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# Indigenous cultural values counter the damages of white settler colonialism

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**ABSTRACT**

Settler colonialism is a violent process that harms all beings. We build upon environmental justice frameworks and argue for Indigenous values affirmation as a strategy for countering the violence of settler colonialism. We discuss the findings of a pilot project to create an Indigenous values affirmation tool with Indigenous peoples in the U.S. to provide context for our argument. We draw from Indigenous-centered literature, including Bacon's colonial ecological violence, and assert that settler systems, and analyses rooted in settler logics, are inadequate because of their inherent inability to meaningfully and critically engage with colonization. This ignorance causes academic fields of study to be damaged-centred in their gaze on Indigenous peoples, or to ignore or render Indigenous peoples invisible or disappeared. Equity is not imaginable, and justice is impossible, within these frameworks. Centring Indigenous people and values have great potential to contribute to environmental sociology. We urge environmental sociologists to honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being in efforts to counter settler colonial violence that plagues all peoples. Doing so will open up new possibilities for healing the environment, and humans' relations with Mother Earth and all beings.

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## Introduction

The violence facing Indigenous peoples and the environment is rooted in settler colonialism; this violence produces trauma. At present, we see and experience traumatic consequences from past, as well as ongoing, settler colonial violence (Coulthard 2014; Vickery and Hunter 2016). Bacon (2019) has contributed to the environmental sociology literature by describing the processes and projects by which settler colonialism erases and eliminates Indigenous peoples, noting that ongoing colonizing projects include physical, cultural, political, and discursive elimination. Building on Bacon's analysis, we stipulate that settler colonial logics rooted in capitalism, individualism, racial superiority, ownership, and possession, will always position Indigenous people and the environment as inherently less-than, and disposable. Settler colonialism uses its own meanings, which we refer to as its *logics*, along with those of white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, to justify the destruction of the earth, the extraction of its resources, and the exploitation of humans and all beings indiscriminately. Within such frameworks, equity is unimaginable and justice is impossible, because they are void of values central to Indigenous peoples, including love, humility, generosity, and respect – each of which holds the promise of a good life, that is in balance and harmony with all things seen and unseen, including Mother Earth (Maracle 1996). Our work builds upon existing environmental justice frameworks, including those that take a critical approach to intersectionality and environmental racism (Taylor 2014) and critical environmental justice, which urges an anti-authoritarian response and begins to consider the relationship between colonization and ecological politics (Pellow 2018). However, these existing frameworks fail to centre the voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples – the very peoples whose homelands, cultures, and bodies are being destroyed by the pollution and violence of settler colonial systems and nation states.

Settler colonial logics and processes attempt to eradicate Indigenous values and presence. We argue that in doing so, those logics render both the environment and people, particularly Indigenous women, as lacking in spirit, as less than human, and as valueless and inherently rapable. Consistent with Hoover (2018) and Vickery and Hunter (2016), we further contend that settler societies' substantial knowledge gaps stem from their reliance on western liberal logics and imagined superiority, resulting in a cycle of domination that damages Indigenous peoples and the land. If we understand the settler colonial lens, including ideas about colonization of the intimate spaces of our lives (Stoler 2001), we can understand the unwillingness and inability of systems to bring about sustainable positive change. Therefore, we argue that healing the

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land and restoring the health of Indigenous peoples are inseparable goals (Hoover et al. 2012). We must turn to Indigenous values and cultural teachings for meaningful solutions (Author 2019).

Drawing from the literature and results from our pilot project with a sample of 30 Native peoples that engages Indigenous values affirmation, we critique the limitations of sociology's equity and justice foci which we argue are generally devoid of values emergent from the strengths and wisdom of Indigenous peoples. Our work into values affirmation represents the first investigation to consider these issues among Native peoples. Our analysis takes up the challenge that Norgaard (2019) poses to sociologists, to examine how the genocide of Indigenous peoples and ecological damage are intertwined. This paper examines the damages wrought by settler values and the healing and empowering properties of Indigenous values. We begin with a critique of the damages of settler colonial logics, then share some of the insights from our pilot project, which lead us to recommend collective actions that promote a more just and sustainable future for the world.

## *The damages of settler colonial logics*

The sentiment that Indigenous peoples are unworthy, inferior and in need of spiritual cleansing, has deep roots in the U.S. nation state, and all settler societies. For example, the founding documents of the U.S. describes Indigenous peoples as 'merciless Indian savages' (Wunder 2000). The power of this narrative as a weaponized tool against Indigenous peoples is further evidenced when a U.S. government official suggested that 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian' to promote an orientation to guide solutions in addressing the 'Indian problem' as their presence threatened 'manifest destiny' and 'western expansion' (Mieder 1993; Glenn 2015). This narrative is reified in state-sanctioned policies and practices, and is embedded within colonial systems of education, of the distant and recent past, in acts that were, and continue to be, horrific and traumatizing to Indigenous peoples. This cycle of colonial domination and trauma is secured through ongoing processes of violence that dispossess Indigenous peoples of their traditional homelands, cultural practices and teachings, languages, and knowledge (Hoover 2018). This cycle remains unchallenged through the permanent occupation of settlers living on stolen Indigenous lands, formal processes that transform land into property, and efforts that are designed to systematically erase Indigenous peoples by re-writing history and their identity as people to satisfy the needs of colonial settlers and the systems that keep it protected (Tuck and Yang 2012). Interrogating the violence of settler-colonialism reveals the multiple and intersecting axes that oppress Indigenous peoples, and all marginalized peoples in settler societies (Hill Collins 2015; Liévanos 2019).

