

# **An Indigenous Perspective of Western Science: Decolonizing & Restructuring**

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Though limited, the literature focusing on young Native children reminds us that providing opportunities for early development of language and other skills can have significant influence on how well these children will do academically in their later life as students. In addition, the review of recent information on the development of the brain tells us that the environment in which young children learn influences the development of their many intelligences. The message is very clear—if parents and educators have an interest in promoting the development of smart, healthy, well-adjusted children, we must provide a safe, challenging, and enriched environment early in the life of a child.

The importance of Native language and cultural programs in schools in motivating students, promoting a positive sense of identity and self, stimulating positive attitudes about school and others outside a child's immediate environment, and supporting improved academic performance among Native students is worthy of recognition outside Native communities. The concept is accepted among Native peoples in the United States and in the Circumpolar North.

William Demmert, 2001

The success of Native college students depends on many of the same factors that influence the achievements of Native elementary and secondary students. Family support, knowledge of the basics, motivation, sense of identity and self, language development, early goal settings, and mentors all affect whether a student stays in college and succeeds academically, socially, and spiritually.

William Demmert, 2001

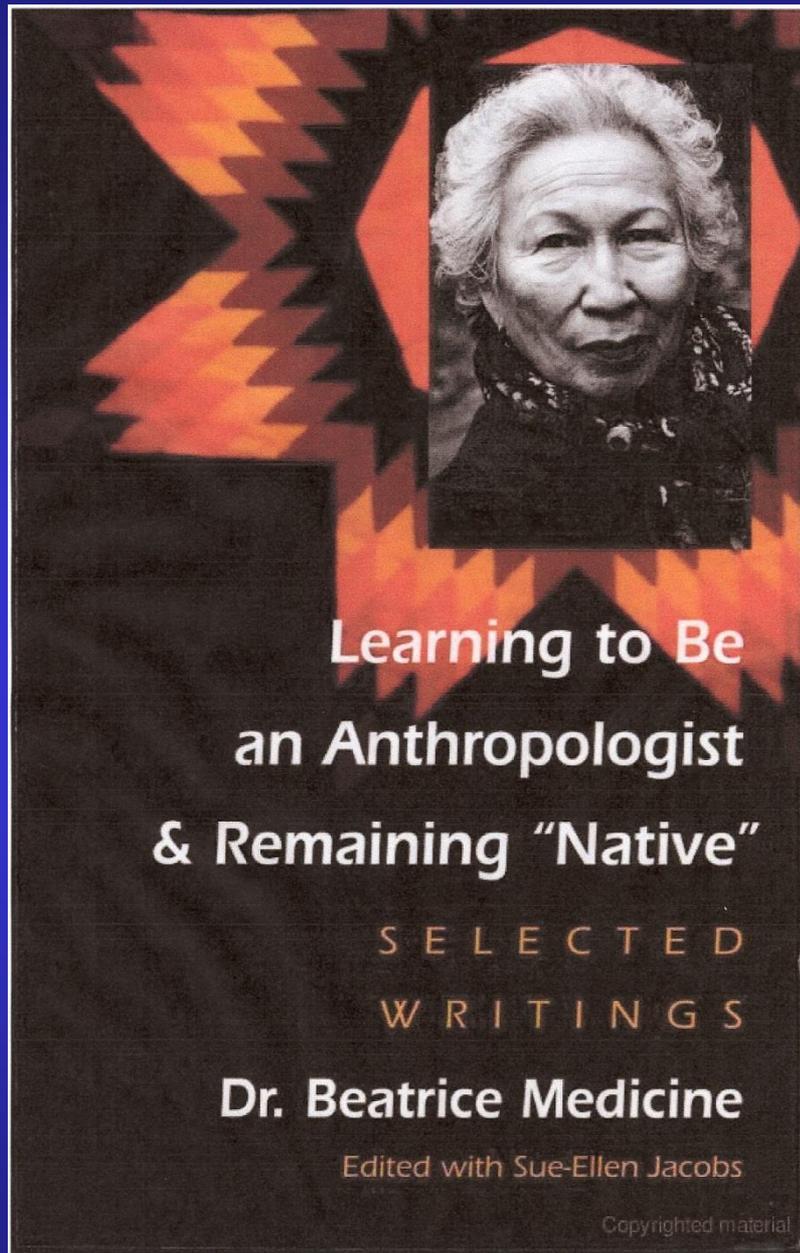


# Challenge

## Ways of Knowing and their Cultural Disconnects

- ❖ **Before we move ahead**, have we looked deep enough into the implicit values of our science and how they reflect upon the “space –in-between”?
