

Rethinking Family Violence: Centering Indigenous Knowledges



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Webinar overview

- Introduction to the issue of 'family violence' in Indigenous communities
 - Draw on forthcoming NCCAH research paper
- Anishinaabeg stories and practices to reframe family violence within an Indigenous worldview
 - Decolonize conceptualizations of family, community, agency, health and safety
- Tools to continue the learning beyond the webinar
 - Synthesis questions and discussion
 - Suggested readings



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Dr. Sarah Hunt

- Kwagiulth (Kwakwaka'wakw)
- 15 years of anti-violence research, education and policy development
- Research focuses on law, violence and space in neocolonial relations
- Focus on working with youth, street-involved people, girls, women & Two-Spirit people in communities across BC
- UBC assistant professor in First Nations & Indigenous Studies and Geography
- NCCAH postdoctoral fellow



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Dr. Cindy Holmes

- Non-Indigenous white settler raised on traditional territory of Attawandaron people in Ontario & now a visitor on unceded territories of the Musquem, Squamish & Tsleil-Waututh people
- Research explores intersections of violence, gender, sexuality, colonialism & health
- 20 years work in community-based anti-violence, health & social justice movements.
- Postdoctoral Fellow with the NCCAH & Michael Smith Foundation for Health Sciences
Postdoctoral Fellow at SFU



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Indigenous Families

- Family and kinship structures have always been at the heart of Indigenous communities' wellness and their ability to function as self-determining peoples.
- Family relationships are understood within a network of reciprocal responsibilities between Indigenous peoples and their non-human/animal kin, the land and waters that comprise their territories, and the spirit world which forms their cosmology.

“Euro-Western models of the nuclear family, in which one father figure (along with one mother figure) is intended to meet all of a child's needs for guidance, discipline, affect, and support, have never characterized traditional Indigenous communities” (Ball, J. 2010, p. 133-134).



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Violence & health

- Indigenous knowledge systems embrace a holistic understand of health
- Violence & colonialism are recognized as social determinants of health
- Within decolonial and Indigenous approaches, health is being conceptualized as moving “beyond the social”
- We are interested in seeing how these approaches can be and are being fostered in discussions of family violence



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Roots of resistance:

early anti-violence work of Indigenous women

At the community level, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people have been resisting the high levels of violence they experience, including within their most intimate relationships, since colonialism began.

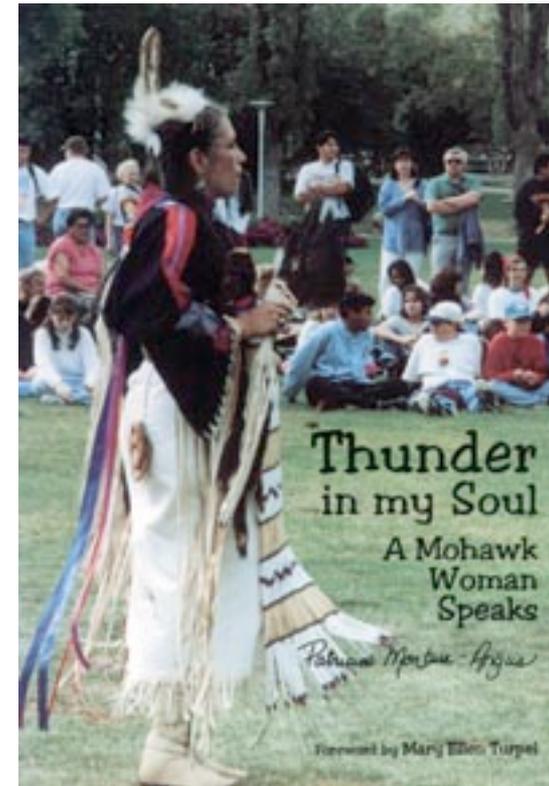
A discourse of 'family violence' in Indigenous communities emerged in the mid-1980s.

Survivors have been at the centre of these efforts.

Exposing the legacies of residential schools has been central to understanding patterns of abuse.

“Organizing against a single form of violence – men’s – is not a ‘luxury’ that I have experienced. The general definition of violence against women is too narrow to capture all of the experiences of violence that Aboriginal women face”.

Mohawk scholar, Patricia Monture-Angus (Thunder in my Soul, 1995, p. 171)



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Relationship to mainstream anti-violence movements

- Grassroots feminist activism in the 1960s and 70s
- Rape crisis centres, shelters and transition houses
- Government funding, programs and legal reform followed
- Discourse frames 'family violence' as:
 - Heterosexual nuclear family; male violence against women
 - Gender as the nucleus of power relations
- Focus on:
 - Services for survivors: advocacy, counseling, court support, transitional housing
 - Improved responses from the justice system, protecting children, and counseling for male offenders.



