

Decolonizing the Literature Review Assignment

Due Wednesday, 15 July on Canvas

Decolonization refers to the practice of dismantling colonial rule in countries once oppressed and made subordinate. It is also an ideological mindset of ‘writing back’ against ongoing colonial mentalities that still permeate education, media, government policies, and public mindsets. For example, views continue to circulate concerning the idea of the Global South as ‘underdeveloped,’ ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilized’ in counter to allegedly ‘superior’ and ‘civilized’ Western societies. We can think of how this plays out in debates concerning immigration or global public health concerns and who is publicly deemed to be ‘worthy’ of inclusion or pathologized as ‘unclean.’

Assignment: A literature review is a descriptive summary of research on a topic that has previously been studied. The purpose of a literature review is to inform readers of the significant knowledge and ideas that have been established on a topic. Too often, literature reviews in academia are defined by a refusal to integrate literary works from the Global South. The scholarship that is given pride of place often leans towards particular ‘highbrow’ institutions and publication houses over others. White male writers dominate academic syllabi with scholars of color in the minority. The voices of those directly affected by the subject matter are also rarely heard. For example, dominant scholarship on forced migration is rarely written by or with asylum seekers and refugees.

This assignment asks you to consider how higher education, research, and publishing can be complicit in continued colonial oppression. It gives you a chance to ‘write back’ against these trends and engage in decolonizing and reclaiming the meanings of ‘academic scholarship,’ particularly in the context of Western research.

Assessment: Your total submission will consist of:

1. Completed table with 6 sources
2. 2-page reflection paper

Format: For this assignment you are asked to complete the outline of a small-scale literature review on a topic of your choice. You are asked to locate 6 sources on your subject area that are a mixture of ‘canonical’ and non-traditional sources.

Make sure your canonical books or journal articles are said to have influence in your chosen subject area. They should be widely cited. You might use the following databases:

- UNCW’s library catalogue
- [Google Scholar](#)
- [JSTOR](#)
- [EBSCO](#)
- [Project Muse](#) (humanities and social sciences)

Your non-traditional sources should focus squarely on work by underrepresented scholars and the perspectives of individuals affected by your topic focus. For example, if you’re looking at the issue of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, find work by Brazilian scholars and/or indigenous

communities who have been subject to resource extraction in that region. This might take the form of articles, books, blogs, podcasts, news reports, memoirs, interviews etc. Once you have done this, complete the following table for your chosen sources:

Citation	What question is the author addressing?	What results & conclusions can you draw?	How does it relate to other literature? Does it confirm, add to, or challenge established knowledge?	How does it contribute to your understanding of the topic? Key insights and arguments?	Can you identify and strengths and weaknesses?

Your citations should take the form of APA format, eg:

Book – Morris, J. (2020). *Why I Love Literature Reviews*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press.

Journal Article – Morris, J. (2020). Why I Love Literature Reviews. *Journal of Ethnographic Methods*, 2 (30), 139-142.

Blog Post or Podcast – Morris, J. (2020, April 15). This is a Great Blog or Podcast. *Blog or Podcast Name*. <http://websiteaddresshere.com>

After completing this for each source, write a 2-page paper discussing the existence of dominant discourses and the influence of dominant groups in what/who we research. Decolonizing researchers argue that indigenous communities are often un- or under-represented in academic research communities and hence their voices and concerns are not heard.

- Looking at the sources you chose, who conducted this research?
- Was it easy to find non-traditional sources?
- Do your dominant journal articles and books lean towards some academic institutions over others (ie. the so-called ‘canonical’ work in this subject area that has a high impact factor?)
- Are the authors directly affected by the subject matter?
- Whose perspectives do you think might be excluded? Why?
- What overall effect might this have in reinforcing particular ideologies of superiority?

Literature reviews and annotated bibliographies usually ask you to draw on ‘reputable’ ‘scholarly’ literature, which is often a coded way of saying Ivy League publication houses and the work of Western academics. Conclude with a reflection on whether you think 'mainstream' research can be of value for the issues it raises, even when academics are removed from the communities they study.

- How can researchers ensure knowledge is shared in relevant representations?
- What do you think a decolonized research project should look like?

Some good resources:

Watch: Umoja Noble, Safiya. 2018. ‘Algorithms of Oppression.’ YouTube, February 28. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KLTpoTpkXo>

Watch: Said, Edward. 2012. 'Edward Said on Orientalism.' YouTube, October 28. Available at: https://youtu.be/fVC8EYd_Z_g

Assigned Reading: Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*. London: Zed Books, Chapter 1: 'Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory,' 20-43.

Additional Reading: Dechavez, Yvette. 2018. 'It's Time to Decolonize That Syllabus.' Los Angeles Times, October 8. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/books/la-et-jc-decolonize-syllabus-20181008-story.html>