According to Wolfe, settler colonialism is 'a structure not an event' (2006, 388). Like any structure, it requires ongoing maintenance, and like all systems of oppression that require denial of privilege to some, the structure of settler colonialism largely remains invisible. Over time, it comes to seem permanent, impenetrable and appears inevitable. A clear illustration of the invisibility of pervasive settler structures is evident in current K-12 education in the US, now that much instruction is online because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Students, teachers, and (perhaps most of all) parents are struggling with ideas such as ungraded classes, Pass/NoPass grading, or even, as the San Francisco United School District decided, assigning all students A's. The logic that western education is a competitive process of performance ranking, with its own abstract rewards and punishments (imagined as letters or numbers on a report card), is deeply ingrained in the U.S. nation-state's system of schooling. This makes it difficult, especially for mainstream white-Americans, to imagine the value of learning in the absence of grades. This emphasis on grades as a commodity is at odds both with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning and Indigenous educational values (e.g., Paris and Alim 2017; Sfard and Prusak 2005; Vygotsky 1980). Synthesizing their previous work (Kawagley 1995; Kawagley and Barnhardt 1998) with Cajete's (2000), Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) share that for Indigenous peoples,

> traditional education processes were carefully constructed around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were embedded (10).

In such an education system, one would 'have little difficulty passing a graduation exam on the subject 70 years later' (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005, 9).

This erasure of Native educational practices and replacement with a western system, and the inability of white Americans to *imagine* a world without grades, is one result of *cultural imperialism*. Young (1990, 58), following Lugones and Spelman (1983), defines cultural imperialism as the ways 'dominant *meanings* of a society render the particular perspective of [one group] invisible at the same time stereotyping [that] group and marking it out as the "Other"' (italics added).

Cultural imperialism pervades the western health care system as well, where the patient is positioned as helpless, and the practitioner as an 'expert' with power to heal. Any lack of health is perceived as the problem of the individual patient, just as

disproportionately high drop-out rates of Native students are seen as the failings of those individuals. The focus of western logics on individuality cloaks the impacts of colonization and cultural imperialist oppression in causing harm, to peoples and to the environment. The participants in our study all shared these views, and were very clear that, as Native patients seeking health care in a western-dominated system, they were positioned as less-than worthy *individuals* and at the same time stereotyped by white providers' negative imaginings of Native persons *as a group*. When you take your child to the dentist, to experience an instrument that emphasizes the settler colonial value of 'living in the moment' (a very individualistic concept) will not be helpful when the practitioner tries to take your child to the examining room and leave you in the waiting area. When discussing birth control options, a focus on the value of 'independence' will not inspire confidence in a woman whose membership in, and responsibility to, her family group – past, present, and future generations – is of utmost importance. Settler colonialism places responsibility for health on individual 'experts' and individual patients, without regard to cultural or familial beliefs and practices.

White settler-American conceptions of 'progress' and 'success' conceive of education and of land domination both as forms of competition in a zero-sum game. When resources seem scarce (whether it's seated in an elite college's class or gasoline for your car), this ethos of competition is especially salient. At the same time, the pollution of the water, air and land endanger the wellbeing of all beings. The dominant white American culture conceives of individual 'success' in terms of grades, college admission, and the securing of a high-paying job or career, and the subsequent material accumulation (Labaree 2012). 'Progress' is defined in terms of 'solving' (human-made) energy shortages with pipelines and coal mining. Indigenous ways of thinking allow us to understand that these violent processes harm all beings.

Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 13) remind us that heteropatriarchy and heterosexism are intricately and intimately linked to settler colonialism in that 'the presumption that heteropatriarchal nuclear-domestic arrangements, in which the father is both centre and leader/boss, [serves] as the model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions.' This link between white heterosexual male ownership and domination, along with cultural imperialism as described above, and the ethos of competition for limited goods, undergird multiple systems of oppression. Settler-colonial-hetero-patriarchal logics work *together* to perpetrate modern tragedies such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, which desecrates and pollutes sacred land; these same ideals allow for countless Native women to be sexually assaulted, physically abused, and murdered every year (Deer 2015; Anderson, Campbell, and Belcourt 2018). The violence of settler colonialism depends upon a society that has been socialized, particularly through educational institutions, to not see, or to ignore, these forms of violence.