  - ❖ **Standards created historically and currently are rooted in Western Scientific values**
  - ❖ **What kind of impact does this have on non-Western European people?**
- 





# Question: Why this book title?

Implies one must fight to maintain one's cultural identity when engaging in scientific research.

Why is this?

**A brief historical analysis can shed light on why this happens to us.**





## Origins of Western European science and thought-

**Plato:** Humans were capable of obtaining “symbols” of truth through reason.

**However, according to Plato, only ‘enlightened’ men were capable of this kind of understanding!**

**The Greeks called everyone who was not like them “barbarians.” Meaning the “other” and regarded them as uncivilized, untamed, wild, and without morals.**

**It follows, then, that taking from these “beasts” is not theft, but using it for the greater good.**

**In the Greek mind, it was like plunder from war.  
Is it any different now?**

**Is the attitude toward Native Indigenous people any different?**

- Divorced ways of knowing from all but the mind
- Became THE standard for knowledge attainment
- Became the basis for scientific methodology
- Created a dichotomy between people

Superior

Thinking

Men

White

Free men

Mind

Human

Objective

Civilized

Inferior

Feeling

Women

Non-white

Slaves

Nature (Natural)

Animal

Subjective

Primitive

## Historical Consequences:

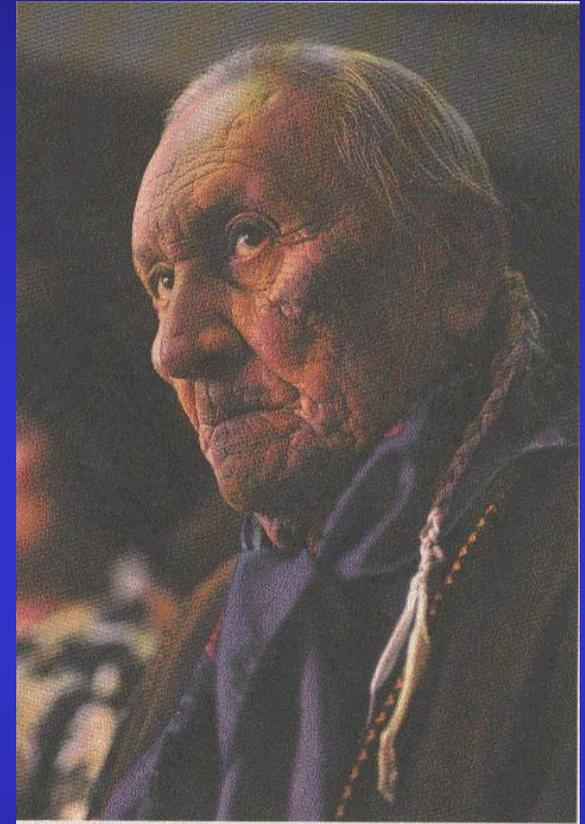
- ❖ Women were excluded from academic pursuits—not allowed in institutions of higher learning because it was thought they were not capable (Wertheim, 1995).
- ❖ Nor were men of color or white servants for the same reason.
- ❖ G. Stanley Hall, while noted for his attempts to combat bigotry, still said that ‘lower races’ are to be considered as still at the ‘adolescent’ phase; they are ‘the world’s children and adolescents’ (p. 748), ‘Natural races are in the process of development’ (p. 719), (cited in, Richards, 2012, p. 26).

