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“Tell Me, Bambi or Yogi Ever Hunt You Back?”

The Windigo Myth: A Metaphor for Imperialism and Mental Illness

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Abstract:

The Canadian indigenous myth of the windigo, originating from Algonquian-speaking tribes of the subarctic Northeast like Ojibwe and Cree, is a manifestation for a multitude of fears. This myth originated hundreds of years ago in order to explain the horror and lack of understanding of a mental illness, which would later be known as Windigo Psychosis. Windigo Psychosis is a culture-bound syndrome for an insatiable desire to consume human flesh. A culture-bound syndrome is recognizable and unique only within a specific society or culture, so in other words, Windigo Psychosis is specific to this area in Canada due to a combination of elements required for it to happen. The region has harsh winters with sparse amounts of food available, combined with extreme isolation. Additionally, there is the ultimate taboo of cannibalism which results in something akin to the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy occurring. The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, in regards to the windigo, is an interpretation of a situation which causes the action. If a person believes they are transforming into a windigo, based on this theory, they subconsciously turn it into a reality. When a person had to cannibalize out of necessity in order to survive or else starve, they realized they committed the ultimate taboo of anthropophagus behavior. Because this region of people grew up with the apprehension of this mythological creature, when any symptoms began to appear similar to the windigo, they believed it to be true and made it happen.

The myth of the windigo before the European invasion in the late 1600s and early 1700s. The imperialistic nations defended their invasions through ideas that would later be known as the West versus the Rest theory. This theory outlines a method where nations modernized specifically in six attributes and saw an exponential growth. This exponential growth, also

known as Westernization, led to them expanding across the world. By expanding through invading other societies that were nowhere near as powerful, including the Algonquian-speaking indigenous tribes of Northeast Canada, they were able to overpower them so they could purloin them of their resources for personal gain. With this invasion, the windigo myth had a resurgence in popularity. This was due to both the documentation of a myth that previously existed exclusively in oral form, in addition to the monster representing a new fear of the colonizers. The windigo is a creature that represents a substantial amount of anxieties, including the aversion of not understanding a mental health disorder like Windigo Psychosis, the indigenous dread of being dislodged from their land by European settlers, and others. The windigo does not represent merely one metaphor for dread; instead it encompasses a multitude of metaphors. Fear manifests itself in a variety of ways, and the windigo represents the majority of these despairs.

Introduction:

The mythos of the windigo has existed for hundreds of years in Northeastern Canadian aboriginal culture, originating to describe a mental illness, Windigo Psychosis. This myth originated from the misunderstandings, stigmas, and misconceptions of a mental illness within their community. There was a resurgence in popularity due to the process of the imperialistic European Empire encroaching on indigenous territory, both physically and metaphorically. Cultural anthropologists and other social scientists investigating this phenomenon have used the identities known as indigenous, aboriginal, Native, and First Nations people as similes; these terms will be used interchangeably throughout the rest of this paper (Ridington 2012). The First Nations' own interpretation of this phenomenon's origin consider the windigo to be a seemingly

all-powerful monster that lost its humanity through committing the ultimate sin of cannibalism. Cannibalism, especially with the Algonquian-speaking people in Northeastern Canada, has been considered the worst possible sin a person could commit due to it being thought of as moral ethics being breached. Europe reinforced this stigmatized taboo during the European invasion in the late 1600s and early 1700s. The windigo is a personification of generalized fears, especially the fear of this utmost misdeed of antropophagus behavior.

In addition to the windigo mythology representing generalized fears, it also represents the argument for social control and the need for moderation. This means that within First Nations society, there needs to be a balance between starvation and gluttony; a life without excess, but with enough to survive. Physically, the windigo appears emaciated, but it has an insatiable hunger that cannot be fulfilled. The more that it consumes, the stronger the hunger is. Because the monster is seen as the embodiment of gluttony, greed, and excess, it is never satisfied after killing and consuming a person (Wonderley 2009: 78). Windigos are constantly searching for new victims, resulting in a perpetual cycle that helps no one, but endangers everyone in its path. This outlines that in order to survive in these harsh Northeast subarctic Canadian conditions where the winters are isolating and scarce with food, one cannot be greedy or else the entire community will not survive. If one person breaks the balance and hunts too much food, then that means there is less food in the area for the rest of the families in their separate territories. There is a fine line between seemingly two extremes of starvation and gluttony, but it is theorized that the windigo is a reminder in order to outline the dangers of both extremes.

There are two different approaches to defeating the windigo, both involving melting its ice heart. This can be done by killing it physically through fire, or metaphorically by bringing the

humanity back with kindness. This can represent the gender role differences within these communities because men are tasked with killing the monster physically, whilst specifically older women kill the windigo metaphorically. Older women are chosen for this task due to the idea of a woman having the most powerful connection with the spirit world when she is on her “moon time,” a term used to describe menstruating (Chards 2018). An elder woman in menopause in the community is specifically chosen over a woman currently on her moon time because every moon cycle she exponentially gets stronger and retains that collective strength during menopause.

As portrayed by Marano on page 31, an Oblate Missionary from Europe by the name of J. E. Saindon was the first to describe the “windigo” as being a sickness. Saindon is credited with originating the term “Windigo Psychosis” in the early 1920s to refer to a mental condition where patients felt possessed or compelled by cannibalistic desires. This missionary was working in a Cree community in the western James Bay area and was one of the first Europeans to observe a windigo victim (Marano 1981: 31). Prior to the European invasion in the 1700s, there was no logical explanation as to why a member of their community would suddenly crave human flesh, except for them turning into a monster. Since the inception of this myth hundreds of years ago, the windigo has expanded to additionally include the fear of outsiders invading the isolated Native way of life. In a society that does not acknowledge mental illnesses as being tangible and as important as physical illnesses, these mental wounds fester and worsen without the support needed to overcome them (Gone 2008: 312). Specific examples of such a society are three isolated aboriginal Algonquian-speaking tribes in the Northeastern subarctic region of Canada who have a focus on the windigo myth: Cree, Ojibwe, and Algonquin. To clarify, there are both

Algonquin people and other tribes who speak the Algonquian language. With a lack of understanding and an almost complete denial of mental illness within these tribes, myths like the windigo are initially created in order to represent, explain, and understand someone acting outside of the societal norm.

