



So You Want to Decolonize Your Clinical Practice.....

Are you Ready?

Facilitators:

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Setting The Stage

- Cameras, Mics, Chat
- Recording and Slides
- Closed Captions
- Definitions
- Assessment
- Impact on Clinical Practice
- Change Making
- Q&A

Who We Are



Aviel Zayas Suliveras, LCSW (They/Xe) has been a student of decolonization, in a professional capacity, since about 2019. Since then, this has been a continual part of how they contextualize the work they do with clients.



Sharon E. Pratt, MSW, LSW (She/Her) became a student of decolonization during her MSW program. Sharon has worked in private practice since 2022 and is committed to decolonizing her work with clients.

*“No one way works, it will take all of us
shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it
down.”*

*Diane di Prima
Revolutionary Letters #8*

judgement
charity
ethics
community
racism
power
civility
assessment
inequitable
marginalize
oppression
education
justice
diagnosis
invalidation
refusal
supremacy
control
social
evidence-based
violence
state-sanctioned
individual
influence
colonial
eurocentric
white
enforce
knowledge
eradicate
deficit-based
whiteness
bias
colonization

Beginning

Choosing to embark on this journey means you're choosing to change how you view yourself, individuals, community, the world, and the profession.

It is a lifelong, all encompassing, journey.

Colonization; A Definition

- Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the **death and burial** of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country.¹
- The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression.²
- Coloniality is defined as the long-term patterns of power, seen throughout culture, labor, and knowledge production, that result from colonialism and survive beyond the colonial time period³
- Controlling history, knowledge, health, and justice is coloniality in action³

Decolonization; A Definition

- Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder²
- Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally...the veritable creation of new men²
- In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation²

Decolonization; A History

- The term “decolonization” is credited to Moritz Julius Bonn, an economist, who used it to “describe former colonies that achieved self-governance”⁴
- Frantz Fanon later expanded the definition to include all areas of life, not solely governance.²

Step 1: Looking Inside

Sitting in the Discomfort of Self

The Discomfort of Self

- Biases
- Interrogation of preconceived notions and automatic thoughts/behaviors
- What perspectives do you need to learn more about?
- What do I **not** think about on a day to day basis that others do?

Self Assessment

- Embedding Anti-Oppression In Daily Practice - Checklist
- Decolonizing Social Work Practices – Case Study Analysis
- How Colonial is Your Development Mindset - Quiz

PERFECTIONISM

Primarily focusing on mistakes and inadequacies, with little to no reflection on how to better things.

SENSE OF URGENCY

A way of functioning that focuses on immediate responses & gains, not weighing the potential harm or negative impact of staff/constituents.

DEFENSIVENESS

Focusing on protecting the way people feel, particularly those who hold power, rather than identifying, addressing, and healing harm.

QUANTITY > QUALITY

Actions or services that are not deemed measurable, are not seen as valuable and are often avoided.

WORSHIP WRITTEN WORD

If it is not written down, it does not exist. Those with the ability to document are more highly valued.

ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY

Only seeing value in the way one person/org does something; does not allow room for alternatives and deems them to be negative.

PATERNALISM

Those with power are the only ones who make decisions, and often do not include others in their decision making processes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

POWER HOARDING

Shared power is not valued, and decision making is left to 1 or a small group of people with no insight or support from those decisions may impact.

FEAR OF CONFLICT

Those in positions of power employ a variety of tactics—both personal and institutional—to avoid conflict or place blame on others.

INDIVIDUALISM

Competition more highly valued than collaboration. The needs or successes of an individual outweigh the collective.

EITHER/OR THINKING

Practice in attempting to simplify complex ideas or practice by limiting to 2 options, and not leaving room to create more.

OBJECTIVITY

Leverages and celebrates logical over emotional, can even shun or shame instances in which emotions or feelings come up.

RIGHT TO COMFORT

Those with power feel they are deserving of emotional and psychological comfort.