“The 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of ‘scientific objectivity’ now begins to look like one aspect of the Olympian consciousness of that century’s white male elite.” (Richards, 2012, p. 35).

Can we say this applies to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well?

**When the enlightenment set out to understand the external world in objective terms**, apart from the inner life of the knower, it took a tack away from the holistic education that had previously characterized the Western academy and the classical traditions of learning throughout the Middle East and Asia, an education that aspired to nurture both the inner and the outer (Coburn, 2005)...

“For the present, the indigenous way of seeing things like traditional Indians is...incongruent with the linear world [of science]. The **linear mind looks for cause and effect,** and the **Indian mind seeks to comprehend relationships.**” (Fixico, 2003, p. 8) -Seminole-Creek tribe.

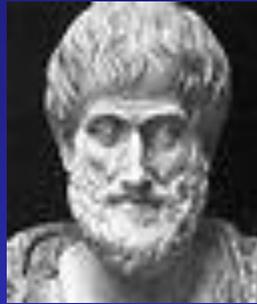


When the late Vine Deloria, Jr., a respected American Indian scholar, was asked during an interview about the fundamental difference between the Western and indigenous ways of life, he replied: **"I think the primary difference is that Indians experience and relate to a living universe, whereas Western people--especially scientists--reduce all things, living or not, to objects."** (Deloria, 2000) Lakota tribe