European imperialism plays an essential part in understanding the windigo and why it has been feared because “those who control the land are those who control the resources within and without it” (Churchill and Laduke 1986: 107). With foreign invaders suddenly coming onto Native land and telling them how they are supposed to integrate within this new Western, predominantly white, society, the windigo had a revival in following amongst the Algonquian-speaking tribes. Whilst the First Nations used to be the majority, they then became the minority in a seemingly brief amount of time. Through this sudden and drastic change of being the majority of people with the minority of power, the windigo organically became a metaphoric manifestation of their fears and insecurities about this European invasion (Wonderley 2009: 74). When the invaders came in and began interacting with the First Nations, they translated and transcribed the myth of the windigo into both English and French. After the myth was converted into these two languages, something that previously only existing as an oral story, travelers brought the myth from indigenous Canada back to France and Great Britain. This transliteration of the stories about the mythological creature continued to spread outside of the select amount of tribes in the subarctic region of Canada. These tribes originally knew about the windigo, but the chronicling of stories enabled the myth to stay relevant throughout time. An analysis of the cannibalistic windigo in Algonquian-speaking indigenous tribes in the subarctic region of Canadian culture reveals the most accurate interpretation of this culture-bound

syndrome is both a fear and lack of understanding of mental illness and how imperialism has impacted it.

What is the Windigo?:

The windigo myth originated only through oral stories told by Algonquian-speaking Canadian aboriginal tribes, notably Ojibwe and Cree, who live in the Boreal Forest of Northeast subarctic Canada. The myths existed hundreds of years before the European settlers arrived in the late 1600s and early 1700s. This means there are variations describing the creature due to either a translation error from Algonquian to the European languages or even from human error within retelling oral stories (Henderson 1982: 102). Some examples of variations about the windigo include how this creature originated, whether it can be killed and in what manner, and even the name by which the creature is called. The Wendigo, Windigo, Witiko, Wetiko, etc. all describe a solitary, aggressive, gaunt creature, taller in height than anything imaginable. Windigos can be either male or female, but they choose to have an isolated life due to their hostile and territorial nature. Wonderly believes that if a male and female meet outside of procreation purposes, then a battle of epic proportions ensues, wiping out entire sections of land (Wonderley 2009: 76). Something of notable importance is how the windigo has large, bloodshot eyes that are reminiscent of an owl; owls are thought to be an omen of death and evil within First Nations culture. Throughout Native lore, eyes are considered to be windows into the soul, or a way to tell the true intentions of someone. The idea that the windigos' eyes project this synonym for death and evil, solidifies that they are immoral (Mythology & Fiction 2018). Besides death and evil, owls are also thought to represent magic or second sight. People who possess the power

of the owl are usually witches, wizards, or shamans who have an interest in the occult (Owusu 2000: 52). One of the theories on how a windigo is created is through an evil wizard or shaman who summoned it from the spirit world. Even though windigos are thought to originally be spirits, there are various ideas as to their exact origin. Some origin stories describe windigos as being spirits that were summoned by an evil shaman to do their chaotic bidding, other stories describe windigo spirits tricking humans into being possessed by the windigo spirit.

The windigo is a mythical spirit creature that can halve a man with one swipe, feet that are $\frac{2}{3}$ of a meter each in length with one large toe on the end, and the entire creature is covered in black, rotting flesh, with a block of ice instead of a heart (Smallman 2015: 45). The block of ice for a heart is a specific attribute unique to this mythical creature because it is a metaphor for how the windigo's humanity is not entirely gone; its humanity is trapped beneath the monster. Regardless of the varying interpretations of the origins of the windigo, whether spirit summoned by an evil shaman or a human possessed by a spirit, all of the analyses agree that the windigo was once a human (Gilmore 2012: 48). Their icy heart is the source of their power; a windigo can only be "killed" when their icy heart melts, whether physically with fire or metaphorically with kindness.

Anytime Natives hear its hissing breath from miles away, "[...everyone] on the north side of the river [...] congregate[s] in a house [...] where] one of the leading shamans conjure all through the night in order to divert the Windigo from his reputed path. [First Nations] believed that the cannibal passed [by the] fury of the wind, which [is] interpreted as a sign of his presence" (Gilmore 2012: 76). It eats rotten wood, swamp moss, mushrooms, and animal corpses, but its favorite source of nutrients is fresh human flesh. Physically, it appears emaciated

with thin skin, sunken eyes, and bones that almost protrude, but it has an insatiable hunger; the more it eats, the hungrier it gets (Smallman 2015: 52). Gradually, it needs to eat more and more in order to fill this seemingly bottomless pit of painful hunger. This means that as it gets stronger, it gradually metamorphoses into a more aggressive and ravenous state in order to fulfill this rapacious hunger. Windigos participate in self-harm by completely chewing off their own lips due to their hunger. By chewing off their own lips, rows of crooked teeth and inner mouth are exposed which culminates in the creature having a more terrifying look. Authors of windigo myths, like Gilmore (2012), Teicher (1960), Hay (1971), and Smallman (2015) describe it as a nocturnal hunter that can fly, swim underwater, possesses extraordinary strength, and has foreknowledge of the location of its victims; this creature seems to have no weaknesses. This creature is more than just a story to tell; it represents a fear of something, or someone, with the power to wipe out an entire nation of people. When everything is stolen from these tribes without warning from foreign invaders who seemingly have infinite power, they tell stories to comprehend and explain what has happened to the Canadian aboriginal people. The arguable root of the problematic concept of colonialism and imperialism stems from the West versus the Rest theory.

