance, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) and the Psychology Foundations of Canada (PFC) launched a cooperative task force “to develop concrete, action-oriented recommendations to improve the field’s service to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations in Canada” (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], & Psychology Foundations of Canada [PFC], 2018, p. 5). The report influenced the CPA to issue an official apology to Indigenous Peoples for being complicit in the residential school system, as well as other forms of anti-Indigenous racism and colonialism in psychology (Maybee et al., 2022). Importantly, the document has provided a baseline of accountability from a national association and has been used to leverage increased accountability among regional associations, regulators, programs, and services. Further, it articulates guiding principles for working with Indigenous Peoples in Canada and specific recommendations for practice and research.

While significant efforts have been made to address systemic barriers within the CPA, including establishing a standing reconciliation committee and a section on Indigenous Peoples Psychology, significant work remains. Indigenous psychologists remain massively underrepresented in the field, both in terms of numbers of Indigenous psychologists and in the membership and participation of Indigenous psychologists in the CPA. This period, however, has increased research on addressing the challenges of truth and reconciliation in psychology (Danto & Ansloos, 2019; Fellner et al., 2020), professional education (Ansloos et al., 2019), and curriculum development (Ansloos et al., 2022). Notwithstanding different national contexts, APA could glean insights from a kindred psychological association that has already begun addressing the effects of settler colonialism in its profession and on local Indigenous Peoples.

### Only Apologies for Indigenous Americans?

Unlike other Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. nations—territories settled during intensive British imperialist expansion—the United States has not engaged in transitional justice regarding the substantive human rights

violations Indigenous Peoples have experienced. Although there was a previous Indian Claims Commission established by the U.S. Congress, which settled land claims solicited from Tribal Nations for nearly 40 years, the United States was still in the position of arbiter and, to some extent, the legal authority over Indigenous Peoples (Lurie, 1957). Despite this mechanism having the potential to provide redress, the United States “has never, in its [225] year history, undertaken the task of compiling an authoritative account of the incidents involved in the long history of its relations with Native Americans ...” (Weston, 2001, p. 1018). This remains true in the U.S. government’s 246th year—there is no official, exhaustive report of human rights abuses against Indigenous Peoples. Instead, there are instances in which *some* parts of the government acknowledge *some* of the wrongs inflicted on *some* Indigenous Peoples.

In 1993, U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution at the request of President Bill Clinton to apologize to Native Hawaiians (Kānaka Maoli) for the 1983 illegal overthrow of Hawaii (Lightfoot, 2015). Then in 2000, the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover (Pawnee Nation), apologized “to Indian people for the historical conduct” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Tsosie, 2006, p. 186). In 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Native American Apology Resolution, which was meant to “acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian Tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States” (Res. S. J. 14—111th Congress, 2009–2010, p. 1). The resolution was given little national attention due to the fact that it was attached to a defense appropriations bill (Hodge, 2012). None of these apologies were accompanied with reparative practices whatsoever—the Kānaka Maoli’s sovereignty was not recognized, nor did Native Americans receive any recompense from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In the United States, attempts to repair relations with Indigenous Peoples are a far cry from what is necessary to achieve truth and reconciliation.

In a recent change of course, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) announced the Federal Boarding School Initiative—the first comprehensive attempt to account for the intergenerational effects of U.S. federal Indian boarding school policies. Volume I of the investigative report found there were 408 government-supported boarding schools from 1819 to 1969, 53 of which included burial sites for students (Newland, 2022). Secretary Haaland has also made efforts to pass the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act to further the investigation, though this has been unsuccessful thus far. Still, the Federal Boarding School Initiative is the first time the U.S. government has taken part in systematic efforts to examine the effects of colonial policies across generations *and* may admit culpability. It is also the closest the United States has come to engaging in restorative practices.