## Settler colonialism and education

Beginning in 1879, the Carlisle Indian School was home to particularly brutal forms of cultural genocide, rape, and other forms of physical and emotional abuse. The goal: to eradicate Indigenous cultures. The founder of the Carlisle School famously wrote 'Kill the Indian in him and save the man' (Pratt 1892). These principles of literal erasure and the dominance of settler society were borne out in the function of the school: 'The experience of boarding school, especially during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was often brutal and occasionally fatal' (Hoerig 2002, 642). Tens of thousands of Indigenous children were stolen from home and family. Hundreds of miles from home, loved ones, and cultural teachings, these children were brutalized and forced to reject their cultural identities and accept a settler colonial worldview. Just as the land was stolen and colonized, so too were Indigenous bodies. Evolved versions of these practices continue in modern schools that continue to perpetuate and uphold settler colonialism, denying and erasing Indigenous peoples, cultures, and presence on Indigenous homelands (e.g. Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Paris and Alim 2017).

Education in the United States is rooted in white, male, western, heteronormative culture and is explicitly and implicitly designed to denigrate those positioned as non-white. According to settler colonial logics, anything 'other' is problematic, frightening, and threatening. In settler colonial societies such as the one we currently inhabit, to be or to sound non-white is coded as less-than, and punished accordingly (Michie 2007). Simply *existing* is a perilous prospect for millions of students in United States schools. Settler colonial logics remain deeply and perniciously rooted in the ways students are perceived, praised, and punished (e.g. Deer 2015). In settler colonial societies, such as ours in the U.S., these systems of oppression and their interlocking functions are also grounds for a shared understanding of how settler colonialism harms us all, and the ways in which a critical understanding of these violent processes can reveal pathways to work toward our collective liberation.

Education can also be a force for liberation and decolonization. As we acknowledge the damage done by explicit and implicit racism, we also witness work such

as Indigenous children's survivance (Jacob 2013; Sabzalian 2019; Vizenor 2008) within the confines of western education's structures. Globally, work to reframe education in terms of Indigenous cultures and languages testify to the resilience and resourcefulness of Indigenous peoples (e.g., McCarty and Nicholas 2014). When we frame Indigenous cultures, languages, and worldviews as foundational to education, curriculum, pedagogy, schools grow from our collective efforts (e.g. Lunney Borden 2013). It is possible to teach and learn with Indigenous cultural values (e.g. Au and Kawakami 1991; Castagno and Brayboy 2008; González et al. 2001; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 1999; Jilk 2016; Jacob 2020; Sabzalian 2019).

### *Damage-centred 'solutions'*

The idea of white-American superiority, based upon settler-imposed values and logics, and the narrow script of what is acceptable behaviour within this individualistic and capitalistic paradigm are so deeply ingrained in U.S. culture that they may seem to many as natural and inevitable. Most social and academic/research systems, including public schools, health care, environmental activism and the field of sociology, are either unable or simply refuse to meaningfully engage with colonization as a contributing factor in our lives. This ignorance, whether willful or not, allows the damage to continue unchecked, while western doctors, social scientists, psychologists, educators, and environmental scholars often search within Indigenous individuals and communities for the cause of problems that Indigenous communities face. This insistence on deficit thinking, the need to locate a shortcoming within an individual or community rather than to find causes of suffering in oppressive violent systems, is one fundamental reason that most mainstream research remains damaged-centred in its gaze on Indigenous peoples. Eve Tuck explores alternatives to research focused on the damage and brokenness of marginalized communities, alternatives that can 'interrupt the binary of reproduction versus resistance … in which people are bound to reproduce or replicate social inequity or, on the flip side, that they can resist unequal social conditions' (2009, 419).

Through life-seeking work we are able to create better alternatives, which may ultimately displace the current emphasis on individual shortcomings. We may, by exposing settler values and assumptions that undergird western systems, and emphasizing Indigenous values that restore relatedness and balance, be able to find new directions to address our most pressing social and environmental problems, and create spaces and opportunities for healing the damage of white settler colonialism.

## Pilot study on indigenous values affirmation

We next present findings from a pilot project on Indigenous values affirmation to present a way of thinking and being in the world that can help in efforts toward collective and individual-level healing from settler colonial logics of violence and domination; a process required by both Natives and non-Natives as colonialism impacts the entire community.

For context, values-affirmation is a psychological process in which a person's global sense of personal worth is strengthened and the production of stress-hormones such as cortisol is reduced. Through these mechanisms, values-affirmation has been shown to buffer the threat marginalized groups experience when at the risk of upholding a stereotype or judgement from being stereotyped (termed 'stereotype threat') (e.g. Burgess et al. 2014; Cohen and Sherman 2014; Steele and Aronson 1995). It is possible to teach and learn with Indigenous cultural values (e.g. Cohen and Sherman 2014; Lunney Borden 2013). Investigations of values-affirmation have been conducted among marginalized persons of color within the education and more recently health care settings. Within a health care setting, applying a values affirmation exercise among patients has shown improvements in indicators related to patient engagement, including patient-provider communication and patient satisfaction in the overall health care experience (e.g. Cohen et al. 2006b). Outside the health care context, applying a values affirmation exercise among diverse groups has been associated with reduced feelings of social mistrust, and improved test taking scores among students (e.g. Steele and Aronson 1995; Cohen et al. 2006b). To date, no study has reported on the use or benefits of values affirmation specifically among Native peoples.