The West versus the Rest Theory:

The West versus the Rest theory is argued to have originated from Niall Ferguson's book *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. This theory's approach describes six attributes that, when combined, enabled Europe to have massive societal and economic success within a short amount of time. The six attributes are competition, science, property rights, medicine, consumer focus to

an economic-centered life, and a higher work ethic. Great Britain and France are two examples of countries that succeeded with this six attribute approach because they focused almost exclusively on improving these six attributes; they found there to be an overall improvement in their government (Pearlstein 2012). With a general improvement in their home country, they were able to expand across the world. By invading other societies that were not as powerful as them through imperialism, countries like Great Britain and France were able to overpower them and later colonize the people. Through colonialism, the home countries were able to further grow due to the new resources they were purloining from the invaded countries, enabling them to keep expanding.

Overall, the West versus the Rest mindset is having Western Universalism, which is “the view that the West represents modernity and that the nations of the world will, sooner or later, turn to Western-style liberalism and capitalism [...] the Westernization of the world will happen without the West having to do anything much.” (Koch 2014). Western Universalism is different from Liberal Imperialism, which is where countries who have “modernized” wish to make the entire world Westernized, by force if necessary. Through Liberal Imperialism, the West feels justified in imposing its civilization on the rest regardless of what is actually the most beneficial for the societies they were taking over; Westernization is not optimal for every country or civilization. Even though the West versus the Rest in theory states that eventually the entire world will Westernize on its own, imperialistic nations were forcing Westernization on them through Liberal Imperialism which is not what the theory states. The imperialistic nations were pretending to support Westernization happening gradually, or Western Universalism, but in actuality were forcing Westernization on unwilling civilizations, or Liberal Imperialism. This is

problematic because these imperialistic countries were saying they were helping the countries they were coming in contact with progress gradually through a more “laissez-faire” or “hands off” approach, but they were actually impeding their growth. Because this philosophy can be done by force, it is not actually liberal; it is a contradiction of Western values by virtue that it is impossible to impose liberty. There is a sense of cultural supremacy where the West typically believes a culture and a society that is different, is not equal which is why the West wants to impose on the Rest.

Essentially, this theory discusses how Europe became so successful that they could spread their influence to other parts of the world, dominating the political, cultural, economic, and social “norms” that other countries should strive to have. With this outline, essentially the theory states if a civilization follows these six designs, they too can be great and succeed. Seeing how every civilization is different and requires specialized needs, this idea of having to follow only six arrangements in order to flourish is flawed. When the civilization failed to thrive on their own because this did not work for them, the West used this as an excuse to swoop in to “show them how it’s done” which equated to taking them over (Ferguson 2012: 237). Countries that had a direct connection with Europe, whether because they are located within Europe or were forcefully taken over through imperialism, is considered the West. Countries that have escaped the reach of Europe by rebelling, or have not yet encountered it due to distance, are considered the Rest, also known as the foreign “other.” Europe’s success, enabling it to be the “norm,” was not as a result of any natural advantages, but by cause of developing the perfect mixture of legal, political, and social institutions. This mixture that made Europe overall resilient to withstand plagues, natural disasters, and failed leaders that set other regions behind.

This is connected back into the myth of the windigo because the indigenous people were an example of the West taking over and forcing change on them. They had no choice about whether they wanted to be Westernized and thus “modernized,” Europe came onto their land to strip them of their resources for their personal benefit and explained to the aboriginal people they were helping them. There was a development of a dichotomy of power with the minority, the Europeans, in charge of the majority, the Natives. The majority of the indigenous people of this region did not know the languages of the European settlers or know what the European takeover was about. The First Nations were forced to almost completely change their lives in order to fit someone else’s viewpoint on what was best for them. The windigo myth originated by the Algonquian-speaking indigenous people of the subarctic region of Canada, hundreds of years before the first Europeans settlers arrived in the 1700s. It originated in order to explain the fear of a mental illness they did not understand, or a fear of the unknown. After both Great Britain and France invaded and attempted to colonize this region, this myth had a resurgence in popularity in order to explain this new fear of being invaded by people they did not know and they did not understand what was going on, also an example of a fear of the unknown. The myth of the windigo is a consolidation of a variety of fears of the unknown that takes on numerous forms, hence how it is able to stay relevant centuries later.

Moral Ethics Behind Cannibalism:

Northeast Canada is extremely isolated and has a lack of resources causing a seasonal effect on tribe leadership, especially during the dead of winter. Because of this, tribes come together in the summertime when food is more plentiful to trade, fish, hunt, and celebrate

(Teicher 1960: 17). There is not a designated leader within these tribes during wintertime, but there is a wandering shaman to assist people throughout this season. Due to the scarcity of animals that can be hunted during the wintertime, people break off into nuclear families. Nuclear families are families ordinarily consisting of a monogamous couple and their children, if they have them. They break off into their smaller families and separate onto their respective land in order to find food more effectively without competition. There are social pressures to provide for one's family because either everyone starves, or some are sacrificed in order for the others to survive (Teicher 1960: 19). Due to the tribes separating over winter, it is an extremely isolating experience for the members because the only people to see in close proximity for the duration of winter, is their immediate family. Men were tasked with providing for their family by going outside for short hunting trips because they are expected to be more optimized for physical work and hold protecting powers. Women stayed inside to manage the home because they are thought to be best for supporting emotional help and holding healing powers. These two genders have different tasks because, in this culture, they are believed to be designed for different natures and hold different powers. Men However, the shaman is focused on spiritual work and is somewhat disconnected from the base natures both men and women have.