To date, the initiative has prioritized truth *seeking* via the investigative report, and truth *telling*, which will occur through a nationwide opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to share personal stories about boarding schools in what is referred to as *The Road to Healing*. While a step in the “transitional justice direction,” it remains true that restorative practices figure prominently in this initiative, whereas no reparative actions have been proposed. For truth and reconciliation to be impactful, truth must be accompanied by tangible deliverables and novel mechanisms to hold parties accountable. Until a formal tribunal or commission like the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act is passed, there are no official processes that the U.S. government must follow, leaving few concrete examples for organizations like APA to emulate.

### Where Does Psychology Go From Here? Calls to Action

APA’s engagement in comprehensive efforts to examine, acknowledge, and take steps to address its role in systemic racism—and now, settler colonialism—is a significant moment for American psychology. “At the same time, this is an insufficient response with respect to both psychology’s responsibility and its potential to heal” (APA, 2021b, p. 1). While there is no exact cure for settler colonialism, transitional justice offers a potential path forward—that is, truth and reconciliation. Since the United States has *not* engaged in a national commission, APA does not have clear recommendations to heed from the top down, which is not necessarily a “bad” position to be in. Rather, this grants APA an opportunity to partner with Indigenous Peoples to raze to the ground remnants of settler colonialism in psychology through practical, Indigenous-focused solutions. APA must make significant efforts to avoid reproducing facile U.S. apology dynamics by taking *actions* that have the potential to change the material conditions of Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Nations. Though many of the 2023 Offer of Apology recommendations are intentional and considered, some stand out for affording actionable progress. To surpass truth telling, we urge APA to implement these suggestions, among others we describe next. We discuss measures APA can take to repair and restore relations with Indigenous Peoples in (a) education, (b) research, and (c) practice. Further, we highlight mechanisms for holding APA and American psychology accountable for such actions. Throughout our discussion, we question the extent to which truth and reconciliation can facilitate transitional justice for Indigenous Peoples in psychology and imagine initiatives for righting the future course of APA.

### Education

Since truth and reconciliation tribunals address grievous human rights issues (e.g., genocide) that have produced enduring structural inequities, recommendations for ameliorating them tend to involve meaningful engagement with

Indigenous Peoples (Balint et al., 2014). Commissions that have implications for psychology (e.g., the Waitangi Tribunal, TRC-IRS) indicate that there must simply be *more* Indigenous psychologists in psychology for this to happen, starting in education (Ansloos et al., 2019, 2022). It is challenging to discern the exact number of psychologists who are Indigenous or citizens of their Tribal Nations. In a form of data genocide (i.e., the purposeful omission of data indicative of structural inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples; Friedman et al., 2023) that erases Indigenous presence in psychology, APA’s Center for Workforce Studies collapses American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders into one category with people of two or more races. The most recent disaggregated data that we could access reports that 149 of 74,824 APA members are American Indian (.2%; American Psychological Association, 2017a), which is a vast underrepresentation in comparison to the 3% of American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). We urge APA, psychologists, and researchers to stop combining Indigenous Peoples into “other” categories, to disaggregate data about us, and to enact a recommendation in the 2023 Offer of Apology that proposes a new demographic category for Indigenous Peoples in published research.

Affording Indigenous Peoples a proper designation within APA and psychology is the beginning of broader structural efforts to be inclusive. APA must “[address] the extreme lack of Indigenous representation within the profession” (CPA & PFC, 2018, p. 11)—a recommendation of the CPA following the TRC. For decades, Indigenous psychologists have asserted the need for “more Native American professionals in order to develop a psychology that makes sense to the Native American community” (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 207). Indigenous psychologists have been leading structural initiatives to enhance representation. For example, the Indians into Psychology Doctoral Education program was first established as a result of federal legislation in 1992 (Trimble & Clearing-Sky, 2009). Programs at the University of North Dakota, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Montana continue to operate in support of Indigenous students in APA-accredited clinical psychology PhD programs rather than “gatekeeping” them out of the profession. Universities with APA-accredited clinical psychology PhD programs are eligible to create their own program in partnership with the federal Indian Health Service, which APA should incentivize and augment. Simultaneously, all PhD programs—regardless of whether they operate an Indians into Psychology Doctoral Education program—should denounce and cease the use of standardized admissions tests for Indigenous applicants (APA IAWG, 2023), a shift that APA encourages. By devoting resources to forging new programs and decrying systems that limit Indigenous presence in psychology, there is great potential for APA to grow Indigenous psychologists. Such recruitment efforts would

align with the 2023 Offer of Apology's recommendation for APA to support workforce pathway initiatives.