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2000-2015: concerning trends in the literature

We are analyzing Canadian literature on Indigenous family violence, intimate partner violence & relationship violence from past 15 years.

Today, we want to share a few concerning trends.

- Colonialism often not acknowledged. If named, it is seen as a problem of the past.
- Drug and alcohol use and poverty are commonly identified factors, without identifying systemic factors.
- Portray Indigenous people through lens of pathology or criminality.
- NO references to LGBTQ & Two-Spirit people in the literature we surveyed.



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Underlying assumptions seen in these frameworks

- Violence is defined solely at the interpersonal level
- Systemic factors sometimes named but not themselves defined as forms of violence
- The continuum of violence individuals experience in their lifetime is not well reflected
- “Silence about family violence” is decontextualized
- Crime control discourse: family violence defined as a crime perpetrated by individual Indigenous people
- Psychology discourse: pathologization of Indigenous people



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What is pushed out of view

- Settler-colonialism is ongoing
- State policies & practices are violence: residential schools, sixties scoop, current child welfare
- Indigenous families do not adhere to nuclear family models
- The justice system itself enacts violence: Indigenous people over-represented
- Gendered violence goes beyond heterosexual relationships
 - Two-spirit and LGBTQ people not accounted for

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network
Healthy Sexuality and Fighting Homophobia
Native Youth Photography Project
www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com



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Calling for Indigenous re-framing of 'family violence'

Indigenous communities have identified the importance of developing understandings and responses to violence, which connect with current struggles for self-determination at personal and community scales (Baskin, 2006).



Continuum of approaches

A continuum of approaches have been undertaken to center Indigenous knowledge in addressing family violence

- Some approaches have sought to Indigenize mainstream models:
 - Culturally safe programming: require knowledge of Indigenous people and issues by practitioners
 - Integrating culture into mainstream programs: eg. using healing circles
- Other approaches have created alternative models at the community level. This work often gets overlooked as being about 'family violence' per se.
 - Revitalizing coming of age ceremonies
 - Restoring kinship networks
 - Revitalizing models of conflict resolution within Indigenous legal traditions
 - Embracing gender roles not rooted in colonial heteropatriarchy
 - Land-based programs



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Centering Indigenous worldviews

- Indigenous cultural teachings & practices include laws which can inform the prevention of violence
- Activation of Indigenous peoples' agency is essential
- Opens up possibilities for reimagining family, community, relationships, & health within culturally specific paradigms
- Stories contain land and water-based teachings which guide how to live well with one another
- No cookie-cutter solution



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Dr. Leanne Simpson

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a writer and educator of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg ancestry and a member of Alderville First Nation.

She is the highly acclaimed author of three books; *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, *The Gift Is in the Making* and *Islands of Decolonial Love*, and the editor of *Lighting the Eighth Fire*, *This Is An Honour Song* (with Kiera Ladner) and *The Winter We Danced: Voice from the Past, the Future and the Idle No More Movement* (Kino-nda-niimi collective).

Dr. Simpson is currently faculty at the Dechinta Centre for Research & Learning in Denendeh/NWT.



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Continuing the conversation

For Indigenous people:

Are there stories in your own community or family that could help to re-frame these issues within your own cultural teachings?

For non-Indigenous anti-violence practitioners:

How can your organization or practice foster spaces in which Indigenous knowledge can be centered?

For funders & policy makers:

How can this story help foster a re-imagining of how we think about family, violence and health?



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Recommended readings

Books & articles

- Leanne Simpson. (2011). *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbiter Ring Publishing.
- Greenwood, M., de Leeuw, S., Lindsay, N.L., & Reading, C. (2015). *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Baskin, Cindy. (2006). Systemic oppression, violence and healing in Aboriginal families and communities. In *Cruel but Not Unusual: violence in Canadian Families*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP.

Other Sources

- From Leanne's blog: Honour the Apology
<http://leannesimpson.ca/honour-the-apology/>
- Resources from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network:
<http://nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/>
- Sarah Hunt's TedX Talk "In her name: relationships as law":
<https://youtu.be/XmJZP2liqKI>



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To view the video shared by
Dr. Leanne Simpson, please
visit:

[leannesimpson.ca/leaks-
music-video/](http://leannesimpson.ca/leaks-music-video/)



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