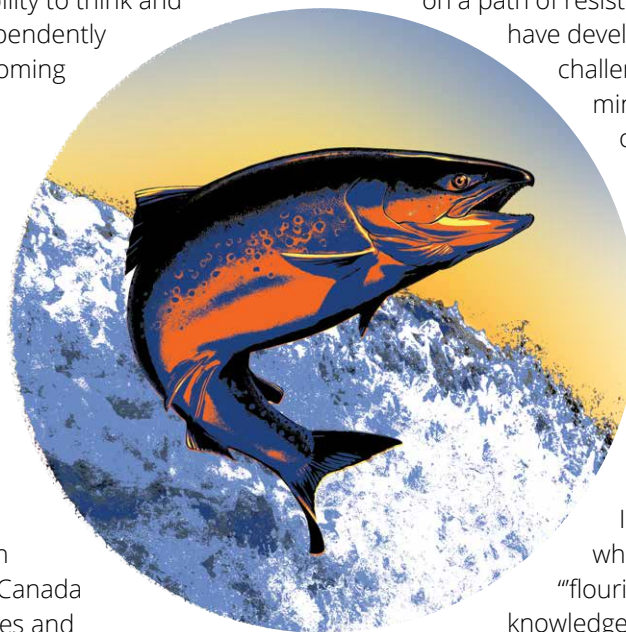


Part 3

Strategies for Overcoming Colonial Mind Control

Mind control is a specific set of methods and techniques used to assert undue influence over a person or group of people. Undue influence refers to the methods and techniques used by an authoritarian figure or regime to “[overcome] the free will and judgment of another person” to gain exploitative or coercive control over how someone thinks, feels, and acts.¹ Under this type of influence, a person’s “authentic identity”² is disrupted, and their ability to think and act rationally and independently is undermined.³ Overcoming mind control involves recovering one’s authentic identity and learning, or re-learning, how to think and act rationally and independently. Given that authoritarian mind control has been used against Indigenous peoples to free up the land for European settlement in what is now known as Canada by Christian missionaries and colonial governments for over 600 years, not least through the *Indian Act*, the residential school system, and countless other coercive means, many bear the intergenerational impacts of undue influence and authoritarian control. Overcoming colonial mind control is not an easy task, but it is both possible and necessary.



Fortunately, First Nations peoples have a long history of resistance to colonization, and many Elders, knowledge keepers, and others responsible for maintaining traditional cultural practices and languages have worked persistently against cultural and spiritual indoctrination. They are invaluable sources for those seeking to overcome undue influence and the coercive control of the colonial government. Others on a path of resistance to colonization have developed methods for challenging the colonial mindset in themselves and others, including those who work towards decolonization, a term that refers to the decentering and dismantling of colonial thought patterns and structures of knowing. Still others are on a path of Indigenous resurgence, which refers to the “flourishment” of Indigenous knowledges, laws, languages, and practices as integral elements of Indigenous self-determination.⁴

Affirming First Nations ways of knowing and enabling genuine self-determination requires learning from history and thinking and acting independently. It requires understanding how behaviours on the level of the individual,

- 1 Freedom of Mind Resource Center, “Undoing Undue Influence and the BITE Model of Authoritarian Control”: <https://freedomofmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BITE-Model-of-Authoritarian-Control-Handout-Oct-2-2020.pdf>
- 2 Steven Hassan defines “authentic identity” as akin to a divine spirit or essence everyone is born with; this essence is not tied to a particular religious or spiritual practice. *Mind Control and Colonization* (32:15): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk>
- 3 Freedom of Mind Resource Center, “Undoing Undue Influence and the BITE Model of Authoritarian Control”: <https://freedomofmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BITE-Model-of-Authoritarian-Control-Handout-Oct-2-2020.pdf>
- 4 Pauline Wakeham, “Key Terms: Reconciliation, Indigenization, Decolonization, and Resurgence”: <https://indigenous.uwo.ca/docs/Indigenous-Initiatives-Key-Terms.pdf>