Based on these promising findings drawn from the mounting body of literature into the associations of values affirmation and wellness, we can imagine that a values affirmation tool rooted in Indigenous values may offer Native people an alternative stress-coping pathway to protect themselves emotionally and spiritually, when confronted with settler colonial logics of violence. Specifically, an Indigenous values affirmation tool offers Native people an access point to re-engage with a practice of intentional resilience that draws on ancestral wisdom, community and cultural strengths, and the fullness of what it means to be an Indigenous person of the land and in relationship with the land. As shared by elder, Indigenous scholar, and community leader Terry Cross, 'intentional resilience' is a practice of living *in* our Indigenous values in relationality, to help us find the balance that we as humans are seeking, and to do so even during the daily adversity and assaults inflicted upon our bodies, minds, spirit, and culture (e.g. Hodge, Limb, and Cross 20099). In these

**Table 1.** Comparison of White-Settler and Indigenous Values in Corresponding Affirmation Instruments.

| Original Instrument (Nine Values) | Indigenized Instrument (Ten Values) |
|---|---|
| Sense of humor | Sense of humor |
| Religious values | Spirituality |
| Membership in a community/social group | Being a community member |
| Relationships with friends/family | Responsibility to relatives |
| | Relationship with the environment |
| | Respecting Elders |
| Creativity, Artistic ability, Music | |
| Athletic ability | |
| Independence | Self-determination |
| Politics | Practicing my Indigenous culture and traditions |
| Living in the moment | Gratitude |
| | Speaking my Indigenous language |

ways, this tool empowers Native peoples to heal the internalized damages of colonialism through a process that draws on their worthiness that comes from the point of view of how their ancestors see them and love them and sacrificed for them. Likewise, we believe an Indigenous values affirmation tool has the potential to benefit descendants of white settlers who are steeped in western colonial values. Within such a context, an Indigenous values affirmation tool has the potential to help create a relational thread between Indigenous values and western colonial values that is balanced, where one does not dominate or disrespect the other. By using such a tool to help dismantle white dominance within institutions and disciplines, including those related to environmental justice, we find institutional and social transformation inspired by *honoring Indigenous values, and protecting the relationship and sacredness of* Indigenous peoples and Mother Earth. In this way, the tool may give white settlers a point of access to heal settler fragility and other forms of denial that upholds and protects systems of ongoing colonial destruction that ultimately harms us all.

Given that respecting Indigenous cultural values make possible a process to work toward individual and group self-determination (Smith 2012), we sought to culturally inform a white settler values affirmation research tool that has been used among non-Native marginalized populations of colour within the disciplines of education and public health. In its original form, the western colonial-values affirmation tool is comprised of a set of nine values. Because the original tool includes only white settler colonial values, we expected that this tool would be inappropriate for applying to the lives of Native peoples. In particular, we had concern that such a tool could trigger trauma responses related to colonial violence, instead of positive coping in the face of stereotype threat. To examine this issue, we recruited a diverse sample of 30 Native peoples, ages 18–65, to participate in one of four focus groups in 2018. We invited the participants to review and discuss a values affirmation instrument, offer Indigenous values to replace or adjust the original set of nine values, and to discuss their experience completing the new culturally informed version of the tool that was based on their feedback. For recruitment purposes, we advertised our project within two different urban settings, posted information about the project on social media outlets including Facebook, put up flyers within agencies that serve Native peoples, and also by word of mouth. This pilot project and its protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the lead authors' institutions.

Our main aim in the project was to adapt the values affirmation instrument for Native peoples. The original instrument of white settler values is used in the health care and education fields; its intention is to have an individual focus on their strengths to help improve their ability to cope with psychological threats, including difficult tasks or entering a stressful situation such as an academic exam or a doctor visit (Cohen and Sherman 2014). The reported benefits of the values affirmation included reduced feelings of social mistrust (Cohen et al. 2006b) and reduced perceived discrimination (Adams Glenn and O'Brien 2006); which are factors associated with patient disengagement among American Indians and Alaska Natives. Our question for our participants was whether this particular instrument might be helpful for them as Indigenous people.

The nine values on the original instrument are (see Table 1): sense of humor; religious values; membership in a community/social group; relationships with friends/family; creativity; artistic ability; music; athletic ability; independence; politics; and living in the moment. Each participant completed the values affirmation tool. As a group, we then discussed the tool, gathering feedback on the instrument and each value listed. We recorded and transcribed the focus group conversation. Two researchers independently coded the transcripts for each of the four groups.

At research group meetings, we discussed the transcripts until, we reached consensus with regard to the main themes emerging from the data. We used feedback from the first two participant groups to revise the tool. We repeated the process with two participant groups for

review once the tool was adapted and culturally informed with Indigenous values. Participants were asked to consider and rank which values they determined to be of greatest to least value to them. Once they ranked the values, they listed the ones that they felt do not reflect Indigenous values, or those of their ancestors or elders. They completed the exercise by listing values or value statements and their meaning that are reflective of the ones they know from their elders or ancestors.