However, representation does not merely refer to Indigenous individuals but also to Indigenous *knowledge systems* and *beliefs about the world* (Wilson, 2001). To recruit and retain Indigenous psychologists, American psychology must infuse Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies into education, which goes beyond superficial adjustments to curricula and pedagogy (Ansloos et al., 2022). In Canada, the CPA (2021) has introduced new accreditation standards to ensure that Indigenous histories, rights, and culturally appropriate and strengths-based approaches to psychological research and practice are integrated into psychology program curricula. While Indigenous educational "content" is necessary, educators must recognize that this requires serious engagement with Indigenous knowledge (Gone, 2022). Oftentimes, this entails moving beyond psychology to an interdisciplinary lens. It is a disservice to prospective Indigenous students who want to work with Indigenous communities but are denied access to the requisite knowledge (Duran & Duran, 1995). The absence of Indigenous epistemologies perpetuates the invisibility of Indigenous Peoples and creates an uninviting space for Indigenous students to endure. Thus, we call for APA to convene a commission on Indigenous psychology and for APA to advocate with university departments to develop Indigenous psychology courses, programs, or tracks to specialize in. This would presumably help fulfill the 2023 Offer of Apology's recommendation to elevate Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Another avenue would be for APA to partner with tribal colleges and universities to advance culturally appropriate psychology curricula (APA IAWG, 2023). To ensure that Indigenous Peoples are substantially involved, APA should develop an Indigenous Strategic Plan that parallels university responses to the TRC of Canada. Indigenous Strategic Plans advance Indigenous Peoples' human rights in education, including goals and clear steps to achieve them. Strong, collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples can help assure that any structures put in place are appropriately contextualized to benefit Indigenous students.

## Research

In addition to education, research must also be transformed to be more applicable to Indigenous Peoples. Research involving Indigenous Peoples has been largely deficit- and risk-focused, pathologizing Indigenous Peoples "as being prone to ill health and in need of intervention" (Bryant et al., 2021, p. 1406). Hence, Indigenous scholars have been advocating for research to build upon existing community and cultural strengths (Kirmayer et al., 2011) with approaches that are consonant with Indigenous knowledge systems (Wilson, 2001). This includes community-based

(Wallerstein et al., 2017) and tribal participatory research (Fisher & Ball, 2003), and decolonial (Smith, 2021) and Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2021), which foreground Indigenous partnerships and community leadership in research. Despite community-driven approaches being the gold standard for research with Indigenous Peoples, it is undervalued in psychology. For example, 0.1% of peer-reviewed articles in psychology are community-based participatory research studies (Collins et al., 2018). Advancing an Indigenous strengths-based research agenda must be done *for* and *by* Indigenous psychologists and communities (Gone, 2019). Indigenous psychologists are championing such efforts in psychological research, challenging the notion that Western psychology is the right and only way "to do" psychology (Gone, 2016, 2021b). This parallels findings from the CPA and PFC's (2018) Task Force on Responding to the TRC of Canada, which describes "culturally relevant approaches to research ... that prioritize and empower Indigenous communities' articulated needs and priorities" as an imperative (p. 11). For example, there is a dire need to identify Indigenous public health concerns (APA IAWG, 2023).