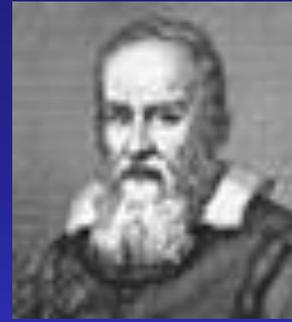




**Plato**



**Aristotle**



**Galileo**



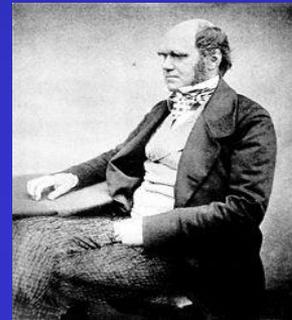
**René Descartes**



**Isaac Newton**



**Francis Bacon**



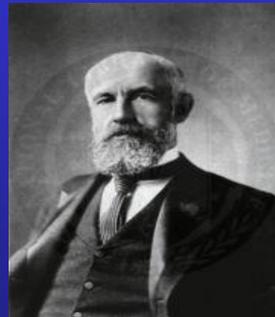
**Charles Darwin**



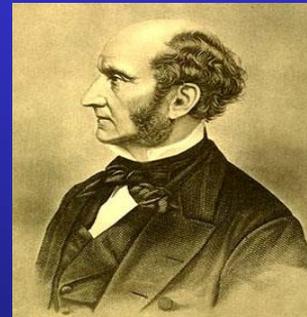
**John Dalton**



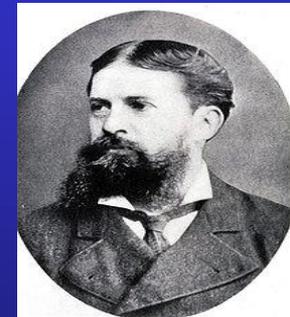
**John Locke**



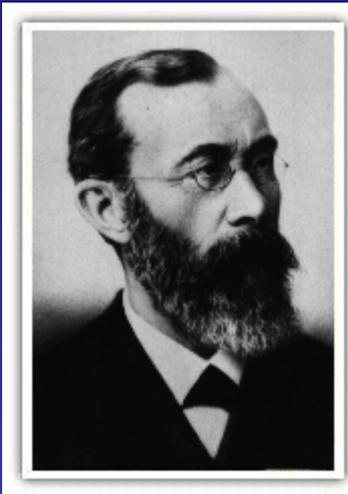
**G Stanley Hall**



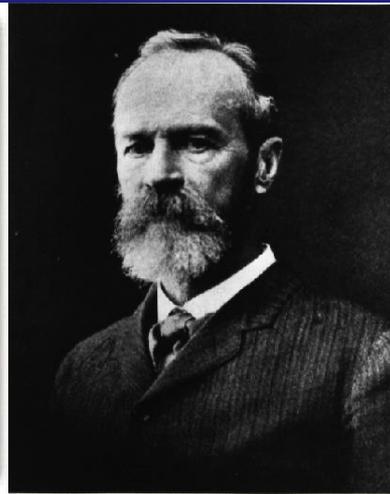
**John Stewart Mill**



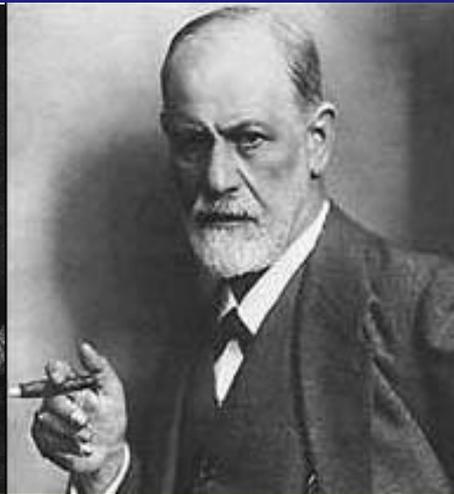
**Charles Peirce**



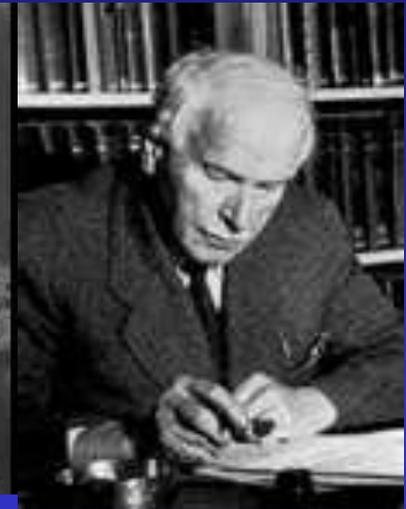
Wilhelm Wundt -  
father of  
psychology



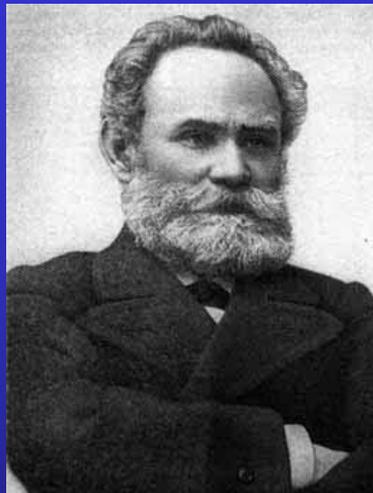
William James -  
father of American  
psychology



Sigmund Freud



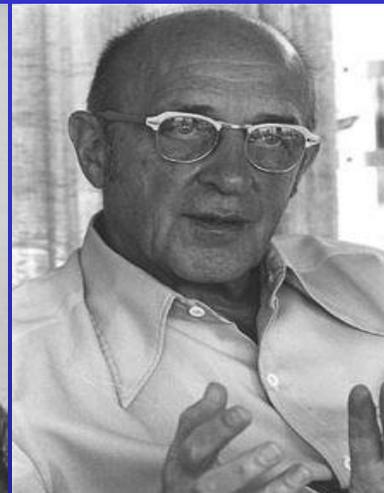
Carl Jung



Ivan Pavlov



Abraham Maslow



Carl Rogers



B. F. Skinner

# Western European Cultural Values

**WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP HUMAN BEINGS HAVE TO THE REST OF THE WORLD (CREATION)?**

-SUPERIOR, POWER OVER

**WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND?**

-SEPARATE, TO BE CONQUERED, MASTERED

**WHAT IS OUR BASIC ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD?**

-DOING

**WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO TIME?**

-FUTURE-ORIENTED

**WHAT IS OUR BASIS FOR SUCCESS?**

-PERSONAL GAIN, STATUS, WEALTH, PROPERTY

**WHAT IS OUR SOURCE OF MOTIVATION?**

-SELF

**WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY PERSON?**

-Independent, Autonomous, Self-made, "I can do it myself",  
Assertive, Vocal, Self-confident, etc.