Within Canadian indigenous communities, including the Algonquian-speaking, there is this idea that a tribe's shaman can fix everything. A shaman is someone in the tribe who has close ties to the spiritual world and provides guidance to members of the tribe. The concept of society members having to rely on the shaman is problematic because it places blame and pressure onto someone else instead of owning one's personal responsibilities. This comes into manifestation through the idea of scapegoating, or if something goes wrong after following the

shaman's advice, then blame the person who gave the guidance. Someone is chosen to be the tribe's shaman due to their strong connection with their spirit guide. Every tribe member acquires a spirit guide through their Dream Ceremony, but shamans have an especially important and formidable relationship with their guide.

The Dream Ceremony is a coming of age ceremony for a young man or woman where they fast for a few days on end in order to prompt a spirit to come forth and bond with them. This bonding is important because that young person will have that spirit guide for the rest of their life and will help them with everything they could possibly think of (Teicher 1960: 21). What is important to note, it is believed that sometimes a windigo can attempt to disguise themselves as a spirit guide during the Dream Ceremony in order to trick the young person to cannibalize by accident. Some accounts suggest that if a young person, who is in the midst of the Dream Ceremony, mistakes a windigo in their dream for a spirit guide, the windigo will try to persuade them to partake in mysterious meat. If the person does partake because they believe this is just their spirit guide looking out for them with the best intentions in mind, then when the person wakes, they begin to suddenly crave human flesh. This sudden craving of human flesh now means they are on the initial stage of transforming into a windigo.

There is a relation between the degradation of morality and cannibalism within these tribes because it is believed that cannibalism is the ultimate sin (Bishop 1976: 42). As their morality degrades, the person becomes closer to cannibalizing and vice versa. The next stage of transforming into a windigo, after their morality degrades to a certain extent, is to continue to crave human flesh until they finally succumb to their desires. They can succumb to this either when the individual has to cannibalize out of necessity in order to survive or because a windigo

disguised itself as a spirit guide within a young person's coming of age ceremony. A windigo can slip into someone's Dream Ceremony in the spirit world, or it was specifically sent after the person from an evil shaman. Shamans have an important part within the indigenous community because they are a sort of bridge between the spirit world and the physical world. They can seek out advice from the spirits and relay it to their community members. Unfortunately, sometimes shamans can go rogue; they break away from their tribe to live by themselves. The temptations of power and listening to evil spirits has the capability of corrupting the shaman and turning it evil as well. This can result in the shaman summoning a windigo from the spirit world and giving it a material form so the windigo can do the shaman's bidding (Pitt 2012). There are more than one way of creating a windigo spirit, with the most common being through a human cannibalizing. Another way of creating a windigo is for a person to be possessed by a windigo spirit who was summoned by the corrupted shaman.

After the person cannibalizes for the first time, what leads them to the route of Windigo Psychosis is the terrible guilt they feel due to resorting to this utmost sin. Windigo Psychosis does not always develop every time someone cannibalizes, what makes this different from everyday anthropophagus is the guilt and the internalized breakdown of their morals that comes with the act itself. In a society where it is believed cannibalism is the ultimate sin, after committing this sin, the individual feels as if they are a monster lost from humanity. Sometimes the person is conscious of turning into a windigo and will either follow along with it due to the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy theory, or they will require the community to bring the person back to humanity.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Theory:

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy is a theory where people conceive consequences in regards to people or events, based on their previous knowledge toward that specific subject. By conceiving, or expecting, these consequences, this expectation comes true simply because one believes it will. The person's resulting behaviors align to fulfil those beliefs which suggests peoples' beliefs have an influence over their actions (N. and K. Sharma 2015: 48). False expectations by people could come true or create their own divergent reality by causing other people to change their behaviors in order to match and fulfill the initial expectations. The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy theory evolved from the Thomas Theorem which states "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." In other words, consequences will come to fruition based on how one interprets the situation. This connects to the windigo myth in the way that, because people have become aware of this myth due to its popularity over the generations, they are more inclined to become what they fear. They subconsciously feel obliged to follow the potential false belief they are a windigo and thus convince themselves they are indeed a windigo. For example, if a person grew up fearing the myth of the windigo, the fear is buried deep in their subconscious. One day, either consciously or unconsciously, they begin to suspect they are turning into a windigo because few of their symptoms are similar to the process of transforming into this monster. By suspecting themselves as being a windigo, they behave as one, which causes the people around them to treat the person as such. Through this sequence of events, people have the potential to socially construct reality. However, this theory does not eliminate the authenticity of the mental illness known as Windigo Psychosis, which is a culture-bound syndrome where people crave eating human meat. Instead, it helps to support and explain the

idea of how relevant this fear of the monster actually is (Carlson 2009: 384). The windigo represents a conglomerate of fears, so by following the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, the person suspecting themselves of turning into a windigo is becoming what they fear the most.