community, and nation have often been in response to the oppressive colonial laws, propaganda, violence, false narratives, and stereotypes that Canada has forced onto First Nations. And it requires understanding how these responsive behaviours sometimes reinforce the abuse and discrimination perpetrated by the government.⁵ One example of this is the perpetual work First Nations do to inform Canada about how its own government can end its abuse of First Nations children, through writing reports and creating solutions, only to have these reports and solutions shelved, again and again, by the government. In this scenario, the government's reputation benefits through the promotion of its supposed desire to find solutions while it continually fails to act, perpetuating its abusive behaviour. As Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby argue in their *Status Updates on the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action*, the government repeatedly fails to implement all but the "easiest, most symbolic gestures." Instead of "enact[ing] the substantial and structural changes that would rectify ongoing harms and change the course of our collective relationship," write Jewell and Mosby, the government merely "perform[s] reconciliation."⁶ This dynamic between First Nations and Canada has a long history. Recognizing it as participation in an abusive relationship and deciding to change or end it are steps necessary for escaping the coercive control of the colonial regime and creating new possibilities for self-determination.

What strategies for overcoming colonial mind control and undue influence already exist within our communities?

Dr. Steven Hassan's work on mind control cults indicates that recovering an individual's "authentic identity" is necessary for overcoming undue influence and the control it asserts over individuals and groups. Understanding what is healthy in terms of one's own internal sense of self and culture, including connecting to one's internal locus of control, rather than following an external ideology or authority, is a crucial part of the process. Learning how to make up one's own mind about things using reliable sources is necessary for gaining control over one's thought patterns and increasing confidence in one's ability to think and reason for oneself. People

who have been under undue influence will benefit from learning how to trust their ability to discern what is true and who is trustworthy. They will also benefit from imagining, planning for, and moving towards a positive future.⁷

In a First Nations context, we might best understand recovering "authentic identity" as a recovery of spirit, which Nisga'a Elder Bruce Robinson equates with the concept of a "true

self."⁸ In Cree, the word for "knowing oneself," *Kiskenimisowin*, contains the medial stem "iso," which refers to "a focus on self or self group and the activity within." Thus, to know oneself involves introspection, self-reflection, and interaction with the world around oneself.⁹

Writing about Indigenous worldviews more broadly, Seneca author and child welfare advocate Terry Cross (Ha-ne-ga-noh) notes that recovery of one's spirit or true self is inseparable from a balanced relationship between an individual, family, and community,

5 Cindy Blackstock, *Mind Control and Colonization* (7:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>

6 "Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 Status Update on Reconciliation": <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/trc/>

7 Personal interview with Steven Hassan, May 20, 2022.

8 Bruce Robinson (2022, June 30). *White Coat, Black Art [Interview]*. *CBC Radio*. <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-75-white-coat-black-art>

9 Victor et al. (2016). *Kiskenimisowin (self-knowledge): Co-researching Wellbeing with Canadian First Nations Youth Through Participatory Visual Methods*. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 11(1), 262–78.

and inseparable from relational worldview principles. Terry Cross describes the relational worldview, which has “its roots in tribal cultures,” as “intuitive, non-time oriented and fluid.” The relational worldview involves “balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables, including spiritual forces,” and “every event is understood in relation to all other events regardless of time, space, or physical existence.” In this view, Cross says, “health exists only when things are in balance or harmony.”¹⁰

Writing about relational worldview principles in the context of First Nations child well-being and safety, Cindy Blackstock notes that relational worldview principles are interdependent and must be in balance to achieve individual and community well-being:

Among First Nations peoples, balance is the ultimate state of well-being both on an individual and collective basis; therefore, each cultural group has highly developed

mechanisms to optimize balance among the principles. Values, social norms, teachings, laws and ceremonies were, and are, used to maintain or restore balance among the relational worldview principles within and across dimensions of reality and time.¹¹

Some use embodied healing practices to help those who have experienced colonial violence and abuse recover this balance. For example, in a program they ran with Native women who experienced “sexual, racist, and colonial violence,” Denise Nadeau and Alannah Young used an approach they call “*educating bodies for self-determination*.” Their approach combines “spiritual teachings, bodywork, movement, and performance in a group education program” to help women recover “the body-spirit’s relationship with self, land, and community: to restore the sense of sacred interconnection undermined by violence,” colonialism, and racism.¹² Another example of a method used

