

# APA Newsletters

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## NEWSLETTER ON AMERICAN INDIANS IN PHILOSOPHY

FROM THE EDITORS, KATY GRAY BROWN & LORRAINE MAYER

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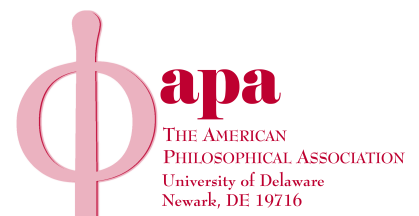
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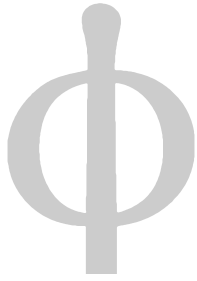
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## ARTICLES

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### ***Indian on the Lawn: How are Research Partnerships with Aboriginal Peoples Possible?***

**Dennis H. McPherson**  
*Lakehead University*

**Abstract:**

*If Aboriginal research is to be meaningful, its initial benefits must accrue to the Aboriginal community from which the data are derived. Interpretive analysis can only be carried out by individuals grounded within the area of study. This paper addresses systemic discrimination present within mainstream institutions that negatively influences the Aboriginal research agenda. I argue for a respectful approach to the investigation of the wisdom of the Elders while recognizing that we are not a homogenous group of like beings where we can build solely on similarities. Like it or not, we are unique individuals and we must respect our differences.*

A review of the literature pertaining to Aboriginal peoples shows an overwhelming acceptance by researchers to focus their research ON Aboriginal peoples as objects of inquiry; as things to be studied. From this perspective, researchers have developed their careers, their understanding of Aboriginal communities, their partnerships with these communities and their research priorities revolving around this perspective as if it were a legitimate conclusion. But this is a wrong-headed perspective leading to a false conclusion. We, the Aboriginal peoples, are not objects of inquiry, and we are not things to be studied in order to build a career for someone else! As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues:

Research “through imperial eyes” describes an approach which assumes that 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 overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of indigenous peoples—spiritually, intellectually, socially and economically. It is research which from indigenous perspectives “steals” knowledge from others and then uses it to benefit the people who “stole” it. Some indigenous and minority group researchers would call this approach simply racist.<sup>1</sup>

Acceptance of the false conclusion that we are simply objects to be studied requires researchers and others to defend their individual positions within that context. For example, in the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) internet discussion groups (Aboriginal\_research@yahoo.com), individuals attempt to substantiate their positions, arguing for acceptance of Aboriginal ways of knowing within the inner circle of the scientific and academic communities. Non-Aboriginal researchers seem to be offended by being questioned about their motives and, in turn, threaten to walk out on the discussion if this is an “us/them” dichotomy. Arguments abound supporting the importance of Native languages and an oral tradition. Arguments are even provided to support such things as Aboriginal methodologies, Aboriginal ethical positions, and copyright of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. But ethical, legal, and methodological discussions are part of the Western tradition that has objectified Aboriginal peoples. If we are to understand our world, it must be seen within the historical context in which it has developed.

Was Christopher Columbus a great discoverer as many are led to believe, or was Christopher Columbus merely a religious fanatic of his time? He was a Christian and, since there was practically no other game in town during his lifetime, he was likely a Roman Catholic. His purpose in coming to the New World was to find gold to support an army to fight a religious war. The result was devastating for the peoples of the Americas. Dominican priests documented Spanish savagery in the Caribbean:

Some Christians encountered an Indian woman, who was carrying in her arms a child at suck; and since the dog they had with them was hungry, they tore the child from the mother’s arms and flung it still living to the dog, who proceeded to devour it before the mother’s eyes. ...When there were among the prisoners some women who had recently given birth, if the new-born babes happened to cry, they seized them by the legs and hurled them against the rocks, or flung them into the jungle so that they would be certain to die there.<sup>2</sup>

Let’s fast forward to 1857 to “*An Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes of this Province...*” which is the forerunner to the present day *Indian Act*. Does this Act assume that we Aboriginal peoples are not civilized? And what about enfranchisement, that great opportunity to gain the right to exercise civil rights and liberties alongside all ordinary Canadian citizens, which was taken away from us in the progressive revisions to the Indian Act in 1985, leaving us condemned to being “uncivilized” forevermore? Isn’t this a step backwards? Moreover, times have changed considerably in the past hundred and fifty years. In colonial times the statute of the settler population was in respect of an uncivilized Aboriginal population determined by blood and those that were married

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to them. Contemporary thinking in modern times has made it possible for not only each and every one of Canada's citizens to one day be a registered Status Indian, but for many others as well, depending on with whom Status Indians choose to have children.

Our colonial past has important implications for our understandings of present day relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the settler population, as it is defined within the legal regime of Canada. In the time of Columbus these relationships were very simple and the "us/them" dichotomy was very clear. "Us" was the ones on the shore; "them" was the ones on the ships.\* The contemporary Canadian legal system concerning "Indians" has evolved from this simple ship/shore dichotomy into the much more complicated one we have today. Our apparent lack of understanding of these relationships allows for the proliferation of well-meaning contemporary projects supposedly directed toward the betterment of Aboriginal people in the areas of child welfare, economic development, education, justice, and so forth. In so far as present day research is concerned, again, I agree with Linda Tuhiwai Smith:

In traveling around other places I have met indigenous people who have experienced similar histories as researchers. Their tertiary education was alienating and disconnected from the needs of their own communities. The more educated they became the more it was assumed that they would not want to return to their own communities. Assimilation policies in education were intended to provide one way roads out for those indigenous people who "qualified." Many did take that road and have never returned. There are many others, however, who choose to remain, to wear their identities with pride and work with and for their own communities and nations. In various places around the world there are small initiatives which are providing indigenous peoples with space to create and be indigenous. Research seems such a small and technical aspect of the wider politics of indigenous peoples. It is often thought of as an activity which only anthropologists do! *As indigenous peoples we have our own research needs and priorities. Our questions are important.* Research helps us to answer them.<sup>3</sup>

As Australian scholars Brown and Sant have observed: "Indigenous Peoples continuing to live in the nation states which colonized them still experience the consequences of past and continuing racism."<sup>4</sup>