## Results

Four main findings were identified: (1) partial congruence between westernized and Indigenous values; (2) complete incongruence between the values perspectives; (3) distress when completing the original version of the values affirmation instrument; and (4) that centring Indigenous cultural values is beneficial. The following sections review the findings and their implications for environmental-sociological examinations of race and environment.

### *Finding 1: partial congruence between westernized and Indigenous values*

Of the nine white-settler-values on the original instrument (see Table 1), all participants considered 'humor' to be a culturally relevant value and it was not modified on subsequent iterations of the instrument. Other values required minor adaptation or rewording to account for differences in language: e.g. 'member in a community/social group' was changed to 'being a community member.' This difference, while subtle, is a significant adjustment with regard to concept: the Indigenous values version centres the participant within the community as someone with an inherent responsibility to the wellbeing of the community. As described by one participant, and affirmed by focus group participants, being a community member implies you are part of a larger family of people that welcome each other, comes together in service and support, upholds protocol and cultural 'ways' for the greater good through ceremony, celebration, support, encouragement, times of healing and growth, and reminds others of their best selves. Additionally, these actions offer support where Indigenous peoples can come together and let go the pressures of living in a settler colonial society that has within it the legacy (and continuation) of oppression, domination, and genocide of Native people and culture. Being a community member also provides social and cultural protections, and serves as a political statement to offset settler colonial violence.

### *Finding 2: incongruence between the values perspectives*

Three of the white-settler-values were problematic and inappropriate within a Native context: 'living in the moment,' 'independence,' and 'politics.' Participants considered these values to oppose the inherent value of connection and responsibility to the past, present, and future within an Indigenous perspective, and these terms contributed to ongoing processes of re-writing history for the benefit of white settlers and the nation state. Participants described the concept of *living in the moment* as aligned with concepts and actions such as 'seize the day' and 'take charge of the day.' Such sentiments lack the perspective that all of our acts today impact the future of the world and the future generations. Living in the moment counters the generosity and sacrifices made by our ancestors, who were motivated toward survival and resistance – even in the face of genocide – because they were dreaming of us; the future generations of youth, elders, and leaders. It also raised, for some participants, concerns about 'acts of conquering' that can be associated with colonial frameworks that Native people are conquerable and rapable; unvalued and reliant on the settler-colonial relationship for validation (Steinman 2016). Thus, this value was considered offensive because it fundamentally disregards the historical and ongoing settler colonial violence perpetrated upon the bodies, minds, spirit and lands of Indigenous peoples in the form of conquest, occupation, stealing, killing, and polluting. It is offensive because as Indigenous peoples we are taught to respect Mother Earth – the sacred land and water – from which many of our creation stories originate and we are taught by our elders to treat Mother Earth with care, and 'never take too much' because that would disrupt balance and harmony. These would be violating acts that put oneself above the community, invoking the methods used by white settlers to maintain power, control and domination over Indigenous peoples and the entire web of life. As Indigenous peoples, the value of connection is paramount. We learn that we are equally connected to all things, seen and unseen, and we grow through the lessons of respect, humility, and living in harmony. *Living in the moment* also raised concerns that 'privilege' was not considered and that its lack of mention may absolve individuals their responsibility to acknowledge the occupied lands in which they live, work, and play. Some participants also told us that *living in the moment* meant no opportunity for self-reflection or accountability to 'worry about history,' or consider 'whose land I'm on.' By extension, participants indicated that such an orientation erased any evidence or reminders that lasting impacts of colonization are alive and well, as evidenced by the fact that Indigenous lands are still

occupied by settlers. These values were removed in the adapted instrument and were replaced with *gratitude*, which is a value that always places one in relation with all beings. It affirms connection to the land, ancestors, spirit, and community.

### *Finding 3. distress when completing the values affirmation instrument*

The intent of the values affirmation tool is to help people feel safe, to serve as an intervention to reduce anxiety, in a place or situation where they may not feel safe, protected, and secure. The original format and content of the tool, however, added to the participants' emotional distress. It put Indigenous participants in a situation of defending themselves and their core values against mainstream white-settler-values. The original list is harmful in that it affirms whiteness and white experiences and thus validates settler colonial violence. The experience of completing the white-settler-values list created conflict within the participants as it asked them to accept erasure of Native people and Indigenous ways, to see them as insignificant and invisible. Thus, the white-settler-values are not respectful or responsive from an Indigenous perspective.

In the project, we heard stories of Native women whose reproductive health is at risk every time they seek out assistance, if they seek care at all, in light of what they know may occur within clinic walls. One of our focus group participants told us about her visit to a clinic that is known for its inclusiveness and its progressive work in health care provision. Her story did not reflect what seems to be generally accepted 'wisdom' about this clinic. She made an appointment to have an IUD placed, a procedure that she decided was the most appropriate for her birth control needs, given her long term (more than 10 years) relationship with her partner. She stated that the health care provider insinuated that perhaps this was not the best method, and that perhaps her partner was sexually active with other partners. The provider failed to allow time for the cervix to become numb after the local anaesthesia and inserted the IUD causing great pain to the patient (Focus Group 4, November 2018).