PROGRESS IS BIGGER/MORE

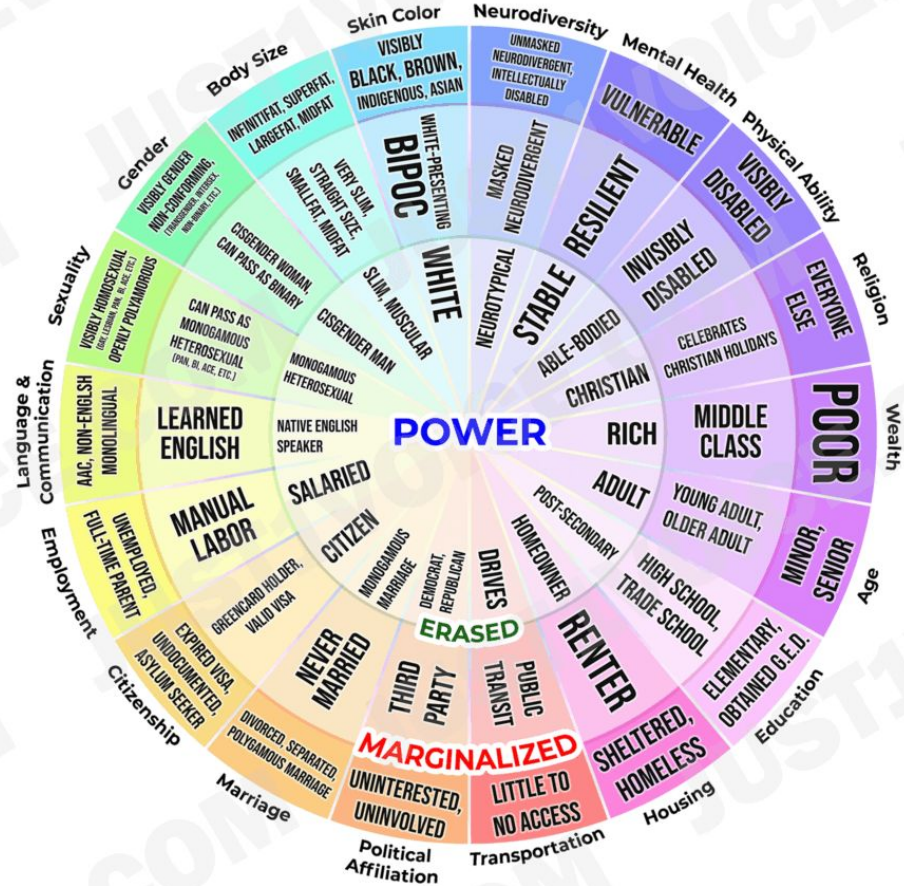
Focuses more on size and increased numbers rather than impact and long-term goals/needs.

Intersectionality Wheel of Privilege

- Where do you land on this wheel in the different areas?
- What are your experiences of power and marginalization?
- As clinicians, do you apply this to your clients and where they land in these different areas?

INTERSECTIONALITY WHEEL OF PRIVILEGE

As Observed in the USA



Social Work Education Assessment

- Despite social work's commitment to diversity and inclusion, social work continues to teach Eurocentrically, perpetuating the colonization of Indigenous peoples and knowledge and every other non-white population (Dumbrill & Green, 2008) through the continual invalidation and refusal of other ways of knowing (Lerner, 2021).
- Social work students reinforce view social justice as separate from clinical practice, stating social justice classes are too theoretical and fail to offer practical skills.
- Social work programs reinforce whiteness as the dominant social work perspective and an overarching lack of practical social justice skills throughout the program (Bhuyan et al., 2017).

Organizational Assessment

- How Colonial is Your Organization? - Quiz
- Framework For Decolonizing Evaluation - “Traditional evaluation often resembles a one-way street, with external experts dictating methods and interpreting results for the benefit of funders or institutions. Decolonizing evaluation flips the script, prioritizing the perspectives and needs of the community most impacted by the intervention or program.”⁸

“In fact, there has been a decline of activism within the field, with social workers spending less than 2% of their time engaging in macro practices such as community organizing or policy development”⁸

Step 2: Colonization and Clinical Practice

How the Personal and Professional Intersect

A (short) History of Social Work⁹

- Social work has an extensive history of complicity, carrying out the government's agenda and enforcing social control
 - Segregated Settlement Houses
 - Removal, Relocation and Genocide against Indigenous Communities
 - Incarceration of Japanese Americans
 - State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black and Brown Communities
- Influences:
 - Christianity
 - White Supremacy
 - Deficit-Based Thinking
 - Patriarchy
 - Medical Model

Step 2: Colonization and Clinical Practice

● National Association of Social Workers

Key Policy Issues

Although a great part of the association's energy is spent on the following issues, NASW's work on Capitol Hill is not limited to these areas, but is driven by the agenda that members of Congress set for themselves.

