

Decolonising Medicine



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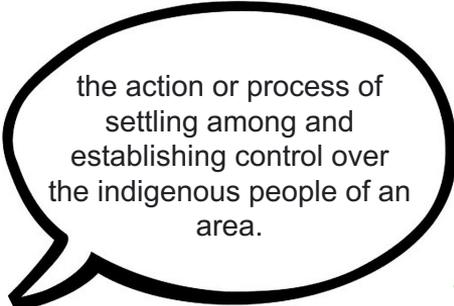
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So how do I understand
decolonization?



What is decolonization?

- Dismantling power structures inherited from, or strengthened by, the practices of colonisation. (Lugones 2010; Vergés 2021)
- Address and challenge the systemic disadvantages experienced by those who have been racialised and marginalised through historic processes of colonial violence and the contemporary manifestations of ongoing oppression.
- De-centre white, heteronormative, masculine, able-bodied privileges, and work collectively to create socially just futures defined by those subject to colonisation, racialisation and inequality. (Mohanty 2003; Flowers 2015; Boudreau Morris 2016)

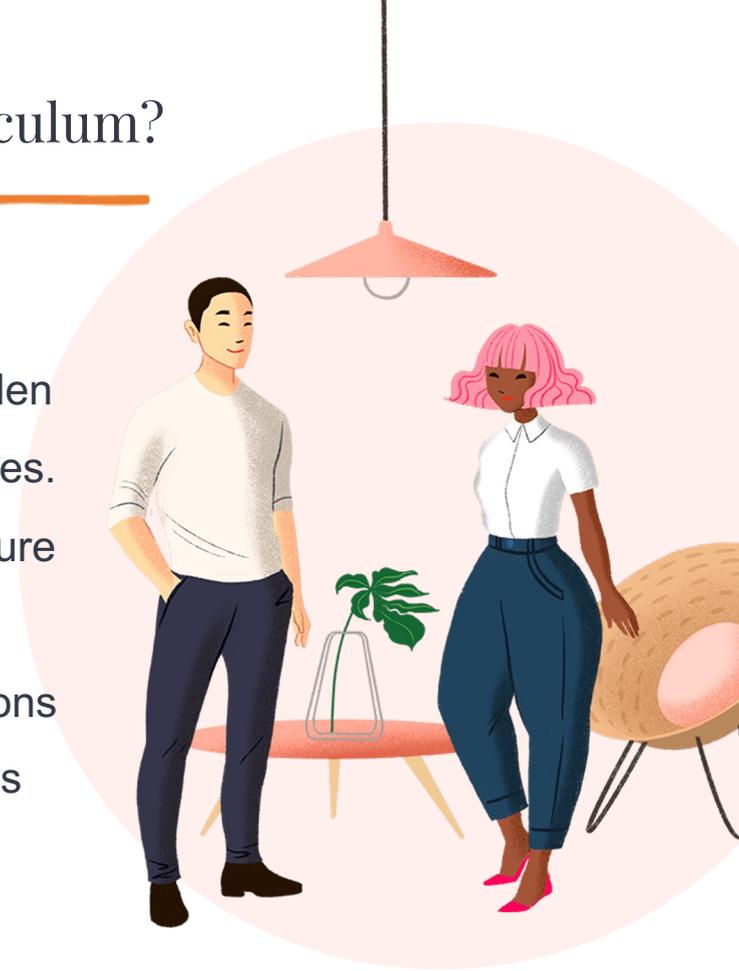


the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.