Calls to Indigenousize psychology research have been persistent and progressive, owing to the efforts of Indigenous psychologists. Yet, there are few structural initiatives to support all that an Indigenous research agenda might entail. Similar to the TRC-IRS and the Waitangi Tribunal, a national commission could provide the impetus for engaging in major systems change across various stakeholders to nurture Indigenous research. There is a growing demand to fund Indigenous research that is community-engaged and culture-forward, but there are few mechanisms to accomplish this in American psychology. In 2021, a single donor contributed funds to the American Psychological Foundation to create research awards for Indigenous students. Again, this is from *one* individual—there are no larger, organizational-led fellowships or grants for the kind of Indigenous psychology research we are describing here. Indigenous students can pursue APA's Minority Fellowship Program. However, the Minority Fellowship Program's framing of psychology research in terms of problems and pathology (e.g., substance abuse) may deter Indigenous students who deem a more culturally grounded approach necessary. To promote innovative Indigenous research in psychology, we call on APA to establish and reserve adjunctive fellowship positions for Indigenous students in open subject areas using diverse research methodologies. Funding agencies (e.g., National Institutes of Health) would also likely be implicated in any findings of a commission wanting to mitigate inequalities associated with settler colonialism. Through intensive lobbying, APA could shift funding priorities to focus on healing trauma, promoting resilience, and practicing survivance (Hartmann et al., 2019), rather than the genetic, biological,



and neuroscientific research that takes precedence but seldom improves the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

There must also be greater infrastructure for conducting research with Indigenous Peoples by Indigenous Peoples and disseminating it. For instance, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans has clear guidelines for Indigenous health research (Canadian Institutes for Health Research, Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Unlike Canada, there is no oversight or regulation concerning Indigenous research in the United States. Psychology researchers have no federal guidelines on what rights Indigenous Peoples have to govern data regarding their communities, also known as Indigenous Data Sovereignty (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). For instance, the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession, "assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes, and that they own and control how this information can be used" (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.).

We recommend APA establish a working group to include Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, practices, and research ethics as part of Journal Article Reporting Standards. This would require changes to the editorial process to ensure that Indigenous Peoples with the appropriate knowledge are in leadership positions. We urge APA journals to at least have Indigenous psychologists on editorial boards, and ideally, Indigenous editors and associate editors at the helm, though this may not be feasible until more Indigenous psychologists are supported to enter the profession as a result of our underrepresentation. We also encourage authors to include their Tribal Nations in their bylines (Lock et al., 2022). With respect to research on Indigenous concerns, an author team must include an Indigenous person from the project's inception. If not, we urge APA journals to require a letter of support from the affected Indigenous community as a part of the article submission process. APA can also support the public dissemination of research by (a) removing journal paywalls and providing open access to Indigenous-focused research and (b) designating staff writers to summarize research involving Indigenous Peoples in lay terms to be published on APA's website. There should be "nothing about us, without us," but substantive actions need to occur to make this sentiment a reality in American Psychology.

## Practice

Finally, national truth-seeking efforts tend to have direct implications for reforming psychology practice (Ansloos et al., 2019, 2022). In the TRC of Canada's (2015) calls to action, there are several that are germane to the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Under the section on

"Health," this includes calling on the federal government "to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities," as well as calling on "those who can effect change within the Canadian healthcare system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in ... treatment" (p. 322). Since then, Canadian psychology has been grappling with its own settler colonial roots to promote healthy Indigenous communities via clinical practice (Fellner et al., 2020). Rather than wait for a U.S. commission to react to, American psychology can be proactive and imagine structural initiatives to enable Indigenous practitioners to create more equitable Indigenous futures. To be clear, Indigenous psychologists have been calling for large-scale changes in psychology practice for decades (Duran & Duran, 1995; Fish et al., 2022; Gone, 2010); now it is high time to heed them in light of APA's commitment to right past wrongs. To disrupt, and perhaps dismantle, psy-colonization—in which Indigenous Peoples must relinquish their cultural and spiritual practices for empirically validated interventions—American psychology must tangibly support Indigenous Licensed Psychologists and Indigenous modalities of healing (Gone, 2010, 2016, 2021a).