# VALUES OF WESTERN SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

- **Linear reasoning**
  - **Scientific method**
  - **Objective knowledge**
  - **Assumes its science is superior to other ways of knowing**
  - **Individualistic**
  - **Mastery and control (power over)**
- 

People in the “superior to creation” world view will see nature more as a curiosity and challenge to tame or conquer and thus approach the world with an attitude of superiority and view all of life as pointing to them. While, Indigenous People will approach life with a respectful and honoring attitude, and view each aspect as containing meaning and lessons for living together, each aspect of life having meaning in itself.



Reinhold Niebuhr stated that those who hold to power in this way assume both moral and intellectual superiority over the “other.”

It follows that if one culture holds the “higher truth” then there is no need to try to understand the “other.” Rather one would expect them to come around to your way of thinking and living. “Civilizing the Native” is an example of this dynamic.

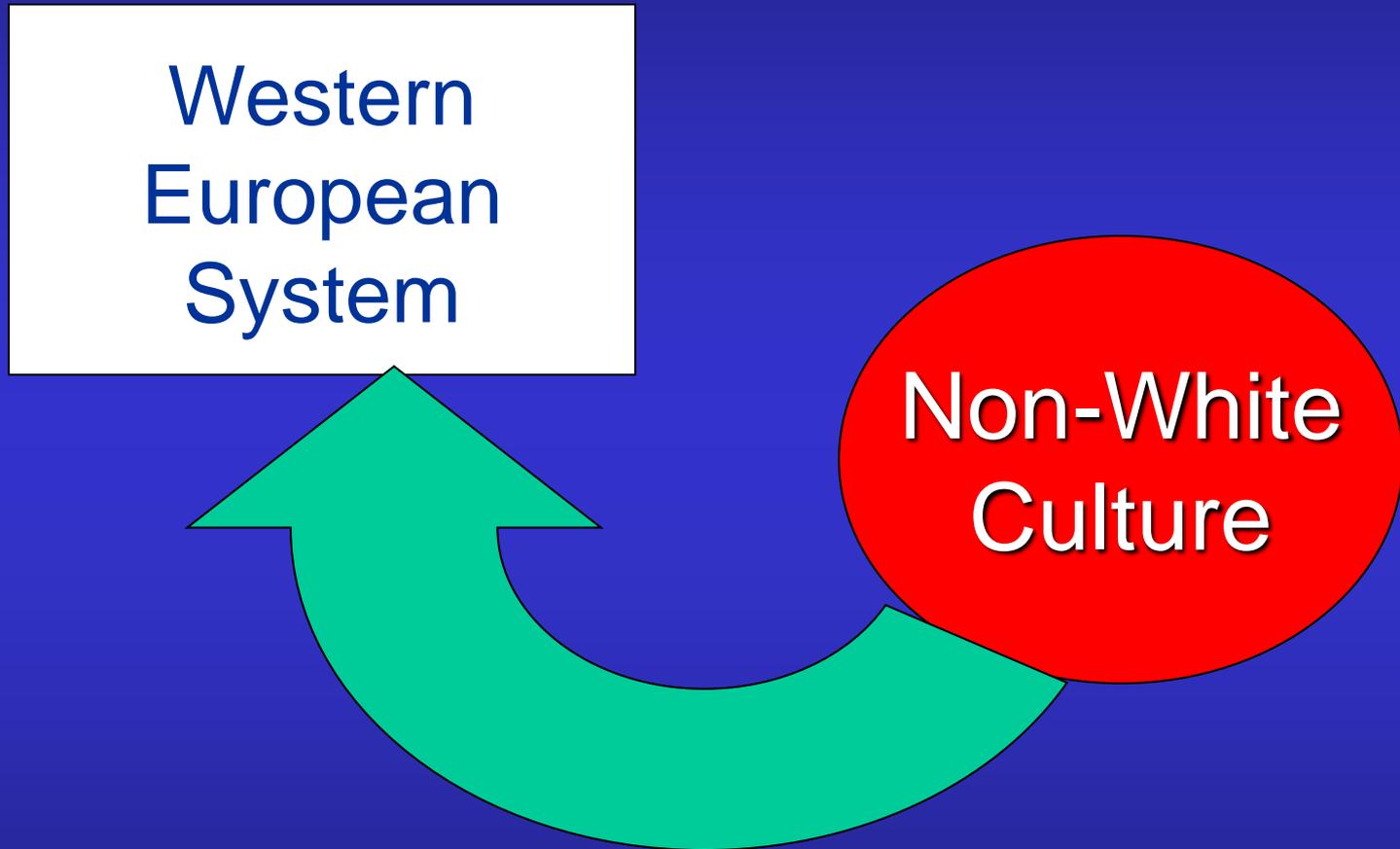
**“We want to develop EBT’s [Evidence Based Treatments] for individuals of diverse ethnicities and cultures, not only within our country or continent but for diverse peoples of the world.” (Kazdin, 2008, p. 208).**