The concerns that Smith, Brown, and Sant are addressing are concerns that I also have and that I see manifested in my classes all of the time. For the most part, indigenous or Aboriginal students in mainstream institutions spend most of their time in argument or debate defending their right to exist in this world. Their struggles add to their frustration, anger, and rage. It is an activity they are forced to engage in, which is extremely detrimental to their own learning. They quickly become the "Indian" expert in the classroom, teaching others what others should have learned in their earlier educational experiences. And it is all so easily understandable. Just ask yourself the question, where would an Aboriginal person (or an Indian) go to receive an education as an Aboriginal person (or Indian)? You may be surprised with the answer. Nowhere! Even though there is a proliferation of "studies" programs across Canada. Native studies this and Indigenous studies that. It goes to the point I mentioned earlier about the focus of research ON Aboriginal peoples as objects, as things to be studied. We, as Aboriginal peoples or as Indians, have been studied to death. And now we are buying these products, developed from the research activities of outsiders to our communities, to feed to

our children under the guise of a provincial curriculum. We have even opened our own First Nations University of Canada [FNUC (I think the "N" should be silent)] under the umbrella of a provincial mandate.

"At the moment we are academically attached to the U of R processes, but we are administratively separate," Stevenson says, explaining in 1994 Canada's only Indian-controlled degree-granting college became a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada—which is about as "close as you can come to achieving accreditation."...The federated college shouldn't sever its relationship with the U of R—which confers degrees on behalf its graduates—before FNUC reaches the point where their own degrees can be and will be recognized by other post-secondary institutions and the community at large.<sup>5</sup>

The guest of honor they invited for the opening ceremony of the First Nations University of Canada was none other than His Royal Highness Prince Edward, the Duke of Wessex, a great-great-grandson of Queen Victoria. Apparently we have yet to escape the yoke of colonialism, though now it appears we are imposing it upon ourselves.

In the words of Paulo Freire, the oppressed have become the oppressors. I agree with Freire when he argues, "In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of later behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset."<sup>6</sup> You cannot both be controlled and control your own destiny at one and the same time.

After some twenty years teaching in both Canada and the United States, Métis historian and philosopher Howard Adams also recognized, in no uncertain terms, such colonial attitudes in post-secondary education:

Neocolonialism altered the attitude and aspirations of Indian and Métis people. One significant way this was done was through education. In Regina, the government supported Status Indians to establish their own college, which grants Bachelor Degrees in several disciplines. Similarly, there are Native Studies Departments at almost every large university in Canada and many teacher institutes offer special programs to train Natives to be teachers. But their perspectives and ideology are quite consistent with mainstream white supremacy courses. There are also university programs to train Aboriginals in law, administration and commerce. All of these courses indoctrinate Native students to conservative middle class ideologies. They are orientated toward creating an Aboriginal bourgeois. ...In short...giving some benefits of the dominant society to a small privileged minority of Aboriginals in return for their help in pacifying the majority.<sup>7</sup>

During negotiations for the Northwest Angle Treaty (Treaty #3) in 1873, Chief Sah-katch-away said to crown negotiator Alexander Morris: "If you give what I ask, the time may come when I will ask you to lend me one of your daughters and one of my sons to live with us; and in return I will lend you one of my daughters and one of my sons for you to teach what is good, and after they have learned, to teach us."<sup>8</sup> After a hundred and thirty years I believe the time to act upon the wishes of Chief Sah-katch-away has certainly come. To date the lending of our children has all been one way. To my mind, for us, this has been entirely the wrong way. As a requirement of the *Indian Act*, we have been made to send our children

mainly to Christian schools in which the languages and values of the dominant society were, and still are, imposed upon our children. It is time to cause changes to the law. It is time *we*, the Aboriginal peoples, begin to teach our sons and daughters our own values once again.

How often have students come to me with the same question: “Do you know how much research they are doing over there on us Indians?” Unfortunately, I do have some idea: lots! The last time I checked, upwards of 90 percent of the faculty members of one discipline claimed to be doing research on Aboriginal peoples in order to get accreditation for a Ph. D. program. In the institution in which I work, I have found similar circumstances in many other disciplines whether they are in the social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, etc., or in the professional schools of medicine, social work, or education. And all of these research projects are well funded, if not by SSHRC, then by others with a similar venue.

We have to keep in mind that the SSHRC does not operate in a vacuum. It has a very specific purpose and that is to distribute government funding for social sciences and humanities research. After almost thirty years of operation SSHRC is finally looking to develop an “Aboriginal” Research Policy.

Implicit in the SSHRC is a fundamental alignment with not only the rules of science but also with the humanities. When it comes to scientific research, from my understanding, there are really only two kinds, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research, dealing with numbers, is derived from the “true” scientist’s perspective, the positivist, where everything is measurable, the hard sciences. Qualitative research, dealing with old shoes, pictures, text, etc., is derived from the humanities, where everything is soft and gushy, the soft sciences. So how do we fit an “Aboriginal methodology” into all of this? Do the Cree have their own methodology? Is there an Aboriginal ethic? Or are we simply falling into Western ways of thinking about research (are we just perpetuating more of the Western bullshit)? As far as I know Aboriginal peoples did not do quantitative research and, as far as the humanities and ethical guidelines are concerned, Aboriginal peoples certainly did not have an ethical stance based on any God or otherwise. Let’s get real about all of this. I’m not saying there isn’t an “Aboriginal methodology,” but if there is, it certainly has to be incommensurable with Western science.

When I returned to school I was admitted to university on the basis that I was an old Indian. That’s not an exception—that’s how most of us get into higher education: because we are old Indians and therefore we are let in as “mature students” (if they had only known). If we were dependant upon academic qualifications for entrance then, or even today, most of us would never be admitted. I think I am very much the norm for Indians; most of us drop out in grade school. Of the ones who go on to high school, again, most of us drop out. That leaves a very small percentage to go on to post-secondary education and smaller still when you consider students graduating from on-reserve schools are not qualified to enter provincial post-secondary institutions.