- [Interstate Licensure Compact](#)
- [Medicare Access](#)
- [Increasing Voter Participation/Protecting Voting Rights](#)
- [Student Loan Debt Relief](#)
- [Telemental Health Care](#)
- One Big Beautiful Bill Act
 - [Reducing Federal Investments in Human Needs Hurts Us All \(June 2025\)](#)
 - [Now the Reconciliation Bill Passed, What is Next? \(August 2025\)](#)

● ASWB Exam

- 2022 ASWB Exam Pass Rate Analysis⁹

Step 2: Colonization and Clinical Practice

- Council of Social Work Education
 - Explicit Curriculum
 - “...colonial, color-evasive, Eurocentric approach to maintain present power structures.”⁸
 - Implicit Curriculum
 - “...students are socialized into the profession, including mitigating classroom conflicts, and reinforcing professional behavior...”⁸
 - Field Education
 - “...limit advocacy, penalize disruption, or embody perspectives from marginalized groups...”⁸

Step 2: Colonization and Clinical Practice

- Eurocentric framework
 - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
 - Diagnostic Tools
 - Clinical Models
 - “Evidenced - Based”
- Medical Model

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

- There is no information about who exactly are the contributors for each edition. We only know they include “experts” from a variety of professions.⁵
- Hysteria- The diagnosis of those with uteri that don’t conform to societal norms.
- During the Civil Rights Movement, the archetype of Schizophrenia changed from “docile” White women to “aggressive, hostile” Black men, reflected in the DSM II. Black men and Black women are still overrepresented.
- Gender Dysphoria

Step 2: Colonization and Clinical Practice

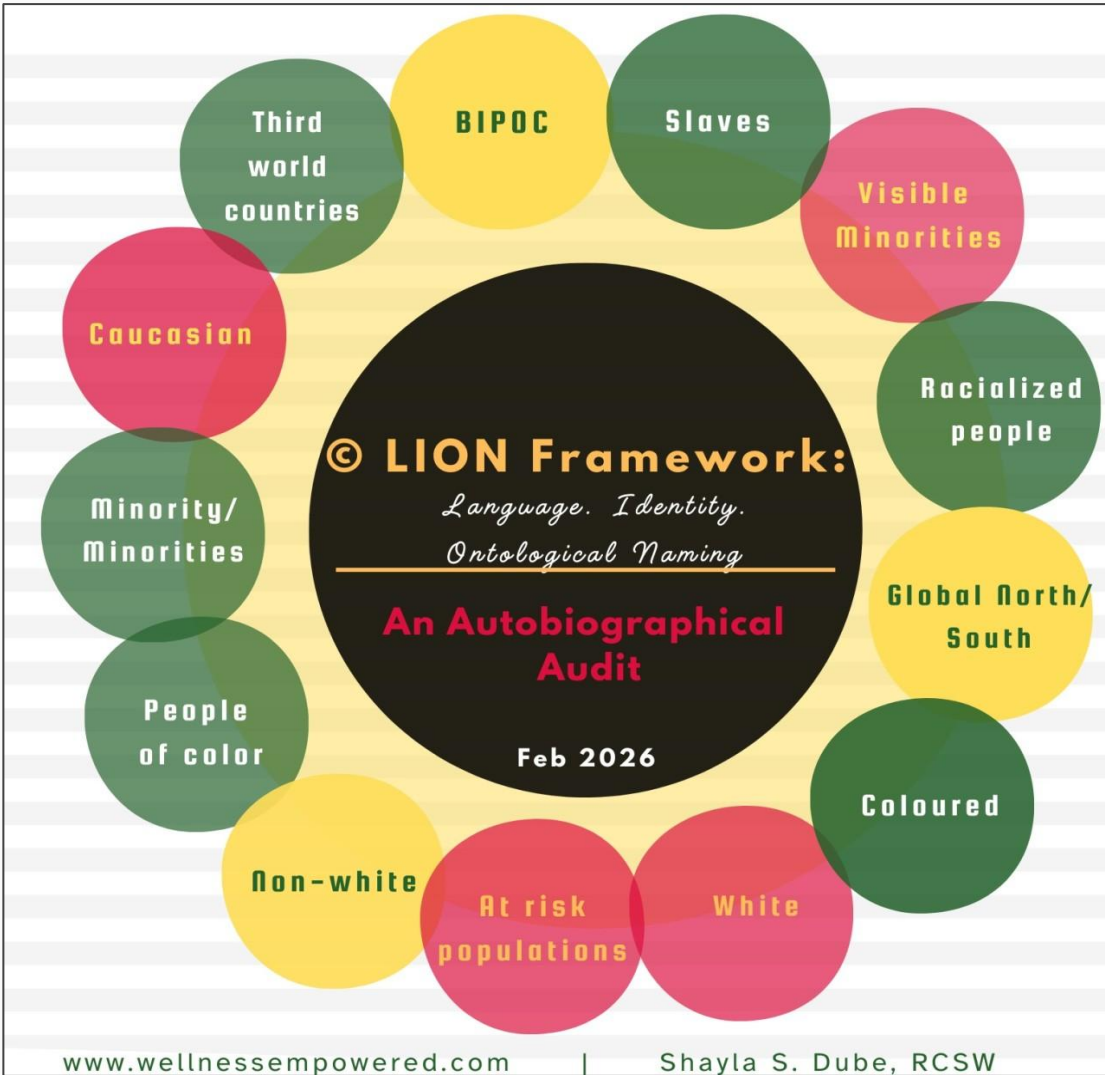
- Focus on individuals needing change instead of the systems impacting them
 - Deficit-Based Approach
- Savior mentality
- Colonized language