There are three major implications to this statement that reflect this sense of Western scientific superiority:

1. “We” implies Western scientists;
2. “develop EBT’s ...” implies that non-served cultures have not developed effective practices; and,
3. implies that these countries and cultures have not been actively involved in addressing the psychological needs of their people over time.

This is all well-intentioned, yet extremely dangerous, as it relegates all other ways of knowing to an inferior status and ignores thousands of years by which ideas from other cultures and countries successfully and effectively engaged in indigenous, non-western healing practices.

# CULTURAL DYNAMIC RESULTING FROM WHITE SUPERIORITY AND COLONIZATION





Carlisle Indian  
boarding school

Tuskegee men  
in syphilis study



Clearly, this is an imbalance of power:

- disrupts authentic communication
- creates a superior-inferior dynamic
- damages the well-being of the “inferior”
- bolsters the status of the “superior”
- creates distrust
- subtly undermines the status of the “inferior” culture
- effects colonization (unawares)

# Typical Indigenous Cultural Values

**WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP HUMAN BEINGS HAVE TO THE REST OF THE WORLD (CREATION)?**

-EQUAL, SHARED POWER

**WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND?**

-LEARNERS, RESPECTFUL, FAMILY

**WHAT IS OUR BASIC ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD?**

-BEING

**WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO TIME?**

-PRESENT-ORIENTED

**WHAT IS OUR BASIS FOR SUCCESS?**

-CONNECTION TO TRIBE, COMMUNITY, FAMILY, NATURE

**WHAT IS OUR SOURCE OF MOTIVATION?**

-OUR PURPOSE TO THE TRIBE, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY

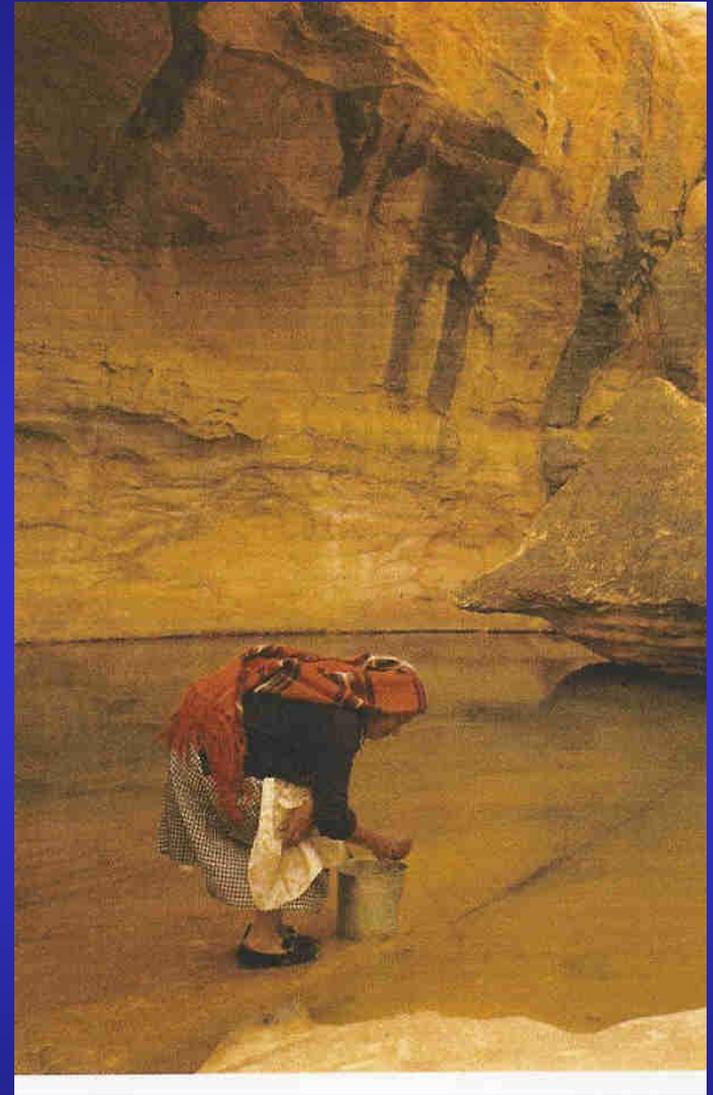
**WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY PERSON?**

-INTERDEPENDENT, KNOWS HOW TO ACT IN RELATION TO OTHERS, QUIET, RESPECTFUL



The difference in world views constitutes, at this time, an insurmountable, fundamental difference.

Given these differences, we must re-evaluate our use of scientific method in the context of non-Western cultures.



Scheurich & Young (1997) call this dynamic “epistemological racism,” meaning that our current range of research epistemologies—positivism to postmodernisms/poststructuralisms—arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race, that these epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures). Consequently, there are inevitably negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular.



They further state that the negative consequences for the non-Western scholar is that they must learn and become accomplished in the epistemologies (ways of knowing) that arise out of a history that has historically been profoundly hostile to their race and that excludes or ignores alternative culture-based epistemologies.



## Western European Scientific Values

“Research ‘through imperial eyes’ describes an approach that assumes Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings. It is an approach to indigenous peoples which still conveys a sense of innate superiority and an overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of indigenous people—spiritually, intellectually, socially and economically.”-*Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa/Ngati Porou)*

## Western European Scientific Values

It is research which is imbued with an 'attitude' and a 'spirit' which assumes a certain ownership of the entire world, and which has established systems and forms of governance which embed that attitude in institutional practices. These practices determine what counts as legitimate research and who count as legitimate researchers. They tell us whether our research is "valid." ."-Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa/Ngati Porou)

Miguel De La Torre describes that around the world and especially in the United States, **privileged students are provided the opportunity to gain an education from privileged scholars.** Structures such as this, De La Torre says, are not neutral. The dominant order promotes Eurocentric ethics from generation to generation, and meanwhile, the poor and marginalized of the world fail to have their voice.