Windigo Psychosis:

In the Algonquian language culture, there is a hefty taboo placed on cannibalism; it is considered pertinent to commit suicide or succumb to starvation instead of resorting to the consumption of human flesh. Cannibalism, also referred to as anthropophagus, is so taboo specifically within this culture because “the suspicion of cannibalism was used by the West to justify conquest [...] “It has historically been convenient for Westerners to stigmatize cannibalism. If you’re Columbus and you can accuse people of being cannibals, then you can treat them like vermin” (Worrall 2017). When a person has to cannibalize because they are starving without any other choice of food, they are resorting to cannibalism out of necessity. This idea of committing cannibalism out of necessity, also referred to as forced cannibalism, is one of the most prevalent causes of the mental illness, Windigo Psychosis (Henderson 1987: 100). Anthropophagus by choice, as in a human decides to eat another human when there are other food options available, is different from forced cannibalism. The two methods of cannibalism, by force or by choice, differ from each other because the person has a different mindset when going into the act of cannibalism. When forced cannibalism occurs, one has to resort to eating human flesh or face starvation. This adds trauma to the person due to “survivor’s guilt,” breaking ethical and moral codes within their community, or the trauma of mortality and coming so close to

death. Regular anthropophagus is built subconsciously into the mind of animals; cannibalism is only thought to be ethically wrong within the human world.

Thinking about cannibalism, instead of acting on the desire, is different because cannibalism is typically thought of as a last resort instead of a fleeting thought. As a result, it is not generally considered a breach of said person's ethics. This is different within Algonquian-speaking indigenous tribes because a fleeting thought or a dream involving the craving of human flesh is considered to be the initial start of the human transformation into a windigo (Waldram 2015: 112). Within these specific indigenous tribes, When someone kills another person who is suspected of having cannibalistic tendencies, it is considered self-defense. Even if the person kills the suspected windigo before they actually cannibalizes, it is still self-defense. This act of killing is to prevent the suspected cannibal from turning full windigo and thus endangering the rest of the tribe. General society believes that when a person resorts to anthropophagus behavior, it is because said person failed to provide for themselves and their family (Bishop 1974: 42). After eating human flesh out of necessity, this person is thought to be led down a path of moral breakdown and then an ethical transformation within the person. This moral breakdown and internal struggle, due to committing what is thought to be one of the ultimate sins, combined with isolation, and lack of resources to reach out in order to seek help, results in the formation of Windigo Psychosis. People with Windigo Psychosis commonly struggle internally with their craving and desire to consume more human flesh. However, they fight with their ethics telling them they are wrong if they do consume more. There are societal pressures to provide for one's family, like making sure there is enough food for everyone in the family to eat, within the First Nations tribes, even when food is scarce like within winter time

(Hoopes: 1978). Societal pressures are expectations that affect the entire community, so when a man, who is thought to be the head of the household, cannot provide for his family, he is essentially failing as a man and thus failing his community.

Windigo Psychosis is considered a controversial modern medical term due to it being described by psychiatrists as an example of a "culture-bound syndrome." "Culture-bound syndrome," also known as "folk illness," is a combination of psychiatric and somatic symptoms that are recognizable and unique only within a specific society or culture (Waldram 2015: 24). Windigo Psychosis has unique symptoms that are hard to recreate and is rarely documented by Euro-Canadian researchers. Because of this, some researchers, like Marano (1985), argued that essentially, wendigo psychosis is a "fabrication, the result of naïve anthropologists taking stories related to them at face value without observation" (Marano 1985: 401). He continues by saying, based on his observation that only Canadian aboriginals have documented Windigo Psychosis prior, it is a "discredited anthropological artifact [...] a belief among academics [...] because there is no trustworthy witness" (Marano 1985: 387-388). Essentially, people who argue against Windigo Psychosis believe all instances of cannibalism were committed in a famine context and this is not a psychiatric disorder or disease. On the other side of the argument on the validity of Windigo Psychosis, Brightman (1988) contends a "lack of European observers does not discredit the existence of windigo cannibalism" (Brightman 1988: 351). Disbelievers discredit it because there hasn't been a "trustworthy" witness, which actually means there has been little to no European observers. In actuality, there have been numerous credible eyewitness accounts over the centuries, both by indigenous and otherwise. These eyewitness accounts acts as evidence that Windigo Psychosis is a factual historical phenomenon.

An example of an individual having Windigo Psychosis, who had numerous credible witnesses, is Swift Runner. He is an example of what this culture-bound syndrome created. Swift Runner was a Cree trapper who murdered and consumed the bodies of his wife and five children in the winter of 1878. Swift Runner's case is still one of the most important and well known amongst both First Nations people and Euro-Canadians because he was the first person hanged under the auspices of the North-West Mounted Police, or the NWMP (Carlson 2009: 378). After the NWMP's investigation, it was determined that Swift Runner's murder of his wife and four of his children were deemed to be out of necessity due to the implication of starvation, but the murder of his fifth child was because he was scared to have any witnesses. Swift Runner's confession, taken by Father Hyppolyte Leduc in Ottawa in 1879, reads

“at that moment the devil [witiko?] suddenly took possession of my soul; and in order to live longer far from people, and to put out of the way the only witness to my crime, I seized my gun and killed the last of my children and ate him as I had done the others. Some weeks later I was taken by the police, sentenced to death, and in three days I am to be hanged” (Carlson 2009: 376).

There is this fatalistic resignation to cannibalism within Windigo Psychosis. I believe that it is a real mental disorder, regardless if there are “reliable” witnesses or not, that is sustained by a belief in the inevitability of there being a windigo condition. In other words, because there is this myth of the windigo, there is this structure of self-fulfillment involved. With Swift Runner, what may have begun as a real uncontrollable desire to consume human flesh, after realizing what he did, he succumbed to his destiny of being what he feared most, a windigo. This would explain why he admitted to committing these acts rather than obtain conventional food; he said he was

“able to hunt a number of ducks for food, and was, at the point of this act, not in a position of desperation” (Carlson 2009: 376). When he finally secured some ducks, he could have switched from consuming his family to hunting ducks. He was no longer starving and had another source of food, but he internally committed to his cannibalistic destiny.