This 2018 example is eerily reminiscent of historical, as well as other contemporary accounts, of reproductive abuse and subsequent medical mistrust of Native women. For example, it is well documented that Native American women underwent medical sterilization without their proper and full consent, and this practice continued in some states until the late 1980s (Lawrence 2000). Unknowingly, many Native American women made medical decisions based on misinformation about the permanence of the sterilization procedure, and in the absence of information about any alternatives. Native women's reproductive health is an environmental reproductive justice issue that demands we consider the ways in which settler colonial violence assaults both the environment and women's bodies, and negatively impacts both human reproduction and cultural reproduction (Hoover 2018).

Even though countless forms of violence are inflicted upon Indigenous peoples and homelands, we do not want to bring a deficit lens to viewing Indigenous peoples. Within the violence, there are brilliant forms of resistance and survival of Indigenous cultures and peoples. We see recent examples that have gained attention in larger-scale media, such resistance and survival reflected in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement and among NoDAPL water protectors at Standing Rock and many more water protectors who stood in solidarity (Anderson, Campbell, and Belcourt 2018; Estes 2019; Steinman 2019).

Indigenous examination of hidden values in Western institutions is necessary to understand the damage inflicted upon *all* people and the environment, by actions and decisions based on white-settler-values, including their intersection with heteropatriarchal attitudes and beliefs. Such work opens up pathways for Indigenous values to be reclaimed and re-centred in the institutions that serve Indigenous peoples, and all peoples, on Indigenous homelands; doing so is critical for challenging the foundations of colonization's legacy (Cantzler and Huynh 2016).

### *Finding 4. Centring Indigenous cultural values is beneficial*

The following Indigenous values were included on the affirmation instrument that was produced with Traditional Indigenous Values: sense of humour, spirituality, being a community member, responsibility to relatives, relationship with the environment, respecting Elders, self-determination, practicing my Indigenous culture and traditions, gratitude, and speaking my Indigenous language.

The white-settler-values affirmation tool has no images, only text in English. Due to the impersonal, and in some ways, even insulting and hostile ways that the tool was received by participants, the research team discussed ways to revise the instrument to be more personal – and relational – for American Indian/Alaska Native participants. We thus included a diagram of a Cedar tree (Figure 1), and asked participants to place the values on sections of the tree. The trunk was identified as values that represent stability and strength; the branches and leaves represented values for new growth; and the roots represented values that offered grounding and nurturing. A diagram of a coyote was provided for values that participants considered to be 'tricky.' Both of

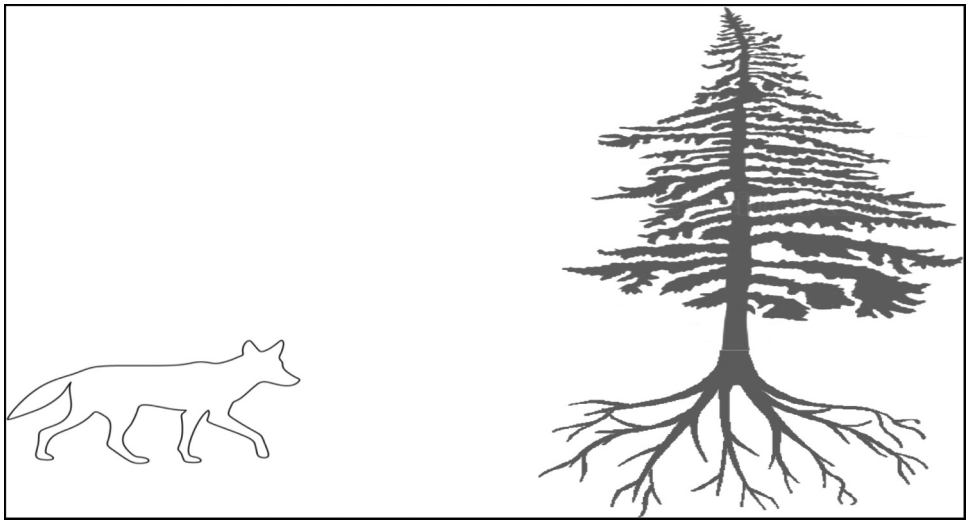

Figure 1. Indigenous Values Affirmation Adapted Tool.

these images are culturally relevant in the region in which this research took place, and serve to display and reminds us of the original teachings offered by the natural world that as Indigenous peoples we are from the land and in relationship with her – Mother Earth; and she provides for us and we protect her so we in turn protect ourselves and future generations. This is in contrast to settlers that orient themselves with the land as 'coming to the land' and extracting from her for their benefit only (e.g. Cross 1998; Orr and Ruppanner 2016). When participants engaged with the Indigenous values instrument, they filled the space with laughter, humour, and a general ease and 'togetherness' among the groups. This good attitude was consistent even when difficult health or education topics were raised, and the groups remained supportive, interested, and positive.