Eurocentric scholars speak of ethics from their perspective in an academic sense. Yet the privileged scholars cannot fully appreciate the condition of the poor: their hunger, their thirst, their monotony, their struggle. Instead, De La Torre declares that **it is those doing ethics at the margins of power and privilege that concentrate on practical praxis [everyday life] behavior and actions towards [social] justice (Knabb, 2005).**

# The Effects of Colonization

- Colonized our land: possessed, renamed, reframed the relationship to the land
- Colonized our tribes: took control over through genocide, coercion, even renaming who we call ourselves!
- Colonized our language
- Colonized our knowledge
- Colonized our thinking
- Colonized our healing ways

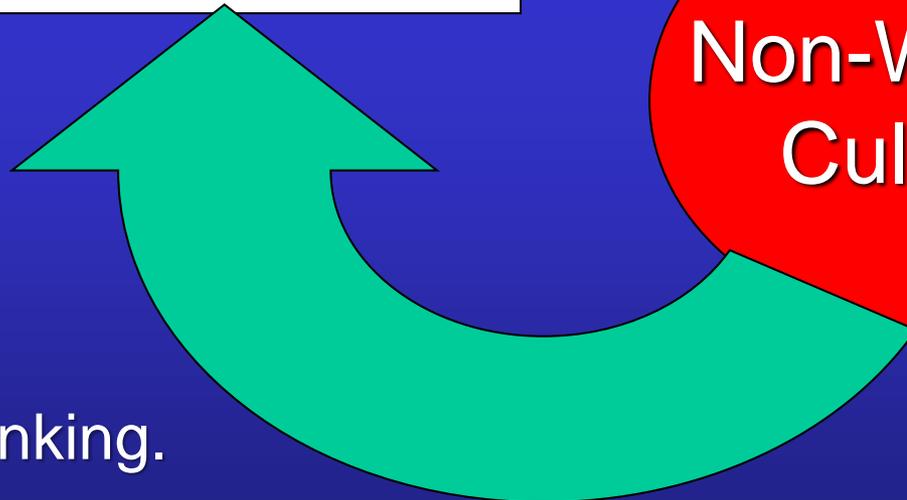
# CULTURAL DYNAMIC RESULTING FROM EPISTEMOLOGICAL SUPERIORITY—Power and uni-directionality.

**Western  
European  
Science**

We will study you from  
our point of view.

**Non-Western  
Cultures**

You need  
to come around  
to our way of thinking.



# Consequences:

Disparities in mental health service delivery, quality, usage, & outcomes have not decreased in the least in the past 25 years

(Isaacs, Huang, Hernandez & Echo-Hawk, 2005; The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).





Are “cultural adaptations” simply Western therapies dressed up in culture?

# WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

There is a need to support and accept the emergence of other epistemologies.

“Research needs to be based on the reality of our [Hopi] existence as we experience it, not just from the narrow and limited view of American universities carried over from German research tradition.”

(Hopi Tribal Chairman, Vernon Masayesva)

Western science needs to become decentralized—move off its center and its notions of superiority.

A greater openness by science for other epistemologies must emerge, with the recognition that they are to be treated with equal respect.

Our ethics must be anchored in the ethics of the oppressed, not the elite.

## **Cultural competence is first and foremost an attitude.**

- To be truly cross-cultural we must become familiar with other ways of knowing and being.
  - We must disentangle ourselves from the existing dominant narratives and seek to understand from a broader perspective.
  - We need to examine our own relationship to space and time.
  - What kind of energy do we exhibit in the space we inhabit and in our relationships?
  - We need to examine our relationship to power, examine whether we truly listen or easily dismiss other ways of knowing.
  - We must anchor ourselves in a foundation of social justice.
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# Practice-Based Evidence (PBE)

- PBE started as a way to organize our thinking about the role of culture in treatment & evidence-building – the use of the initials “PBE” was an intentional flip of the “EBP”, PBE work was serious in nature, but also employed social marketing as a way to stimulate broader thinking .
- Practice-Based Evidence is defined as a range of treatment approaches and supports that emerge from the community or culture that are recognized as effective.
- It is also an attempt to bring the locus of healing back into the community and a reversal of historical implementation of services of care.

**Mvto! (Thank you.)**