I used to be proud to say on employment applications that I had grade eight and two years hunting. My reason for approaching academia in the first place grew out of these experiences. I had been fired by the “white guys” for being too Indian, and I had been fired by the “Indians” for being too white. This left me with a real dilemma; like who am I? What? Not Indian? Not white? One would expect that an institution of higher learning could provide some answers to these questions, after all, to “know thyself” is one of the first imperatives of philosophy. However, they could not answer these questions, for I was not interested in learning about old, dead, white guys or

studying the relics of anthropology or someone else’s romantic version of Indian “spirituality.” I wanted to learn about myself as an Indian, about my ancestors and their ways of being. When academia, including Western philosophy, could not provide answers to my questions, I and my colleague, Dr. J. D. Rabb, decided to proceed with our research question: Is there such a thing as a Native philosophy?

Our first proposal was to SSHRC and they flatly turned us down on the grounds that there was no funding available for this type of research (i.e., they had other priorities). Our next application was to the Rockefeller Foundation and they accepted the same proposal we had previously submitted to SSHRC, so we did our research using two hundred and fifty thousand United States dollars instead. The Rockefeller Foundation made clear in their acceptance that “The Foundation’s support is, and will continue to be, contingent upon the central presence of Native scholars in this effort. Simply and baldly put, we would not be recommending this project for funding if it involved only non-Native scholars examining these topics.” And that was in 1993, over a decade ago, quite a bit ahead of where SSHRC is right now. Four years later the Rockefeller Foundation provided an additional two hundred and fifty thousand United States dollars.

My second major research project was a bit more personal. In response to the misallocation of Aboriginal funding by Lakehead University, I decided to engage in an Action Research Project\*\* to find out how a university would respond if an Indian set up a tent on the front lawn. I did so and what I found out was nothing short of astonishing!

While I was doing my Action Research, a senior faculty member of the University allegedly said at a party one night, “send the Indians back to the fucking bush, that’s where they all belong.” An on duty University security guard allegedly said, “I’ll go over there and stick a tomahawk in his head.” While at a meeting attended by a number of Chiefs and the Minister of Indian Affairs, the President of the University allegedly said, “the Indian can sit there until he rots.” The President apparently made this comment just shortly after he brought the Diocese Bishop and a nun to my “encampment” on the front lawn of the University to talk to me. When I later questioned the President about this strange visit he had arranged, he replied that he brought the Bishop and the nun to visit me because he thought they were “knowledgeable in these matters.” My response was unambiguous: “You racist pig, you see me as an Indian and not as a faculty member?” At that moment I wondered what indeed had changed in five hundred years?

After a one-month stint of sitting on the lawn twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I then completed a ten-week walk of a thousand miles (1600 kilometers) to Ottawa. During the entire walk, I exercised my Aboriginal right to use unoccupied Crown land. Every night I set up my tent and slept in the ditch. (My research shows that ditches along highways are not used by “white guys” for anything much other than a place to throw their garbage, their pee bottles, and to dump the remains of a variety of road kill). Direct expenses that I incurred along the way were mainly paid for out of my own pocket. Other costs, which I alone must bear, are more long standing. For example, not only was I alienated by my colleagues within the institution (people actually shied away from me as if I were contaminated), my advancing career in the University administration was curtailed and my health has been affected.

Throughout the summer of ‘95 I certainly learned that racism is alive and well in institutions of higher learning. In addition to the alleged comments discussed above, other events were equally enlightening. While “encamped” on the lawn, I was sworn at and pissed on by students leaving the University

pub while security guards stood by and laughed. Three fire engines and two police cars responded to deal with my Hibachi (a small charcoal grill). The firemen ruined my hot dogs when they used a three inch diameter fire hose to put out the burning briquettes. On the highway, I was intimidated and threatened with arrest by Ontario Provincial Police Officers. I had pop cans thrown at me from passing cars. I was threatened by civilians. Even my colleagues, faculty members of the University, the real scientific academics, the positivists, were curiously offended by my Action Research Project. On September 22, 1995, twenty-one of them sent a letter to the President, Dr. R. G. Rosehart, stating, "we are appalled that a senior member of the university administration should make enthusiastic statements which not only apparently give to the public the official endorsement of the University to Professor McPherson's current activities but which also support the idea that his current walk to Ottawa constitutes research (Chronicle Journal, Sept 20, 1995). What makes this even more unacceptable to us is that the person involved is the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research."

Then on November 8, 1995, another letter signed by nineteen faculty members was sent to Mr. Patrick J. O'Brien, Chair of the Lakehead University Board of Governors, which stated,

We write to you on a matter which is of some considerable concern to us and to many of our colleagues. As you are probably aware, an article concerning Professor McPherson's protest walk to Ottawa appeared in the Chronicle Journal on September 20 of this year. This article included some statements attributed to Dr. C. Nelson which strongly endorsed Professor McPherson's activities and which indicated that Dr. Nelson, in her role of Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, regards these activities as being research of the highest order. These statements caused some consternation within the research community of the University and a letter expressing the outrage of many members of this community was sent to Dr. Rosehart together with a plea that appropriate action be taken.

Not only were the positivists calling Dr. Nelson a "loose cannon" for her recognition of my activities as an Action Research Project, this elite group was also calling for her termination for doing so. Their expressed concerns clearly illustrate that when unabated, racism will run rampant and will include all targets.

Even at the highest levels of the chain of command of the University, the Board of Governors, people expressed concern about my Action Research Project. As recorded on page 9504 of the Minutes of the Annual Board of Governors' Meeting held on September 21, 1995:

Ms. Balacko asked for an update on Professor Dennis McPherson's walk to Ottawa. Dr. Whitfield reported that Prof. McPherson is still on the road, that the Dean of Arts and Science has made arrangements for the continued operation of the Department of Indigenous Learning and the teaching of Professor McPherson's classes at no additional cost to the University, and that Professor McPherson is expected to be back in place at the University by October 1.

In response to a question, Dr. Whitfield said that quotes attributed to Dr. Connie Nelson in Wednesday Chronicle Journal were not the official University position. Dr. Whitfield went on to explain the difficulties with defining research, which is usually

judged by peers and often not until it can be viewed in retrospect.

Moved by Mr. Scott, seconded by Mr. Seuret that the question of the employment status of Professor Dennis McPherson during his current activities be referred to the Executive Committee for review.

During discussion that followed, it was clarified by mover and seconder, and by members who spoke to the motion, that the intent for the Executive Committee was not to address the question of what or what did not qualify as research, but to review the policies and practices at the University dealing with a faculty member's absence, and when leave-of-absence without pay or suspension might apply.