## Discussion

In this section, we address limitations and possibilities of using an Indigenous Values Affirmation tool among diverse Indigenous peoples and in non-Indigenous populations. We base this discussion on our project findings, as well as our observations of the resilience and strength in Indigenous communities, and the benefits of non-Indigenous peoples engaging Indigenous teachings for the purposes of understanding and dismantling settler colonial logics.

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the qualitative design of this study and convenience sample may have yielded data that are not representative of individuals within other urban geographic areas, especially if cultural resources are non-existent and challenging to access. Second, cultural differences between tribes, as well as their history and experience with colonization, may shape the salience of Indigenous cultural values and might be worth considering in future research investigations into these issues. Additionally, all Indigenous peoples have creation stories, which while differing in content, tie them to Mother Earth and help them know intuitively and deeply that they are always connected to the earth and the Creator. In spite of these cultural differences, as well as variations in creation stories, Indigenous people recognize that our strengths come from the resilience of our ancestors and their love for us.

Future applications of the Indigenous values affirmation tool hold expansive and inspiring potential as they give us a sense of hope for healing and thriving; which is beyond the limits of just enduring the violence to survive. The Indigenous values affirmation tool embodies a spirit of resilience and survivance that simultaneously honours the past and present, while also stretching far into the future to offer protection to the future generations. For example, in our current work, we are collaborating with curriculum developers to design, implement and evaluate an Indigenized-STEM curriculum that begins from a respectful position of assuming Indigenous cultural values are inherently useful in STEM classes. Especially relevant for environmental education – how can students care for Mother Earth and all our more than human relations, if students do not have a respectful relationship with Indigenous teachings that have always sustained humans in respectful relation to place? We view such work as beneficial for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and instructors. Second, our work is also being used to develop competencies and curriculum for a new undergraduate concentration on Indigenous health that uses a decolonizing framework to train the future public health workforce to connect students with Indigenous understandings of relationships between land-values-and health. This work is necessary, as

public health is a multidisciplinary field that engages multiple sectors including land use planners, environmental scientists and activists; it is an application of the Indigenous perspective that the health of humans reflects the health of our environments. In both of these examples, curricula built with a respectful understanding of Indigenous cultural values can help build a workforce that centres Indigenous peoples, and work to dismantle white settler dominance and colonial violence. Such an idea is inspiring, as there is a great need for decolonized white allies, especially given the disproportionate underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples within these field and systems.

We believe the Indigenous values affirmation tool could be useful in any work with non-Indigenous peoples who are learning to understand and dismantle settler colonial logics. The tool could be paired with a traditional story that local Indigenous peoples have shared, and many stories are in print or available via Tribal Nation websites or media (i.e. Beavert 1974; Jacob 2020). This work should be accompanied by non-Indigenous peoples spending time learning about the settler colonial violence that has taken place in their areas, and how historical violence continually reproduces contemporary forms of oppression and systemic violence against Indigenous peoples.

The interlocking systems of oppression are also grounds for our shared understanding of how settler colonialism harms us all, and a critical understanding of these violent processes provides us (and we hope all environmental sociologists reading this article) with pathways forward to work toward our collective liberation. However, within our collective yet different experiences living at the hands of colonial violence, the path for liberation is profoundly different for white colonial settlers and Native peoples. On one hand, white settlers are entrenched in colonial values driven by and reinforced by their experiences of white supremacy and unearned access to white privilege and power. This orientation to the world is not one of the collective, nor does it allow for the consideration that white people need healing from colonialism too. White children are raised to believe in their superiority, which is reinforced when ideas of whiteness and superiority are not challenged or dismantled, and the idea that they are descendants of foreign invaders, that sought complete annihilation of Native peoples through genocide, so they could 'own' and occupy stolen lands that remain occupied and stolen lands. Fundamentally, the Indigenous values affirmation tool provides white settlers and the field of environmental sociology opportunity to build loving connection through respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples and appreciation for all that Indigenous peoples have to offer. Thus, the Indigenous values affirmation tool can help us – all of us – as we are all part of the oppressive settler colonial societies that harm both people and place, so that we can *all* move forward along a path of liberation that is transformational by dismantling white dominance – a root of white settler colonialism and ecological violence that poisons both humans and the environments we share.

## Conclusion

Earlier in this paper, we drew from Indigenous-centered literature that describes the processes by which Indigenous peoples are obscured and erased in settler societies. This occurs in both rural and urban areas. Although our work takes place in the U.S. urban context, these issues are of deep concern globally. Blatman-Thomas and Porter, based on their work in both Israel/Palestine and Australia, report that 'urban settlements represent a particular intensity of property relations and built form that … works creatively to sustain the conditions of settler colonialism. Urban landscapes are emblematic of the logic of replacement' (2019, 32–33). Additionally, while our study engaged Indigenous peoples in urban contexts, there are also many examples of Indigenous erasure occurring in rural areas across the globe, many of which are highlighted in ecological issues. Fox writes about Indigenous peoples of Guatemala and how 'the persistent ethno-racialized violence of the state continues to manifest in how it elects to address the ecological contradictions indigenous peoples highlight when discussing the social, health, and environmental problems they confront due to air, water, and land contamination' (2015, 163). These are the types of discussions that could be broached, supported, and improved upon by work like that undertaken for our study.