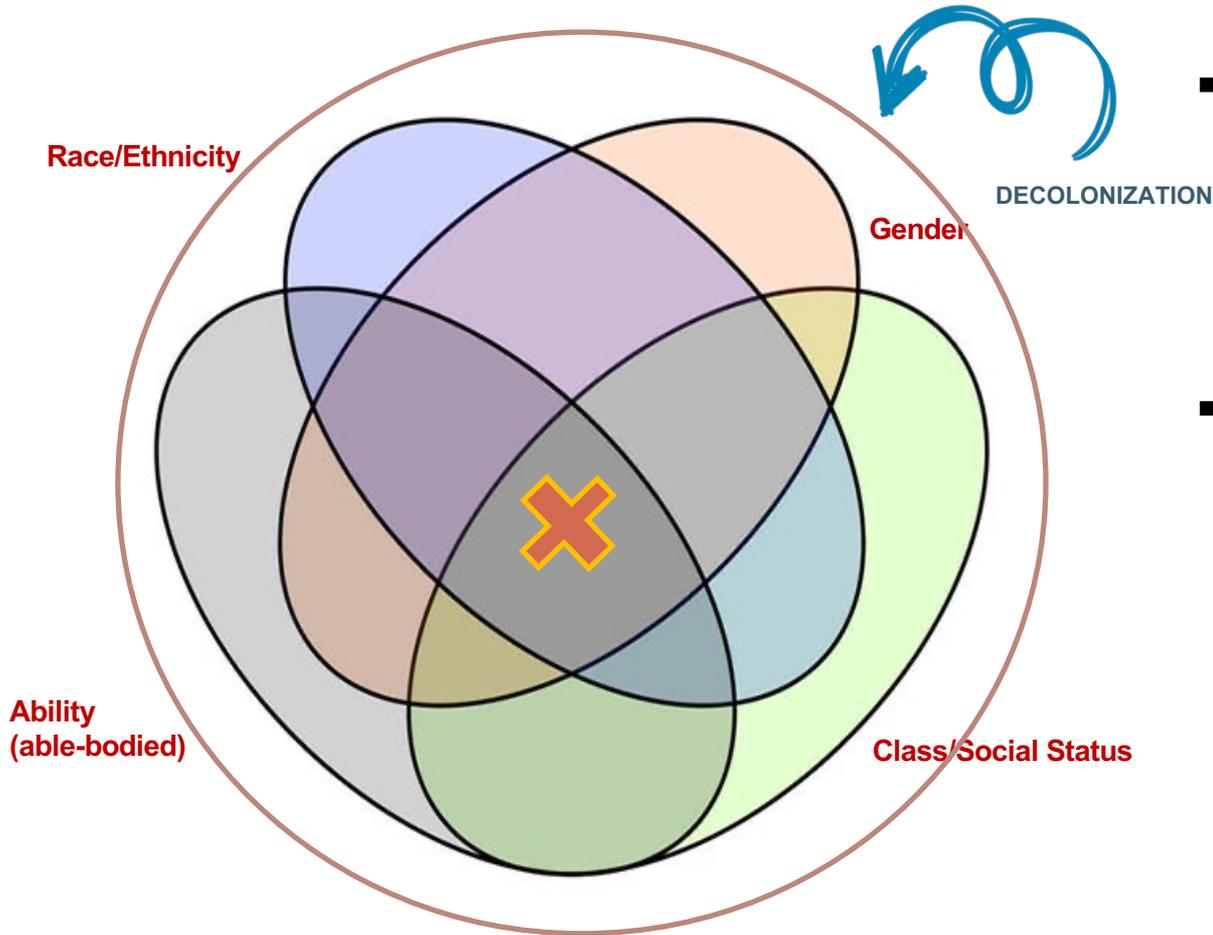


How do we decolonize Science/Medicine Curriculum?

- \neq removal of white male perspectives from curriculum.
- Challenge assumptions of the White male lens and broaden our intellectual vision to include a wider range of perspectives.
- Fundamental level: To create spaces at the 'table' to ensure all groups/perspectives are represented equally.
- To decolonise our curriculum is to challenge power relations and call for deeper thinking about the content of our courses (curriculum) and how we teach them (pedagogy).



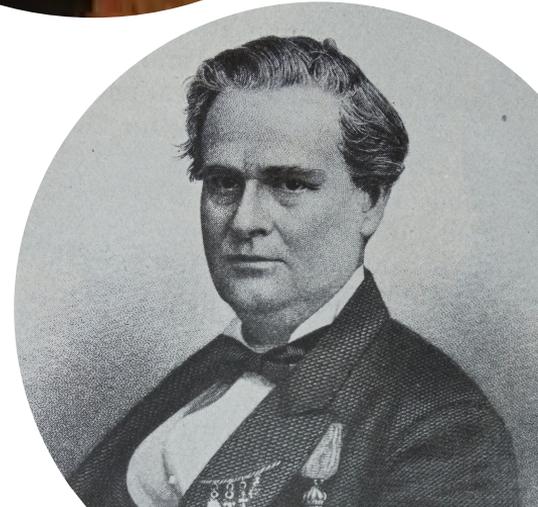
How does it look visually?