Mr. Nowgesic requested that, should this motion pass, the Committee should take care to examine what is really happening and to examine both sides. He also asked that the vote be recorded.

The Chair asked Mr. Atkinson if, as an observer, he wished to comment. Mr. Atkinson replied that if the motion is accepted, the AMC would like to be informed as early as possible of the decision of the Executive Committee.

Scott/Seuret motion carried.

(16 in favour, 3 against, 2 abstentions, excluding the Chair)

It should be noted that Mr. Nowgesic, the member who asked for the vote to be recorded at the Annual Board of Governors' Meeting, is a well-respected Elder of the Ojibway community. He is the same Mr. Nowgesic to whom Status Indians across Canada owe a great debt of gratitude. It was his patience and perseverance that clarified the issue of income tax exemption for Status Indians across Canada under section 87 of the *Indian Act* in the case of *Nowegijick v. The Queen* (1983). The case was decided in the Supreme Court of Canada. It should also be noted that Mr. Nowgesic was the first Native to sit on the Board of Governors of Lakehead University. He remained a member of the Board continuously for seven years prior to these events. It is particularly for these reasons why I find it extremely appalling how he was treated by the Board of Governors. It is not possible for me to explain why he was physically assaulted in a meeting of the Executive Committee, why his car was spray painted with vulgar graffiti, or why he was removed from the Board of Governors by a secret ballot. It seems very odd that exercising his right to have information legally his as a Board member in an Executive Committee meeting of the Board of Governors would warrant the extraordinary actions that were taken against him. Or is there another reason that caused the Board to go to such extreme measures? And, again, I wonder what has really changed in five hundred years?

As to why I was on the lawn in the first place: This stems from a motion passed by the Senate of Lakehead University on the morning of June 15, 1995, dealing with Calendar changes for the Department of Indigenous Learning. At that time I was the untenured Chair of the Department. In regard to the Calendar changes for the Department, the particular motion, submitted by the Senate Budget Committee, "determined that the immediate budgetary costs were covered by tuition and *special funding*. Long-term viability will depend on increased enrollment, a change in the university funding formula, or the continuation of special grants. In the meantime, new positions

in Indigenous Learning have been set up as term appointments. The committee recommends that the Department of Indigenous Learning consider research methodology courses available in other departments instead of offering its own” (emphasis added).

Besides failing to recognize any need for difference in research course requirements for the Department of Indigenous Learning from other departments within the University, the motion speaks to an important funding issue: the dependence of the Department of Indigenous Learning on the University receiving *special funding*. *Special funding* had been clarified in an earlier memo to me by the Dean of Arts and Science, dated May 26, 1995, wherein he stated in regard to staffing of the Department that “The tenure-track position will be funded by the University’s operating budget; the others will be funded through the AETS” (AETS refers to the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy announced by the Minister of Colleges and Universities in May, 1991).

When the motion was presented, I asked for and received permission from the Chair of Senate to address the Chair of the Budget Committee. I asked the Chair of the Budget Committee to provide the Budget Committee’s interpretation of what was meant by the use of the term *special funding*. I heard the Chair of the Budget Committee say that the Committee understood there was enough flexibility in the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy dollars received by the University to pay for the salaries of faculty. I asked for and received permission from the Chair of Senate to comment on the explanation provided by the Chair of the Budget Committee. I stated to Senate that I had just had a fast meeting of the Department of Indigenous Learning, which was not difficult seeing as I was the only faculty member of the Department, and it was unanimous at this meeting that the Department could support the motion before Senate to approve the Calendar changes for the Department, and the Department had no difficulty with the use of tuition. However, the Department could not sanction the use of Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy dollars to pay for the salaries of faculty members to deliver the program, for to do so would be *unlawful*.

Question was called by the Chair of Senate (who was also the President of the University) and the motion passed with only three opposing votes. At a later time I asked the President, “why would Senate pass such a motion?” and his reply to me was unequivocal—“Dennis, you know that Senators don’t think.”

Whether Senators think or not about the motions they pass in Senate was really not any of my concern. However, I was concerned that, by their action, they had placed me in what I considered to be a very precarious position within the University. As a result of their vote I felt I had to choose one of three possible options. I could have left the Senate meeting, gone back to my office and carried on with my business, pretending nothing had happened and hope that sometime in the future someone would not start digging into administrative matters and learn that what had occurred in Senate was unlawful. I could have simply quit my job and gone away as my predecessors had done for various reasons. Or, since I was a faculty member, I could do some Action Research while making my person visible to the whole world twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week until these matters were put right. I decided to do the research. At 1:00 PM on June 15, 1995, I set up my tent on the front lawn of the Lakehead University Centre.

At the crux of the matter was the use of AETS funding coming to the University. Under the Strategy, funding was to be provided to colleges and universities under three categories: A Support Services Core Fund; a Special Projects Fund; and a Supplementary Grant Fund. All proposals submitted by colleges

and universities requesting funding under the Strategy were reviewed by the AETS Proposal Selection Committee. I had been appointed to the AETS Proposal Selection Committee as the representative for the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) in 1993. As a member of the AETS Proposal Selection Committee, I well knew that the intention of the Dean to use AETS funding for any faculty position within the University was wrong. As someone trained in law (I held an LL.B. at the time), I also knew the actions of Senate passing the Senate Budget Committee’s motion could be viewed as criminal. In the case of Senate, I have no doubt that passing the motion to use *special funding* (AETS funding) for term appointments for the delivery of on-campus programming was fraud. In addition, this action also sanctioned the misappropriation of funds within the University. The issue of not using AETS funds for faculty salaries was further clarified in correspondence by Mr. B. James MacKay, Team Leader, Student Affairs Team, Ministry of Education and Training, in a letter to Dr. Robert G. Rosehart, President, Lakehead University, wherein he states in regard to Indigenous Learning Curriculum Development: “I would also emphasize that the activities related to program delivery are not eligible for funding under the Program Development Fund (with the exception of community-based programs). Therefore, costs associated with faculty salaries, lecturers or department chairs will not be considered for funding.”<sup>9</sup>

I left the University on foot at 1:00 PM on July 15, 1995, and reached Ottawa on Sunday, September 24. Once there, I met with the Minister of Indian Affairs, the Honorable Ron Irwin, on September 25, and in the presence of National and Band Chiefs at a meeting of the Assembly of First Nations I questioned the Minister specifically about the alleged statement of the President of the University, “the Indian can sit there until he rots.” The Minister did not deny the fact that the statement was made, but he coyly denied his presence if it were made.