Colonization of Language

“I was named Simangele at birth in Zimbabwe, where I was raised. When I moved to Canada in 2004, I renamed myself Shayla as part of my journey to assimilate into Canadian culture, hoping to increase my chances of getting job interviews—a story many immigrants can relate to.”

Shayla Dube, RCSW, is an ACSW board-approved clinical supervisor with 20 years of trauma-informed and culturally responsive expertise. She meets the CRPO standards of clinical supervision and holds a BSW and MSW from York University. Additionally, Shayla has passed her clinical exam, earning the RCSW title.

[Wellness Empowered](http://www.welnessempowered.com)



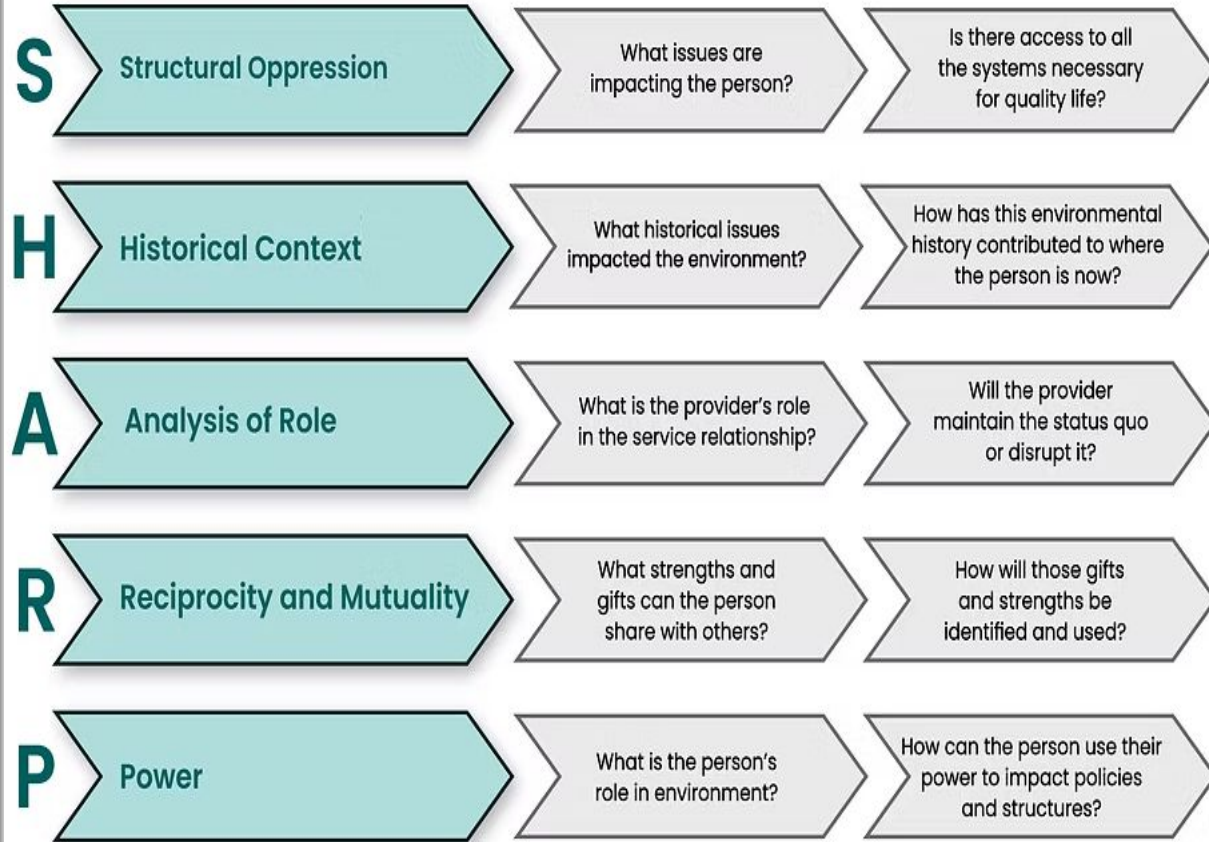
SHARP Framework

“The SHARP framework is a lens through which providers may view issues of oppression impacting their clients, and partner with clients to create plans to take action to impact oppressive policies and structural issues.”

Wendy Shaia is a British-born Jamaican living in Maryland. She spent her formative years in Kingston, Jamaica, and emigrated with her family to Queens, New York, at age 14. Wendy earned her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Hampshire College, her Master of Social Work from the University of Maryland Baltimore, and her Doctor of Education from the George Washington University.

Wendy Shaia

SHARP: A Framework for Addressing the Contexts of Poverty and Oppression During Service Provision



Step 3: Change Making

Questioning and Dismantling the Status Quo

Step 3: Change Making

- What needs to change about myself, my practice, organization, local govt, state govt, etc.?
- How can you use your power as a therapist for advocacy?
- Scarcity mindset keeps professionals from working to change the system. They need us more than they need them.
- Sharing this with your orgs, other therapists, etc.

Step 3: Change Making

- Intuition, Connecting back to Indigenous Healing Practices
