

**Questioning Our Foundations:  
Decolonizing Occupational Therapy Practice and  
Education**

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Tessa Milman OTD, OTR/L.

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### Learning Objectives

1. Describe why the concepts of colonization and decolonization are relevant to occupational therapy.
2. Identify two strategies to decolonize your own practice or teaching.

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### Agenda

1. Introductions
2. What is decolonization?
3. Have you incorporated decolonization into your practice?
4. Take Aways and Questions

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### AOTA's mission statement related to Health Disparities

“Occupational therapy practitioners have the responsibility to intervene with individuals and communities to limit the effects of inequities that result in health disparities.” (AOTA, 2013, p.1)

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AOTA's DEI mission statement

“AOTA affirms the inalienable right of every individual to feel welcomed, valued, a sense of belonging, and respected while accessing and participating in society, regardless of the internal or external factors that make every individual unique. This statement supports efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion within all aspects of occupational therapy, including practice, education, and research, as well as policy development and advocacy.”  
[\(AOTA, 2020, p.1\)](#)

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Cultural Safety

“It is **consumers or patients who decide** whether they feel safe with the care that has been given... addresses power relationships between the service provider and the people who use the service. It empowers the users of the service to express degrees of felt risk or safety.” (p. 494)

(Papps & Ramsden, 1996)

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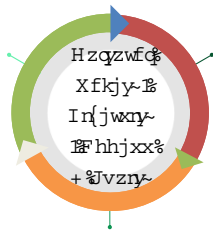
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**What are you already doing to create cultural safety, diversity, access and equity?**



Start the presentation to see live content. For screen share software, share the entire screen. Get help at [pollux.com/app](https://pollux.com/app)

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**What is coloniality?**

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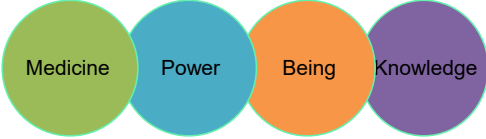
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**4 areas of colonialism to consider**  
(Ramugondo, 2018 as cited in Dirette, 2018)



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### How is coloniality embedded in our education and practice?

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### Need to Decolonize Occupational Therapy

- Occupational therapy practice and education has been embedded in western, middle class, and white knowledge, perceptions of truth and ways of being.
- This can result in occupational therapists perceiving problems or deficits instead of difference, or superimposing our own values subconsciously upon the individuals our work with (Grenier, 2020).

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### Need to Decolonize Occupational Therapy

- Can result in individuals not receiving care that matches their interests, values or goals (Grenier, 2020).
- Decolonization of occupational therapy is a response to this oppression.

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**Decolonizing Occupational Therapy Education**

- Decolonizing occupational therapy involves **“acknowledging, challenging, and unlearning** the dominance of Western ways of knowing about occupation.” (Gibson & Farias, 2020, p. 445)

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**Decolonizing Occupational Therapy Education**

- This requires **questioning our western assumptions** about **knowledge, human beings, and occupation** in order to collaborate with their individuals, groups and populations to address occupational needs (Ramugondo, 2018).

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**Decolonizing Our Assumptions**

- Identifying and checking assumptions to determining whether they are valid and useful guides to action
- Making assumptions is not the problem, leaving them unquestioned is (Brookfield, 2012)

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## Decolonizing Occupational Therapy Education

- In order to widely decolonize practice, we must **embed these concepts within occupational therapy education** so that new therapists can begin practice by questioning their assumptions (Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019).

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| Cultural Competence  | Cultural Humility   | Decolonization  |
|--|---|---|
| Originally conceived as knowledge of the values, customs, and traditions of a specific cultural group. (Hammell, 2013) | “Involves [seeing difference as occurring within relationships and] being open to clients’ culturally based understandings of their lives and the impact of structural inequalities on their occupational opportunities and well-being.” (Hammell, 2013, p. 230). | “process of incorporating other, non-Western worldviews into the philosophy, education, and practice of occupational therapy” (Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019, p.1) |

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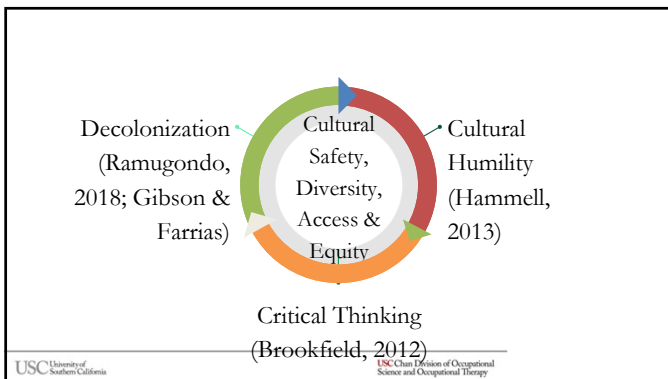
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## Decolonizing Occupational Therapy

### Question assumptions of universality regarding:

- Independence
- Productivity
- Client-Centered Care

(Dirette, 2018)

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## Decolonizing Occupational Therapy

### Embrace:

- Multiple perspectives
- Context
- Interconnectedness

(Dirette, 2018)

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Have you already incorporated decolonization into your curriculum/course(s) or practice?

Yes, No or Maybe?

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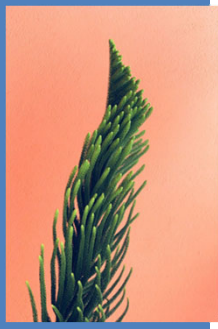
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**Yes:** what has been effective?  
**Maybe:** what is working, what is not working?  
**No:** What are the barriers?

Photo by Caleb George on Unsplash

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**Reflect on your own practice....**

What in your own education or practice reflects colonization?  
 (Consider assumptions of universality regarding independence, productivity, client-centered care.)

Reflect individually  
 Share in a pair or trio  
 Volunteers to share with the larger group

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**Decolonizing Occupational Therapy**

Share your clinical and academic examples of coloniality.

**How can we embrace:**

- Multiple perspectives- what other perspectives can be considered?
- Context-how does the context matter?
- Interconnectedness- how can interconnectedness

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### Questioning Assumptions...



**Decolonizing** is about **questioning western assumptions** about knowledge, human beings, and occupation **in order to collaborate with** their individuals, groups and populations to address occupational needs.

(Ramugondo, 2018)

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### Questioning Assumptions...



What is one thing you are going to do to decolonize your practice/education??

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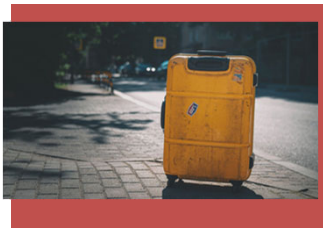
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### Key Take Aways



We need to **question our western assumptions** about **knowledge, human beings, and occupation** in order to collaborate with their individuals, groups and populations to address occupational needs (Ramugondo, 2018).

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**Questions?**




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