There are several action steps regarding the practice of psychology that APA can implement, such as those in relation to ethics and professional conduct. In 2011, SIP began examining the negative effects of the *American Psychological Association (2017b) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* on Indigenous Peoples, which culminated in an official commentary (García & Tehee, 2014). It highlights discrepancies that can alienate Indigenous Peoples, stating, "we all have to live with the [Ethics Code] in order to maintain our licenses. But many of us have been raised in cultures and work in cultures that were not included when the Ethics Code was written" (p. 7). We call on APA's Ethics Code Task Force to include tenets of SIP's commentary to achieve its intended vision of developing a new ethics code. This would help address the 2023 Offer of Apology's recommendation to revise the ethics code to attend to Indigenous issues (APA IAWG, 2023). We also ask APA to amend their policy statement on evidence-based practice to reflect the limitations of "white Western-oriented clinical practice" and the importance of Indigenous healing practices. Not only would this be consistent with APA's (2021a) resolution "to be responsive to, and respectful of, the unique cultures and traditions of a given group" (p. 5), but it would also align with the 2023 Offer of Apology's call to include Indigenous healing strategies in therapy (APA IAWG, 2023). Finally, APA should develop relevant continuing education programs that speak to Indigenous contexts and concerns (APA IAWG, 2023).

Other actions APA can take to make the practice of psychology more equitable for Indigenous Peoples include

allocating funds to grant Indigenous psychologists and students lifetime APA memberships at no cost. While the CPA has not implemented this practice, the American Anthropological Association has, awarding American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal citizens lifetime membership at no cost—including one of us. This serious commitment to including Indigenous Peoples in APA is a structural mechanism for increasing representation in the largest professional organization of psychologists in the United States, providing Indigenous psychologists access to resources that would directly benefit the Indigenous communities we serve. We also suggest APA waive registration fees for Indigenous psychologists, students, and local Indigenous Peoples to attend the annual convention. For instance, the CPA began offering complimentary registration to full members and affiliates who are Indigenous in 2022 ([Canadian Psychological Association, n.d.](#)). Determining the inclusion criteria for such benefits must occur in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, but we would expect such reparations to make psychology more accessible to Indigenous practitioners.

Regarding the annual convention, we also call on APA to designate an ongoing, high-profile session to SIP to spotlight practice topics related to Indigenous Peoples, and additional convention programming hours to Indigenous psychologists ([APA IAWG, 2023](#)). APA should also offer a land acknowledgment honoring the land and Indigenous Peoples at the location of the annual convention. Presenters can offer their own land acknowledgments regarding where their research activities took place. APA could also follow the practices of the CPA, which include inviting an elder to give a land acknowledgment as well as an opening and closing ceremony as a part of the annual convention. As the 2023 Offer of Apology states, this would require APA to “study, learn, understand, and teach researchers/publishers how to appropriately acknowledge lands and peoples” ([APA IAWG, 2023, p. 4](#)).

Our biggest call is for APA to commit to donating a portion of convention proceeds to local Indigenous Peoples. As the President of the Society of Counseling Psychology, Dr. Amy Reynolds donated \$2,000 to the Native American Community Clinic in Minneapolis at APA 2022 as a part of her presidential initiatives. Although laudable, changing the material conditions of Indigenous Peoples cannot be the responsibility of a single person—it must be a structural effort. Finally, we would be remiss to not mention current structural changes that can extend the reach of psychology to Indigenous Peoples, such as accrediting master’s programs. In tandem with regulatory changes (for which there are precedents), this would presumably increase the licensed Indigenous practitioners from whom Indigenous Peoples could obtain services. Structural efforts can begin to level the

playing field for Indigenous Peoples entering our profession to benefit entire Indigenous communities.