On September 26, 1995, I hand-delivered a letter, along with a bear’s head, a copy of the Criminal Code of Canada, and a pouch of tobacco, to the office of the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honorable Jean Chrétien. In the letter I said to the Prime Minister:

Dear Prime Minister,

I have walked from Ojibway country. I have carried your law around my neck for a thousand miles; it is very heavy. I have also carried Ojibway law but in my heart; it is very light. My fathers and my grandfathers have respected your law as have I. Law without enforcement is of no value. Your law is not being enforced equally in Ojibway country. Ojibway people are jailed for their offences while offences committed by others are ignored. This violates the basic premises of your law. Therefore, your law is invalid in Ojibway country.

Respectfully,

Dennis McPherson,  
B.A., H.B.S.W., H.B.A., LL.B.

To say that the University administration seemed somewhat dumbfounded by my actions of setting up a tent on the front lawn of the University and then walking a thousand miles to Ottawa is an understatement. This was not the usual behavior for a university faculty member, particularly that of a Chair of a Department and distinguished member of the University Senate, not to mention the previous year’s winner of the University’s Alumni Honour Award. Nonetheless, over a three-and-a-half-month period, that is exactly what I did.

Finally, I believe in an attempt to quell the savage beast, the President and the Chair of the Board of Governors of Lakehead University requested the Minister of Education and Training to conduct “a review of Lakehead University’s use of AETS funding.” The final report (Creber, Zaluduk, 1996) of the funding review was circulated to all members of the Lakehead University Aboriginal Management Council (AMC), Senate, and Board of Governors with a covering memorandum from the President of the University and the Chair of the Board of Governors stating, among other things: “While not commenting in detail on the report, it is important to notice that the review concludes (page 20) that ‘we were satisfied that the funds allocated to Lakehead University in total have been used for Aboriginal Education as approved by the Ministry’.” Most importantly, what this covering memo failed to admit, however, is that the rest of the paragraph referred to on page twenty of the report reads as follows: “We noted however, that the cost allocations between individual programs were not accurate for a variety of reasons including inadequate accounting software and inaccurate coding practices, the resulting financial figures could not be relied upon. Finally, the financial reports produced for the AMC were inadequate to provide for proper accountability.” In another research paper I must admit I referred “to the covering memo from the President and Chair of the Board of Governors, with all due respect, as the White is Right Memo.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, the memo by the President and Board Chair diverts attention away from my concern that the University meet its contractual obligations in accepting AETS funding.

Like all other provincial institutions funded under the Strategy, the University has a legal obligation to include Aboriginal peoples in the decision-making process of the institution. As publicized in the *Guidelines for Proposals from Colleges and Universities* under the Ministry of Education and Training Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, “A key element of the strategy is that Aboriginal people be an integral part of the *decision-making* process of an institution with respect to Aboriginal programs and services” (emphasis added). The Terms of Reference for the Lakehead University Aboriginal Management Council, which clearly gives the AMC decision-making powers within the institution, were passed by Senate on November 23, 1994. In addition, the sanction of the decision-making powers of the AMC by the Board of Governors is recognized by the Ministry of Education and Training in correspondence, dated July 7, 1995, from Mr. B. James McKay, Team Leader, Ministry of Education and Training, to Dr. Robert G. Rosehart, President, Lakehead University. In his correspondence, Mr. McKay says, “The selection committee noted that the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors on behalf of the Board passed a motion supporting the terms of Reference of the Lakehead University Aboriginal Management Council. The committee was pleased to note that the terms of reference now recognizes the council as a formal *decision-making body* of the university” (emphasis added).

Not too many things have changed since I carried out my Action Research Project. The financial review requested by the President and the Chair of the Board of Governors substantiated my claim. The Ministry review found at least \$8,000.00 of AETS funding was misappropriated.<sup>11</sup> A decade later, the AMC has yet to fulfill even an advisory role within the University, though that is where they are placed in the organizational chart of the institution. But we do have a new University President who may be better prepared to handle Aboriginal issues. He has a Ph.D. in Zoology. Our institutional vision is now mainly focused on putting up new buildings, installing advanced technology in smart classrooms, and hockey games.

Given the established record of research on Aboriginal peoples, today it scares the hell out of me to know that a branch of the first new Medical School in Ontario in over thirty years is being developed on the Lakehead University campus. This new Medical School, supported by the Nishnawbi Aski Nation (NAN), among other things, is intended to service the health needs of First Nations communities who suffer from diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. And the new Northern Ontario Medical School (NOMS) is being given millions of dollars to carry on their good work. When they are in operation, they will have captured specimens for their laboratories (just like rats). My concern in particular is for the children of Status Indians. Under the *Indian Act*, parental consent for Status Indian children is not required in order for dentists and doctors to pinch, poke, or prod them. Even more worrying for me is the future use of advanced technology in experiments with distance diagnosis and surgery directed from some far-off place being carried out in First Nations communities. Despite the use of advanced technology, haven’t we seen all this before?

Contrary to popular belief, none of the health problems of diabetes, cancer, and heart disease are the leading causes of death among First Nations people that NOMS is funded to address. The leading causes of deaths among First Nations people are accidents and suicide. No amount of clinical medical attention is going to solve these problems. They are socio-economic problems, not health problems. Diabetes, cancer, and heart disease are merely symptoms of these socio-economic problems. Given the record of systemic racism established at Lakehead University over the past decades, I would argue it is the one location in all of Canada where a Medical School dedicated to the health concerns of First Nations communities should under no circumstances be established. At the very least, its implementation should be postponed until Status Indians have equal protection before the law as that of all other Canadian citizens.