Engaging Indigenous values in social science and environmental research is crucial. Schlosberg and Carruthers (2010, 13) show that from northern Arizona to southern Chile 'Indigenous environmental justice claims are embedded in broader struggles to preserve identity, community, and traditional ways of life.' By asking Indigenous peoples about their values, listening to what they have to say, and incorporating their responses, work such as ours has the capacity to support and nurture Indigenous communities and to centre Indigenous values. Doing so may result in recognition of the rights of, and our responsibilities to, the environment.

We return to the argument here that the liberation of Indigenous people, and all peoples will not happen through the policies of the U.S. nation-state, nor any other settler government. The U.S., like all settler colonial societies, is predicated upon Indigenous erasure. As Bacon eloquently describes, 'the mechanisms of eco-social disruption are numerous: land is redistributed, privatized, polluted, and renamed with generally no input or consent on the part of the original inhabitants; the value of places and beings are redefined by

the culture of the colonizers' (2019, 63). Cameron adds to this when she writes on the absence of a recognition of colonialism 'in spite of the fact that the projects are carried out in communities profoundly shaped by colonization and movements toward decolonization and Inuit self-determination. Climate change itself, as a number of Indigenous leaders and scholars have made clear, is thoroughly tied to colonial practices, both historically and in the present' (2012, 104). Cameron further stresses that the current settler and governmental approach to how climate change affects humans and:

> perpetuates the delimitation of Indigenous peoples to the "local," by limiting the legibility of Indigenous geographies to the realm of the "traditional," and by eliding the persistence of the colonial, understood not just in cultural, social, or historical terms, but also as the organization and re-organization of political-economic relations (2012, 104).

Indigenous peoples need to be listened to and their values and knowledge must be acknowledged and honoured.

Settler societies are grappling with the violent legacy of colonization, as well evolving types of colonialism in technocratic, market-oriented, neo-liberal environmental policies and practices. Mascarhenas writes that 'neo-liberalism represents a new, more subtle, style of colonialism; one where the discourse of expertise plays a far greater role than in previous assimilationist and displacement-type policies' (2007, 571). This is yet another attempt to silence Indigenous voices. And while Mascarhenas is writing about water rights of First Nations peoples, policies such as reconciliation, which we see taking place in Canada, will not likely be liberatory. Such policies continue to centre settler interests, primarily aimed at alleviating settler angst, or guilt. We agree with Tuck and Yang (2012) analysis that decolonization cannot be a metaphor, but rather must continue to centre the repatriation of Indigenous land, upon which Indigenous cultural values are based – the restoration of Indigenous peoples to Indigenous land is the path to liberation for all peoples marked by the trauma of colonization. As Mascarhenas writes, 'First Nations speak not only of injustice in terms of equity but also of injustice in terms of recognition – recognition of harm, and recognition of other ways of knowing' (2007, 571). Our project begins to acknowledge the harm that colonized ways of knowing and being cause, as well as to honor, and support Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

This Indigenous-centered examination of the hidden values in Western institutions is necessary to understand the damage inflicted upon *all* people, and the environment, by actions and decisions based on white-settler-values that at times intersect with heteropatriarchy and other forms of oppression. In this way, Indigenous values can be reclaimed and re-centred in the institutions that serve Indigenous peoples, and all peoples, on Indigenous homelands. We invite environmental sociologists, activists, and those working for justice in health, legal, education, and related academic spaces to engage Indigenous cultural values in efforts to challenge the exclusionary white spaces and counter the settler colonial violence that plagues all peoples. Doing so will allow for healing humans' relationships with the environment, our more than human relations, and with each other.

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***Jennifer L. Ruef*** earned her PhD at Stanford University and her BS and MS at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, all in mathematics and education. She is now an assistant professor at the University of Oregon. Her research interests include the intersections of mathematics and learning, social justice and equity, identity and power. She studies how people understand what it means to be 'good at math' and believes we are all math people.

***Dr. Stephany RunningHawk Johnson***, a member of the Oglala Lakota nation, focuses her research on recruiting, retaining and supporting Indigenous students attending universities and majoring in science fields, with a particular emphasis on how the philosophy behind the way science courses are taught creates barriers for Indigenous students, as well as other students of color. Stephany is interested in working with local Tribes to incorporate place-based education and Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledges in order to increase Indigenous students' sense of identity and belonging in a university setting. She is also conducting research on how non-Indigenous instructors can begin to decolonize their curriculum and teaching practices. All of Stephany's work is done through an Indigenous Feminist lens and is dedicated to supporting Nation building, Tribal sovereignty, and empowering Indigenous communities and students in working toward social justice.

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