Typically, the first instance of forced cannibalism is out of necessity, such as the choice to either eat human flesh, or starve to death. When someone “fails” to provide for their family in conventional ways, such as through hunting, fishing, or scavenging, people have the potential to resort to their natural instincts of becoming an anthropophagus hunter in order to survive at any cost. After the first instance is committed out of necessity, there is this craving to continue to cannibalize because they experience this kind of awakening within themselves; they cannot believe they have missed out on experiencing cannibalism and why would their society disallow them from acting upon this (Henderson 1987: 102). This goes against all of their morals they learned throughout their upbringing, which is that eating another human being is wrong.

Windigo Psychosis is prevalent in the indigenous tribes of both the Cree and Ojibwe because the areas in which they live in are extremely isolated and distant from other tribes. The Cree tribe is one of the most diverse and expanded tribes within Canada, stretching from the Canadian territories of Alberta through Quebec (Ridington 2012). Because of how the Cree Canadian aboriginal tribes expanded across Canada, sub-tribes like Plains Cree, Swampy Cree, and Woods Cree have emerged which allowed for variations of cultural aspects. With this divergence of Cree into smaller sub-tribes, cultural aspects like the windigo were able to change depending on location. The Ojibwe are mostly located in Northeast Canada, unlike the more spread out Cree, and they arguably have less difference in cultural aspects. Northern Canadian

tribes have a Cree dialect and have access to caribou and seals, Southern Canadian tribes have an Ojibwe dialect and can farm, but the Northeast Canadian tribes face extremely cold weather during winter, which means it is too cold to farm and there is only a sparse amount of animals to hunt (Ridington 2012). In areas in which European settlers invaded, there was nothing to do, nothing to see, but a sea of endless trees and freezing cold. One of the first European settler groups, majority of them came from England and France, to enter into this area were fur trappers and traders. These initial European settler groups were ill-equipped to handle the forest's freezing conditions.

In a large group of trappers traveling together, it was quite common for members of the group to slowly be separated, killed by the harshness of the environment, and become divided against each other. "Derangement caused by starvation is remarkably similar to descriptions of Windigos. Starvation led to insanity and descent into demonism" (Podruchny 2004: 687). When Native people saw these foreigners acting strangely, who did not speak the same language and had different customs, their behavior would, understandably, strike fear in anyone, especially the Canadian aboriginals. The fear of unfamiliarity is epitomized here in the way stories about windigos were becoming more commonplace during this time period. This was as a result of the European settlers writing down these traditionally oral myths for the first time. Once the stories were transliterated from the original Algonquian into French and English, the stories were able to reach more people. Northeast indigenous people and a few trappers that regularly interacted with the tribes, typically spoke Algonquian. By translating the stories into English and French, the trappers spread the stories to other people outside of the Native tribes with whom they interacted with during their travels, causing the stories to spread and become more popular. Generations of

indigenous people have told these windigo stories, but traditionally only older members of the tribes legitimately believe them to be true. The youth of the tribes believed these stories were just stories and to not be taken seriously. Unfortunately, this is not the only impact that European settlers have had on Native people.

Aggressive European Invasion, Ethnic Cleansing, and its Impacts:

When European settlers forced their way onto Native land, they introduced new diseases, dislocation, and the disintegration of indigenous communities. As a result, the Native people's population was greatly impacted. With the retreat of the European settlers from Canada back to Europe after they began the colonization process in the mid 1800s, came the end of the decades of forced Western "normalization" and integration of the Canadian aboriginal people. The indigenous people had their culture and their individuality stripped from them and they lost a portion of their identities through forced adaptation to the foreign European culture, traditions, and generalized Western society. As one can imagine, the trauma from this time period left new legacies as much physically as the trauma did culturally, permanently altering long-standing traditions and introducing a foreign mindset. After living for so long in fear and being told how to behave, it was startling to suddenly be considered "on their own" once more (Gone 2008: 311). Isolation, followed by sudden disruption, forced integration, and confusion of what to do afterwards left a void. After Europe relinquished their total control over the Canadian aboriginal population, the indigenous people went to the extreme to be as different from the domineering Europeans as possible due to the trauma associated. Because of this internalized association of Westernization equally bad, the First Worlds missed out on a lot of progress.

A great example of the progress they missed out on includes the advancement of working towards ending the stigmatisation of mental health. In First Nations society, there is shame associated with mental health; no one has time to deal with problems that are not “real” and require immediate decisions involving life or death scenarios. Indigenous society does not think mental health concerns are priority because there are real dangers like animal attacks or starvation; there is no room to worry about something that is not seen (Waldram 2015: 217). But, ignoring problems does not make them go away and can in turn lead to these problems getting worse over time. While Europeans were slowly beginning to focus on expanding interest on mental health in regards to psychology, the indigenous people of Canada were avoiding it because the Europeans were interested in it. As a result of the European colonizers suddenly leaving, the First Nations were left to fester with their thoughts instead of having access to help and support due to their cynicism of receiving help from people who hurt them for decades.

Is the Windigo Killable?:

What is important to note, is that there are two extremely different interpretations of how to kill a windigo (Carlson 2009: 386). The first interpretation is to physically kill the windigo by setting it on fire, letting it burn until the heart of ice completely melts, and then cutting off its head to separate it from the body for good measure. The idea behind having the head separated from the body is to prevent another windigo spirit possessing the body as well as preventing the same windigo spirit from coming back. Without a head, the body cannot support life so unfortunately, by killing the windigo in this way, it permanently kills both the monster and the human still trapped inside. The heart of ice represents the evil windigo spirit’s hold on the once

human body so when the ice heart melts, this indicates the spirit officially leaving the body and going back to the spirit world. The second interpretation of how to kill a windigo is to metaphorically kill the monster with patience, kindness, and love. An older woman in the community is chosen for this task of killing the windigo with kindness because windigos fear the smell of menstrual blood. Female fertility is thought to be a threat to windigos because tribes have internally explained that windigos represent the collapse and destruction of the social structure. Through this representation, female fertility is a threat to windigos because it brings order back to these structures that the windigo is aiming to destroy and allows for humanity to survive through procreation (Smallman 2015: 47). An older woman in menopause is chosen over a woman who is able to menstruate for this task because it tricks the creature into thinking that the woman is stronger than the windigo. If the woman was able to survive years of menstrual cycles, then the windigo believes the woman can out survive the windigo and should be feared.