Some time ago I posted on the SSHRC listserv an article by my colleague, Dr. Rabb, and myself, entitled “Indigeneity in Canada: Spirituality, the Sacred and Survival.”<sup>12</sup> It was published in an issue of the *International Journal of Canadian Studies* dedicated to Spirituality, Faith, and Belief in Canada. But the point of our article was, as the Associate Editor put it in her introduction to the issue, to show that “Canadian Universities are inadvertently completing the job of assimilation begun by the residential schools.”<sup>13</sup> We provided documented evidence that mainstream universities in Canada regard Indigenous knowledge and heritage as inferior to Eurocentric knowledge and heritage. This should be of some interest to those who think that SSHRC can fund research at these universities that will respect Aboriginal peoples, communities, and culture. The best that such research can provide is accounts of Aboriginal peoples, their communities, and their cultures using what we describe as outside view predicates. As we have argued at length:

To apply an outside-view predicate to yourself is much more than seeing yourself as others see you. It is permitting others to tell you who you are, fitting in with the plans and projects of others, making it easy for them to manipulate you for their own ends, for their own purposes. As we have argued in more detail elsewhere, “It is, in a very real and frightening sense, to lose yourself, to become alienated, to become a stranger, an alien to yourself” (McPherson and Rabb 1993: 22). Marie Battiste (Mi’kmaq) and Sa’ke’j Henderson (Chichasaw) confirm this difficulty in Canadian universities, though they describe it using the concept of “double consciousness” rather than

our “outside-view predicate.” They define “double consciousness” as “always looking through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt” (Battiste and Henderson 2000: 88). They also insist that “Double consciousness occurs when the dominators reject the assertions of the colonized that they are human and insist on imposing the standards of the colonizers as universal and normal” (88). After years of attempting to develop appropriate Aboriginal programming in universities and educational systems run by the dominant society, Battiste and Henderson find it necessary to admit: ‘At best Canadian universities and educational systems teach this double consciousness to Indigenous students. Canadian educational systems view Indigenous heritage, identity and thought as inferior to Eurocentric heritage, identity and thought’ (Battiste and Henderson 2000: 88-89).”<sup>14</sup>

I do not reject entirely descriptions of myself using outside view predicates. Others can see me as I cannot see myself, and that is sometimes helpful. They can, as some have said, show me my social back.<sup>15</sup> But what I strongly object to is research that produces accounts of my people and my culture using *only* outside view predicates.

Though he does not use the terms, Howard Adams has argued that many Native people have fled from the anguish of negative stereotypes, from double consciousness or outside-view predicates, by taking refuge in “strange myths, pseudo-traditions, unusual spiritualism, ecstatic dances and festivals.”<sup>16</sup> But these, of course, are just as much outside-view predicates as the negative stereotypes they were intended to replace. Indigenous values and worldviews, ceremonies and practices, ones that have not lost their “vital and meaningful functions,” can still be found if one knows where to look and how to identify them. As I have argued elsewhere, they can be extrapolated from the cultural interactions within Indigenous society. But this can only be done by people who are so much a part of those cultural interactions that their very being has been shaped by them, by their communities.<sup>17</sup>

Native researchers engaged in community-based research would be writing about their own cultures within hermeneutic circles in which “both object and forestructure may require radical alterations, even transformations.”<sup>18</sup> Philosophical hermeneutics recognizes that to write about, to interpret, a culture is to transform that culture. When a culture is written about from the outside with alien preunderstandings, the transformations may well threaten to destroy that culture, particularly if it is a minority, dominated, or occupied one. But when people within a culture research and write about their own culture, the resulting transformations are healthy and breathe life into the culture, keeping it current and alive. The forestructures, preunderstandings, or prejudgements they bring to their interpretations of their culture are derived from that very culture. The culture is then, in a sense, transforming itself in a normal and healthy way. In my own research I have found that underlying the diversity of Native American cultures is a pattern of Indigenous thought that is itself a form of transformative philosophy.<sup>19</sup> When Native researchers write about their own cultures they are not only transforming those cultures, they are also transforming themselves, for they are given the opportunity to discover and transform their own prejudgments. As Crusius notes, “we cannot even know our own history, the complex conventions we have internalized; for the most part we can only live it/them, for we are it/them.”<sup>20</sup> Native researchers in learning more about themselves by writing about their own culture are keeping that culture alive by actually making the culture

conscious of itself. In other words, they are, quite literally, the culture becoming conscious of itself. This in turn allows it to grow and change while remaining true to itself. For the most part Native cultures in North America have been deprived of this normal, healthy development because community-based education has not been a part of these cultures since the imposition of residential schools and government-sanctioned policies of assimilation.

Though philosophical hermeneutics has recently been recognized as a viable qualitative research methodology,<sup>21</sup> I suspect that the implications for community-based research have not been fully understood by funding organizations such as SSHRC. Philosophical hermeneutics can be traced back to the work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and some of his followers, particularly Hans Georg Gadamer. “In *Being and Time* (1962) Heidegger...provided the impetus for Gadamer’s extensive development of philosophical hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*.”<sup>22</sup> Researchers trained at mainstream universities are taught that “science is value free, unbiased, and objective. ...The scientific community is free of prejudice...[w]ith complete value freedom and objectivity, science reveals the one and only, unified, unambiguous truth.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the turn toward hermeneutics in post-modern philosophy has revealed an unacknowledged prejudice pervading the modern scientific world. It is, in short, a kind of prejudice against prejudice as it were. “We have been taught that prejudice can only be a barrier to truth, that we should want to shed our prejudice and be objective. Truth is the opposite of prejudice.”<sup>24</sup> But there is a very real sense in which we cannot and should not “shed our prejudice” because prejudice as “pre-judgment” or “preunderstanding” is that which makes interpretation possible. We make sense of our world in terms of our expectations (preunderstandings) that are either confirmed or modified by further experience. All seeing is a seeing as...“If we do not see as, we do not see at all; to understand is to exist already in preunderstandings.... We could have no experience at all without them.”<sup>25</sup> Our preunderstandings or pre-judgments are continually modified in dialogue with the text or whatever it is we are attempting to make sense of or to interpret. We continue to return to the text with our modified preunderstandings gaining deeper insights but also progressively having our preunderstandings modified even further. This is what is meant by dialoguing with a text:

Dialogue moves in two directions: “back” towards our preunderstandings, for nothing exposes them better for us than dialogue with someone whose prejudices do not merely reinforce our own—in such moments of grace, we in fact first become aware of our biases as biases—and “forward” toward achieving a common understanding, toward agreement, or at least toward recognition of exactly what we disagree about and why. ...Finally, why should we want to dialogue with a text rather than—or at least more than—analyze it? Treated as an object textual otherness loses its transforming power, its claim to truth. It becomes something for us to operate on, something never allowed to operate on us.<sup>26</sup>

When we, the Aboriginal peoples, are treated as objects of research, as things to be studied, we are deprived of our power to transform the researcher.