### Truth and Reconciliation for APA?

Engaging in restorative practices (e.g., truth telling, apologies) is an important requisite of transitional justice, but it is incomplete without reparative efforts that promote reconciliation and have the potential to prevent future abuses ([Seils, 2017](#)). Considering the magnitude of the violence that Indigenous Peoples—both physically and mentally—have endured as a result of ongoing settler colonialism ([Veracini, 2011](#); [Wolfe, 2006](#)), apologies must be accompanied with momentous action. To right past, present, and future relations with Indigenous Peoples, APA has an obligation to translate their words into permanent and perpetual measures that will provide concrete support to Indigenous Peoples in psychology for years to come. Now that APA has taken stock of and acknowledged its role in the settler colonization of Indigenous Peoples, what will be the next steps to transforming what is often a superficial gesture into a movement that ameliorates inequities among Indigenous Peoples and communities? In the absence of a formal TRC in the United States, we have drawn inspiration from other Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. nations with tribunals or commissions to consider the implications that transitional justice might have for APA. While we have prioritized actions that APA can implement with haste (e.g., waiving convention fees) to provide immediate and direct relief to Indigenous Peoples, we have also included initiatives that will take longer to implement. As the IAWG Group ([2023](#)) stated, apologizing is a process rather than a completed action, and there are “several next steps that APA should undertake to develop and continue a process of mutually defined reconciliation” (p. 1).

Despite the recent progress addressing the harms Indigenous Peoples have experienced in and by our profession, we were left with more questions than answers about how APA can work towards transitional justice. Transitional justice is meant to occur at a structural level. Yet, we are four individual Indigenous psychologists, with disparate knowledge of the inner workings of APA, seeking to reconfigure deeply entrenched colonial dynamics to better our communities. It seemed that developing action steps to chart this path forward would be straightforward until we learned that much of what we considered to be reparative does not fall within APA’s purview. For example, including Indigenous epistemologies as a profession-wide competency appeared to be a clear mechanism that would contribute to equitable Indigenous futures, but APA is barred from directly lobbying the Commission on Accreditation. Thus, our point was moot. It became increasingly apparent that transitional justice has implications for APA and other organizational structures that we have no influence over. We were limited in

knowing what possibilities exist for Indigenous Peoples to obtain redress from APA and adjacent systems. Once the 2023 Offer of Apology was published, we could use the document as further support for some of our action items, especially where there were points of convergence (APA IAWG, 2023). We could also elucidate what else APA could strive for that was not included in the 46 recommendations.

Ultimately, a structural issue such as settler colonialism in American psychology requires a structural response. The IAWG provides a glimpse of what a group of psychologists dedicated to Indigenous Peoples can offer. As we mentioned earlier, many of the 46 recommendations are aspirational. However, there are several that have the potential to be impactful for Indigenous Peoples in psychology, which we have foregrounded in our own discussion. We found significant value in the CPA and PFC's decision to sponsor a task force and permanent advisory group to the CPA executive following the TRC of Canada. The purpose of this sponsorship is to develop action steps for advancing Canadian psychology's service to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples—a collaborative effort of Indigenous Peoples, service providers, and granting agencies who offer guidelines for psychology. Transitional justice is a process that cannot be sidestepped; our recommendations here, though sincere, are insufficient for effecting large-scale change for the well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Our purpose here is to incite APA to follow the example of the CPA and PFC in resourcing a powerful task force to pursue transitional justice for Indigenous Peoples. Following the 2023 Offer of Apology, APA should initiate a systematic process to uncover restorative and reparative practices Indigenous Peoples want and need in psychology and to determine which are possible. This would extend the efforts of the IAWG by engaging in a serious, heavily resourced, and methodical inventory of next steps for APA to engage in with Indigenous Peoples. We expect this to set the agenda and political tone for education, research, and practice standards regarding Indigenous Peoples in American psychology while serving as a measure of accountability.

### Conclusion

There is no panacea for the human rights violations that Indigenous Peoples have experienced as a result of the legacy of settler colonialism. Even transitional justice, which is meant to address large-scale injustices, is not a cure-all. Although truth and reconciliation have their limitations, restorative and reparative practices have utility in advancing transformative justice among Indigenous Peoples. For transitional justice to take place in American psychology, it is imperative that APA put the resources and infrastructure in place to systematically examine psychology's complicity in the settler colonialization of Indigenous Peoples and ongoing actions for repairing and reconciling relations. By foregrounding Indigenous voices,

self-determination, and sovereignty in this process, Indigenous Peoples can chart a course for healing that is strengths-based, anchored in culture, and oriented to a robust future.

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