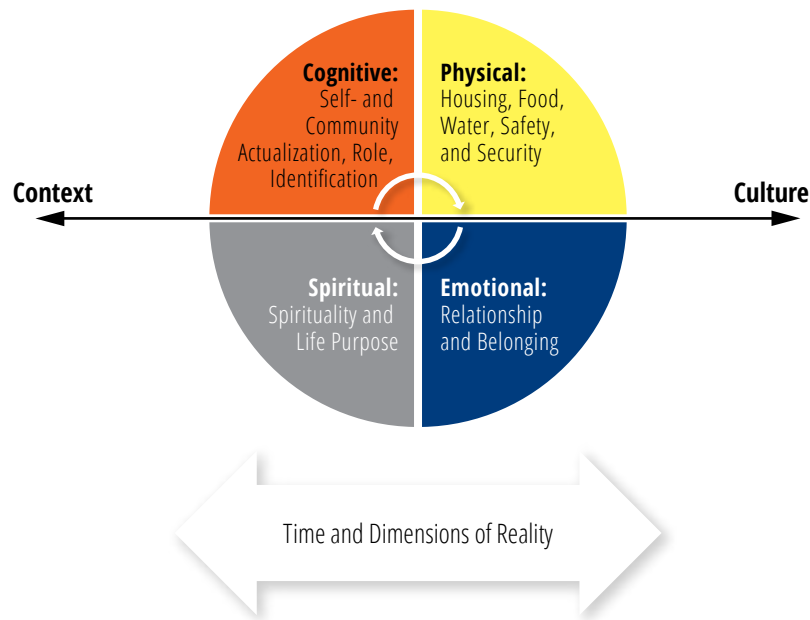


Figure 1. Adapted from *Bonding Relational Worldview Principles to Holistic Model* from *When Everything Matters* by Cindy Blackstock (2009), p. 38.

10 Terry Cross (n.d.), *Relational Wordview Model*, p. 1. <https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/Relational-Worldview-Model.pdf>

11 Cindy Blackstock (2009), *When Everything Matters*, pp. 34–35: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19024/3/Blackstock_Cindy_N_200911_PhD_thesis.pdf

12 Denise Nadeau and Alannah Young (2006), *Educating Bodies for Self-Determination: A Decolonizing Strategy*. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 29(1); pp. 88–89.

to restore this balance is Michael Yellow Bird's work with Tribal and Indigenous Peoples using what he calls "neurodecolonization." This practice combines "mindfulness approaches with traditional and contemporary secular and sacred contemplative practices," including ceremony, to weaken the traumatic effects of colonialism and help people restore "emotional, behavioural, and spiritual well-being" as well as greater critical thinking capacities and unbound creativity.¹³ Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks to the restoration of balance and relational principles through land-based embodied practice when writing about the word *Biiskabiyang*, which is Anishanaabemowin for "the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a reemergence, and unfolding from the inside out." It is a concept referring to "an individual and collective process" that offers "flight out of the structure of settler colonialism and into the processes and relationships of freedom and self-determination," which are "encoded and practiced within Nishnaabewin."¹⁴

Along with these strategies, Pam Palmater explains that overcoming colonial mind control also requires the disruption of state propaganda, political rhetoric, white supremacy, and anti-First Nation racism that allows for the continuation of the "worst and longest-running genocide to continue unabated in Canada," the blaming of First Nations for problems they cannot control, and the internalization of this blame by First Nations peoples. Palmater also notes that overcoming colonial authoritarian control will require "full access to free, open, transparent, fact-based information," holding governments and industry to account, and identifying the ways colonial "racism and violence are so engrained that people don't even see it anymore." It will also require us to embrace people in First Nations communities who are speaking out against injustice. This process, she says, will allow us to "move forward on a path of truth, fact, knowledge and mutual health, safety, and well-being for everyone."¹⁵

13 Michael Yellow Bird (2014), *Decolonizing the Mind*: <https://vimeo.com/86995336> and <https://www.indigenoumindfulness.com/about>

14 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (2017), p. 17.

15 Pam Palmater, *Colonialism and Mind Control* (1:10:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYHuBgR-Otk&t=3350s>

16 <https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/mind-control-and-colonization-information-sheets>

This is Part 3 in the series, **Mind Control and Colonization**

[Click here](#)¹⁶ to see all information sheets in this series.



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