This wizened elderly woman is tasked with bringing the creature back to humanity, rehabilitating it through acts of kindness by cooking for it, covering it in blankets, and tenderly tending to their wounds. Initially, the windigo resists such kindness because they are used to being solitary creatures who only look out for themselves. Over time, they learn to accept this help and allow for the elderly woman to metaphorically “melt” their ice heart back into humanity (Rivard 2017). Both the tribe interpretation of a windigo representing a collapse of structure and the metaphorical representation of ignoring mental health and letting the problem fester and worsen go hand in hand. By having the mindset that a community member suddenly comes out of nowhere to cause societal destruction places blame on the person instead of acknowledging societal blame causing this behavior. As discussed earlier, this is generally how First Nations

cultures and tribes handle mental health, which is to not do anything about it and pretend that it is not a problem. This is indicative of how women with mental health are statistically more likely to rehabilitate as in seek out mental health treatment, whereas men are statistically more likely to commit suicide due to mental illness (Tijernia-Jim 1993: 36).

Why the Windigo Fears a Woman on Her “Moon Time:”

In indigenous Canadian tribes, a woman’s menstruation, also referred to as a woman’s “moon time,” is considered to be a healthy time of rest and regeneration. This is especially so with Ojibwe women because they can reflect and recognize their important roles as life givers and community leaders. For the duration of an Ojibwe woman’s length of menstruation, she would traditionally be secluded in a “moon lodge.” A moon lodge is a small, secluded, wigwam where women retreated to in order to be separate from the rest of the tribe. Female friends and relatives visited the moon lodge often in order to ensure the menstruating woman was safe and fed. Additionally, they helped care for her family and other duties in her absence because the menstruating woman is not allowed to do any chores, like food preparation, or have any contact with men. Instead of a prison to keep women away, moon lodges are seen as a safe and private space for them (Buckley 1988: 127). The menstruating woman is kept from the rest of the tribe to because it is thought she is following the link between humanity and spirituality.

Women are considered to be in a spiritually charged state while they are menstruating and are closer to the spirit world where they can receive guidance from friendly spirits, including their spirit guides. The act of being in the moon lodge is self-centering on their ability to give life and to rehabilitate others, like the windigo. Their moon time is their “moon power,” so to speak.

Through their femininity, they are able to reach and metaphorically “save” others like the humans trapped within the windigo. While in the moon lodge, the menstruating woman is not allowed to participate in, or touch anything relating to, a ceremony. For Ojibwe women, menstruation is considered to be an internal source of power of birth and inner prayer. On the other hand, ceremonies signify an external source of power of spiritual rebirth that focuses on creating outward energy (Pember 2019). Ceremonies and a woman on her moon time are not allowed to mix because they are seen as opposite sources of power, internal vs external.

In an oral story originating from Cree from the James Bay region, a young woman was able to not only escape from a windigo, but kill it, because she was menstruating. This young woman was alone in a menses hut on the edge of the encampment, similar to a moon lodge from Ojibwe culture, when she saw a windigo approaching. He had just finished slaughtering her entire community, but she was spared due to her menses hut’s location being on the outskirts of her encampment. While he was approaching, the young woman was able to run into the woods and climb a tree. The windigo followed her and lit a fire at the base of the tree. Luckily, the woman brought a kettle with her when she fled. She urinated into the kettle and dumped its contents onto the cannibal, who became consumed by madness. He began to talk to himself and wondered if he was made of delicious fat to eat. Because he was in this delirious state due to the influence of the menstrual urine being poured on him, he cut himself in the stomach so his fat could pour out, and began to eat his own fat. By morning, the windigo was gone and the woman survived (story found within Smallman 2015: 46-47).

In Ojibwe culture, a woman does not lose her spiritual potential during the rest of the month when she is not bleeding, just like the moon does not disappear when it is not full. The

moon is always in the sky regardless if people can see it or not, which is the same with a woman's power. Because the young woman from the story was actively menstruating when she encountered the windigo, she was at her most capable and her urine contained a small amount of her condensed influence. Even though it was a little amount, it was still too much for the windigo and he was driven to insanity which showcases how powerful women actually are and why windigos respect post-menopausal women. After every menstrual cycle, a woman becomes exponentially more attuned with their full potential that far outshines any windigo. Menstrual taboos in some societies across the world stem from the idea of having to protect society from a universally ascribed impure, feminine evil. However, in Ojibwe society, the community explicitly protects the perceived creative spirituality of menstruous women from the influence of others.

Mental Health and the Metaphors on Processing:

The two ways to kill the windigo can represent femininity and masculinity within the indigenous communities, due to the methods of how to kill a windigo. These two methods, either by physically or metaphorically, melting the windigo's icy heart personify the gender difference in how indigenous Canadian community members approach mental health.. Within the Native communities, there are designated jobs for the genders in general and in regards to the windigo. Depending on the specific windigo case, one method of "killing" it will be tried first, either physically or metaphorically, before the other is tried. Each windigo case is considered to be on a case by case basis due to windigos being known to live an autonomous and solitude life. When trying to metaphorically "kill" the windigo with kindness, it is strictly a woman's job to care for

the windigo so it can cease its hold on the human trapped inside (Brightman 1988: 363). An elder woman in the community is tasked with this because, in addition to having braved years of menstrual cycles that the windigo fears, they are thought to be the most kind and have lived the fullest life. Through decades of having her “moon time,” she has reached her fullest power potential and has the strongest connection with the spirit world in the community; all of this is key in being able to melt the windigo’s icy hold on the human (Buckley 1988: 128).