When the text or that which is being interpreted is allowed to operate on us, exposing and changing our biases and pre-judgments, we begin the back and forward process called the hermeneutic circle. When we return to the text with our modified preunderstandings, it reveals more of itself, once again challenging, if we allow it, those very preunderstandings thus



beginning the circle anew with further transformations of our biases and, hence, ourselves. This circle continues, transforming both interpreter and interpretation until what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons” is achieved. Although this is a spiralling “struggle toward consensus,” it is important to note that it also includes a healthy respect for difference. “Our horizons do not fuse in the sense of complete identity. ...Rather, our horizons fuse in the sense of a mutual enlargement of horizons which still remain different.”<sup>27</sup>

In the case of Native researchers engaged in community-based research, not only are their preunderstandings or prejudices changed but their communities are also transformed in the healthy way described above. For example, when interviewing Elders, I suggest that it is a sign of deepest respect to question what they say and to look for corroboration of and continuity in their storytelling. If research is to be done at all in Aboriginal communities, the principal researchers must be Aboriginal researchers cognizant of their own communities. This cannot be done by ethnologists from the dominate society who have never lived the story. Community-based research would prevent the irreparable damage done to communities under current research practices. We must keep in mind that one size does not fit all: what is learned in Mohawk country certainly does not apply in Anishinaabe country or vice-versa. Regardless of what anyone might say, we must properly respect the local wisdom of the Elders. And we must keep it exactly where it belongs, within the Aboriginal community. At the present time SSHRC should NOT, under any circumstances, be funding research in this area unless it is community-based research carried on quite apart from mainstream universities and those employed by them. This is the fundamental lesson that must be learned if research partnerships with indigenous peoples are to be taken seriously. Of course, members of Aboriginal communities need education at the graduate level to carry out such research. There must be a better way of providing this education than forcing them to attend, what are to them, not only foreign institutions but institutions that regard Indigenous knowledge and heritage as inferior to Eurocentric knowledge and heritage.

Had this whole discussion about SSHRC funding respectful research designed to help Aboriginal scholars and scholarship occurred some ten years ago, the development of an SSHRC Aboriginal Research Policy might have appeared plausible on the face of it. At that time there was no record about how Canadian universities would treat Native students and their communities because so few Native students made it to the post-secondary level. But now, today, there is a record. My colleague, Dr. Rabb, and I have been doing research for almost twenty years corroborating this record through our experiences at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. As I mentioned above, in 1993 we were successful in attracting a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar institutional grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for our Native Philosophy Project. This made Lakehead University the first Canadian University to become a site for the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation Visiting Humanities Research Fellowship Program and allowed us to attract Indigenous scholars from all over North America and, indeed, throughout the world during the next four years. We were also able to establish the first ever graduate program in Native and Canadian Philosophy, which successfully graduated two Native students (one Cree and one Ojibway) as well as some four or five non-Native students, all with substantial Masters Theses, before the University cancelled the program. The Masters in Native Philosophy was not cancelled for a lack of students. The year before the program was cancelled sixteen Native students applied to enter the program. My colleague, who was Graduate Coordinator for the Department of Philosophy

at the time, tells me that the University decided to change the entrance requirements after the sixteen students had applied. When faced with rejecting all sixteen students, my colleague first resigned as Graduate Coordinator and then left the University entirely. He tells me he could have fought harder to prevent the change in entrance requirements, but he felt that there was little point in forcing the University to accept Native students that they so obviously did not want. I am convinced that my colleague left in disgust. He certainly made it quite clear why he felt morally obliged to leave Lakehead University. In a letter to the President accepting the title of Professor Emeritus, he states explicitly,

You should know that a major factor in opting for early retirement was your lack of support for the Master's Programme in Native Philosophy. I could not live with the fact that the University would deny sixteen Native students access to the qualifying year of the Master's Programme in Native Philosophy. I consider it unethical to change the entrance requirements after such students have applied.<sup>28</sup>

After my colleague resigned, I had some hope that he might be replaced by a Native philosopher in the Department of Philosophy thus satisfying the minimal requirements of the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) approved unique graduate program in Native Philosophy. The University did replace him but with a Western philosopher, one with no interest in Native philosophy. The University quite obviously wanted to get rid of the Masters program in Native Philosophy and that is exactly what it did.

In our near twenty years within the academic community at Lakehead University, we have been asking the University to change radically in order to accommodate Aboriginal students and provide them with a culturally appropriate educational experience. Instead it seems that Native students are only tolerated on the University's own terms. But finally, after close to forty years of operation as a university, Lakehead has done something right. They have said “NO” to Native students. Now they know where they stand in relation to the University.

The Master's Program in Native Philosophy was not cancelled for financial reasons. Though the Rockefeller Foundation institutional grant of a quarter million U.S. dollars is not normally a renewable grant, our Native Philosophy Project was judged so promising that we were encouraged to apply for a second grant. We were successful and brought in another quarter million U.S. dollars to continue the project over the next four years. With the cancellation of the Master's Program in Native Philosophy the University lost this grant. This enables us to quantify how much a university can be adverse to Native students researching their own philosophy. In this case, a university was willing to give up at least a quarter of a million U.S. dollars in prestigious research funding. The insistence that Native students be accepted only on the University's own terms, the refusal to accommodate them as Aboriginal people, is, in essence, why we concluded that “Canadian Universities are inadvertently completing the job of assimilation begun by the residential schools.”<sup>14</sup>

My discussion of Lakehead University is only one case study. The problem is very much broader than this. I would argue, as have Howard Adams, Marie Battiste, and Sa'ke'j Henderson, for example, that systemic racism is inherent in the very essence of mainstream universities in North America. In my colleague's first post-retirement publication he has documented the systemic racism apparent in a recent book written at Queen's University and published by Temple University Press. The book is *Deep Vegetarianism* by Queen's philosopher Michael A. Fox.