- Deeper into the intersections- the more excluded their voices become in a colonized curriculum. *(W,M,C,A,H,)*
- Decolonisation → becoming inclusive to the intersections and enabling all sections to have equal power *(equal power as the White male perspective?)*

An Example in Medicine

- James Marion Sims- father of modern (surgical) gynecology- 19th Century
- Developed pioneering tools and surgical techniques related to women's reproductive health.
- Invented the vaginal speculum, a tool used for dilation and examination
- Pioneered a surgical technique to repair vesicovaginal fistula: complication of childbirth- tear between the uterus and bladder caused constant pain and urine leakage.
- Using Black women's bodies as medical test subjects
- Dehumanizing the bodies of enslaved women
- Testing out new surgical techniques on Black women **without anesthetics**. (racist notion that **Black people did not feel pain**)
- 30 surgeries on **Anarcha** to perfect the techniques.
- Operated on White women WITH anesthetics



‘That was in the past, we need to look to the present and future...’

- A substantial number of white laypeople and medical students and residents hold false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites
- racial bias in pain perception and accuracy of treatment recommendation ([Hoffman et al., 2016](#))
- [2016 Guardian Article](#): ‘Black patients half as likely to receive pain medication as white patients, study finds’ despite presenting the same pain characteristics
- [2018 BBC Future](#): ‘women in the emergency department who report having acute pain are less likely to be given opioid painkillers (the most effective type) than men’.
- [2014 study from Sweden](#), women in A&E waited significantly longer to see a doctor than men and often, classified as less urgent cases.
- ‘Black women are less likely to be diagnosed for endometriosis than white women: when experiencing pelvic pain → misdiagnosed as having pelvic inflammatory disease (STD).
- [Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women](#) → quality healthcare, underlying chronic conditions, structural racism, and implicit bias.



Developing the New Module- Decolonising Medicine



The Danger of Tokenizing Decolonization

- ✓ A module like this is niche and unique.
- ✓ Tendency to tick a box in the college that they are decolonizing the curriculum since they have a module on it.
- ✓ Important to onboard all academics on the decolonizing journey- unlearning, learning, applying to what and how they teach.
- ✓ Authentic engagement from senior leadership as role models.
- ✓ Take the first step!!



2. Module Syllabus

- **Week 1: Decolonising the curricula:** The relevance of decolonization in Science and Medicine, common misconceptions and the path forward.
- **Week 2: Hidden figures:** Hidden contributions by Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, Indigenous Persons and People of Colour; interrogating the lack of visibility of non-White knowledge creators and knowledge from the Global South.
- **Week 3: Ethics** in medical research: A historical perspective and contemporary progress.
- **Week 4: Perception of pain** through the century; disturbing reasons why Black patients may be undertreated for pain.
- **Week 5:** Who gets **antibiotics** first? Racial and ethnic differences in antibiotic prescription.
- **Week 6: Women of colour and consent in medicine:** The case of Puerto Rican women and the pill in context of colonialism.
- **Week 7: Tuskegee** Syphilis study: Denial of Syphilis treatment to African American men.
- **Week 8: Willowbrook** Hepatitis experiments: Discovery of Hepatitis vaccine by experimenting on mentally disabled children.
- **Week 9: COVID-19** and inequality: The disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities.
- **Week 10: Co-creating solutions** and dismantling systems of discrimination around us.



My Takeaways from the process

- ✓ Students are curious and want to learn about decolonization and the part they can play.
- ✓ One of the most effective methods to engage them, is to let them take leadership on their learning-guided.
- ✓ As tutors, we must keep an open mind, with an objective viewpoint.
- ✓ Creating safe spaces and building trust was essential from the beginning.
- ✓ We can bring in our perspectives but need to be comfortable in opposing viewpoints.
- ✓ Students need to be challenged to think from the opposing viewpoints even if it does not align with their ideas.
- ✓ Emphasizing on challenging and communicating with one another respectfully is important.



Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at:

- ✓ University of Exeter, College of Medicine and Health
- ✓ m.reza@exeter.ac.uk



Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- ✓ [Fresh Folk](#) illustrations by [Leni Kauffman](#)
- ✓ Presentation template by [SlidesCarnival](#)
- ✓ Photographs by [Unsplash](#)