Due to the harshness of the winters in this area, it is thought to be too dangerous for women to leave the home so men have the singular task of hunting and providing for their families. Because men are preoccupied with hunting what little food they can muster up during the harsh winters, which is considered to be the most important task for the very tangible fear of starvation, they are often gone from the house for long periods of time on hunting trips (Bishop 1976: 42). While men provide the physical necessities to survive, women are the glue that keeps the family together. There is the stereotype and idea of “toxic masculinity” where men have to always be tough, uncaring, and anti-feminine. This can relate back to the mental health aspect since taking the time to care for a mental illness and treating it with compassion is thought to be a more “feminine” way to handle it. Women are speculated to have a base nature of healing and men are deemed to be the opposite, which is why as a pair, they work so well. This is a flawed way of thinking of things because if a man does not have the capability of healing on his own, due to the pressure of healing being feminine while being damaged is masculine.

Overall, there is a lack of resources and motivation in Native communities to prioritize mental health because it is not thought to be a tangible illness. As time progresses, mental health is starting to be considered more important and something to be considered in these communities

due to the high rate of suicide and alcohol dependency of Native people, but it is still not as widely accepted. Out of the small percentage of people that do seek out help for mental health, statistically women are more likely to seek third party help, like therapy, while men internalize and do not seek help (Tijerina-Jim 1993: 36). Since men in the indigenous communities generally believe that it is un-masculine to care for their mental health, or have healthy coping mechanisms, this leads to a lack of proper communication skills. Stemming from this, metaphorically killing someone's identity who is different from their own, or an "outsider" instead of trying to understand their differences. The "just man up" masculine way of dealing with emotions and mental health, or in other words repressing and not handling them, can be represented by the physical killing of the windigo. This colloquial term to "just man up" is aimed towards men and means to build up enough courage to face adversity and responsibility independently. When someone "mans-up," they project maturity and increase respect received from society when they are dealing with an obligation or a challenge in a "manly" or strong "anti-feminine" way. To "just man up" typically means to show little to no emotion because of the stereotype that only women can show their emotions; a man showing emotions is thought to be weak. By physically burning the windigo, the human is lost forever when the monster is killed. Instead of taking the time to understand the windigo and help it return to humanity, both the human and the windigo are killed.

This myth is indicative of, and important to, Native cultures because it is deeply rooted in the historical time period of the European invasion beginning in the 17th century. While the monster itself may not exist physically, what it represents and describes metaphorically are extremely palpable. By being patient and working with the monster, metaphorically, members of

the tribe are working with and supporting their fellow peers affected by the imperial invaders who suffer mental scars left behind. Canadian aboriginals have experienced an exorbitant amount of mental trauma as a result of imperialism, lack of resources, and the generalized stigma behind mental illness not being a “real” illness because the trauma cannot tangibly be seen or felt.

Conclusion:

The Canadian aboriginal myth of the windigo, as it pertains to Algonquian-speaking tribes of Northeastern Canada within the subarctic region, is a complicated myth that is best understood as having multiple and layered meanings. The windigo is a monster that represents a multitude of things, including a combination of European settlers’ invasion and its negative effects on the Native people, as well as a community that disregards mental health. Through looking at the West versus the Rest Theory, there is a better understanding as to why Europe was able to invade and how they used this as an excuse to use the indigenous communities for their resources. The indigenous community, generally, disregards mental health because it is thought as not being tangible and thus not an issue to prioritize. The windigo is just a way of representing and externalizing previously internalized problems associated with settler colonialism and the effort to dominate and control the everyday lives of First Nations. Additionally, the windigo represents a society that ostracizes people with mental illnesses instead of assisting in their wellness journeys. When someone was coming from the brink of starvation or had to go through the horrors of eating another person in order to survive, it has been documented to break down

and change that person's ethics and morals due to the taboo mindset of cannibalism being the worst sin someone one can do.

By making the decision to succumb to cannibalism in a survival situation, Windigo Psychosis can occur. This mental illness happens due to the decision to breach the person's own ethics and morals by committing anthropophagy, internalize this decision, and later on digest and unpack it after they have the chance to thrive instead of animalistically survive. Legacies of cultural integration from the colonial influence of the victim mindset, combined with starvation due to the lack of resources in the subarctic region of Northeastern Canada during winter, led to the windigo myth staying relevant across hundreds of years. This myth originated as an explanation for the fear and lack of understanding of a mental illness, Windigo Psychosis. While Windigo Psychosis has been argued to not be a real condition because it is a culture-bound syndrome and is rare to document, having less documentation on it does not make it any less real. Even if the person falls victim to Windigo Psychosis through the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy theory, which is where a person begins to believe they have this syndrome and thus it becomes reality, they still have a tangible mental illness. On the outside, when someone has this condition, it appears to others as a person losing their humanity and transforming into a monster. While this transformation process was hard to explain hundreds of years ago when the windigo myth first originated, in modern society it is explained as being a combined representation of fear. Fear of not understanding a mental health disorder like Windigo Psychosis, the indigenous fear of being dislodged from their land by European settlers, and others. The windigo does not represent merely one metaphor; instead it encompasses a multitude of metaphors for fear.

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