- “Expert” versus Lived-Experience
- Commitment to Ongoing Learning

Questions:



Resources

- [Checklist-Embedding-Anti-Oppression-in-Daily-Practice.pdf](#)
- [Decolonizing Social Work Practices – Case Study Analysis](#)
- [How Colonial Is Your Development Mindset - Quiz](#)
- [SHARP Model](#)
- [How Colonial is Your Organization - Quiz](#)
- [Framework For Decolonizing Evaluation](#)

Sources

¹ Fanon, F. (1986). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press.

² Fanon, F. (2002). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove.

³ Almeida et al., (2019)

⁴ O'Dowd, M. F., & Heckenberg. Dean Learning and Teaching Centre for Aboriginal Studies, R. (2026, February 2). Explainer: What is decolonisation?. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-decolonisation-131455>

⁵ What is the DSM?. *Psychiatry.org - What is the DSM?* (n.d.).

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-the-dsm#:~:text=The%20APA%20started%20work%20on,overseen%20by%20the%20Revision%20Subcommittee.>

⁶ Gladstone, B., & Metzl, MD., J. (2010, February 12). *The Protest Psychosis*. WNYC Studios.

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/132677-the-protest-psychosis>

⁷ McMillen, M. (2024, June 23). Are black people more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia?. *WebMD*.

<https://www.webmd.com/schizophrenia/schizophrenia-black-people>

⁸ Asher BlackDeer, A., & Gandarilla Ocampo, M. (2022). #SocialWorkSoWhite. *Advances in Social Work*, 22(2), 720–740.

<https://doi.org/10.18060/24986>

⁹ Association of Social Work Boards 2022 ASWB exam pass rate analysis. ASWB. (2022).

<https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-ASWB-Exam-Pass-Rate-Analysis.pdf>

Thanks for Joining Us!

Next SWAA Event!

#RadChat

April 13th @ 6:30

*What does it mean to be a
radical social work student?*

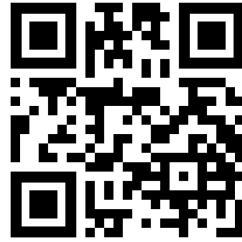


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