According to Rabb, its basic thesis is that racism, sexism, and “speciesism (the exploitation, domination and oppression of other species)” all have a common origin, “which can be found in the connection of the domination of humans by humans and the domination of nature including other animals by humans.”<sup>29</sup> Rabb argues that “in appropriating Native American or indigenous world views to his vegetarian cause” Fox finds himself “in the paradoxical position of overcoming speciesism but, all be it unwittingly, perpetuating systemic racism.” In fairness Rabb notes that “Fox proves himself to be among a handful of Western philosophers open-minded enough to acknowledge and attempt to learn from North American indigenous values and world views. [Rabb adds] For this reason, he should be commended.”<sup>30</sup> Although Fox acknowledges that Native people respect the land and other animals and even regard them as kin, Rabb is able to cite Fox saying such contradictory things as, “hierarchical thinking is endemic to our species,”<sup>31</sup> “[A]nimals’ moral status must be taken more seriously than it was hitherto, and...they are owed far greater moral consideration than humans have accorded them,”<sup>32</sup> and finally: “Humans stand to forfeit a great deal if they give up their self-defined species supremacy.”<sup>33</sup> On the basis of these and many other such howlers throughout the book, Rabb says of Fox: “Unless he has indigenous people clearly in focus, they are invisible. This invisibility is racism, is it not? It is what permits oppression to continue.”<sup>34</sup> Temple University Press, its editorial staff, and external referees allowed these obvious examples of systemic racism to slip through. Both Fox’s book and Rabb’s paper are essential reading for anyone who thinks that systemic racism is not a pervasive problem in North American universities today. I am convinced by the record established at Lakehead University that such racism cannot be expunged, even by people of good will who genuinely want to do so. As Rabb concludes, what “Fox’s book does illustrate is how easily well-meaning academics can perpetuate systemic racism without meaning to, paradoxically in Fox’s case, while actually arguing against oppression and domination of all kinds.”<sup>35</sup>

Paulo Freire asks:

How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which *to be* is *to be like*, and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible. The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.<sup>36</sup>

Now here is a novel idea! From Freire’s perspective, the oppressed must educate their oppressors? What an exciting concept! In my classes I always ask my students to give me their definition of “what is an Indian?” Their responses always cover a broad spectrum, varying from things like “a First Nations person,” “the original people,” “the ones discovered by Columbus,” to the more romantic tales of “sharing peoples,” “hunters and gatherers,” “the ones with rights,” and, finally, “the stewards of mother earth.” A few more venturesome students will offer things like “lazy drunks” and “no good welfare bums.” The odd bold student will even suggest “a noble savage.” Then I am met with fury and scorn when I tell my First Nations students that they have been filled with bullshit! And I am met with hate and anger when I tell my non-First Nations students they have also been filled with bullshit! Why is it so hard to admit that an Indian in Canada is nothing more than a legal fiction, a figment of imagination? It is a construct of long standing that

allows the Canadian government to legally discriminate against a segment of the population. And it is done for a reason: “it is for our betterment.” This simple exercise serves to demonstrate the one aspect of equality entrenched in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of this country that so seriously affects us all. That is our level of ignorance about each other. As long as this level of ignorance remains, things cannot change for Aboriginal peoples.

There is no question that learning is violent. My students do not hold these beliefs merely by chance. It is what has been taught to them by the educational system, a system driven by the politics of the day. But if students are merely left to what Friere describes as the banking system, then how much do they actually learn? And how easily can they simply use the “flush” method to get rid of it all? “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information.”<sup>37</sup> If this be true then it is clear evidence of the fact that all the efforts of the community of researchers dealing with Aboriginal peoples have totally missed the point. In their Eurocentric training, that is the basis of their bias, they are simply looking for transferrals of information; provide me, the researcher, with the information I request and I, the researcher, will provide the “right” interpretation from my dehumanized perspective.

This reminds me of an analogy I use in class. The anthropologist sits on the hill and watches the activities in the Native community below, making notes and doing her qualitative study. She notices that consistently each morning a particular fellow comes out of his wigwam, stretches, then takes off running like hell for the bush. Shortly thereafter the fellow comes leisurely walking back. Taking note of this event the anthropologist envisions, as if in a dreamy fantasy, the occurrence of a very spiritual sunrise ceremony taking place in the woods. Little does she know that the individual is simply answering to a very pressing call of nature. We must remember that in qualitative research context is critical; to gain insight and learning a researcher must be much more than an objective bystander sitting high up on a hill. Yet how difficult it is to get this point across.

In Piaget’s terms learning involves both assimilation and accommodation. Part of the job is to get the subject matter to bend and deform so that it fits inside the learner...Just as important is the necessity for the learner to bend and deform himself so that he can fit himself around the subject without doing violence to it. Good learning is not a matter of finding a happy medium where both parties are transformed as little as possible. Rather both parties must be maximally transformed—in a sense deformed. There is violence in learning.<sup>38</sup>

I sometimes wonder if this is what Chief Sah-katch-eway was thinking during negotiations for Treaty #3. Obviously that is certainly not the way it has turned out. Instead, Aboriginal peoples expend their energies arguing for relatively trivial matters like the need to maintain their Native languages, their cultures, their oral traditions, their rights. They forget the most important question in it all. Colin Bourke, Chairman of the Indigenous Australian Higher Education Association, puts it well:

How can you expect your culture and identity to survive if you give the responsibility for education [of your children] to another group of people? It is absolutely essential, if we are to know what it is to be aboriginal, to take charge of the education system...<sup>39</sup>

At the end of the day, the “Indian problem” in Canada is not an Aboriginal problem. It is a “white problem.” It is a problem of oppression stemming from our colonial past that is deeply entrenched in our contemporary legal relationships in a way

that most of us do not even understand. A lack of historical knowledge allows the oppression to continue. When viewed within a paradigm of oppression the Aboriginal peoples, and especially the “Indians,” are the most oppressed by the state. Yet, as strange as it may seem to some, it is up to Aboriginal peoples to take responsibility to solve the “Indian problem.” In doing so, our contribution to Canadian society will be to re-humanize our oppressors.

I would like to applaud SSHRC for their efforts in funding research, especially research dealing with and intended to help Aboriginal peoples, but I cannot. In the world in which I live, I do not have to do anything from the time I am born until the time that I die but sit on my ass on an Indian Reserve (in La La Land) and the “white guys” will quite willingly bring everything to me. After all, it is their Christian way. Unfortunately, nothing that I have ever received from the “white guys” has ever done me any good. In fact, what I have received from them has taken practically everything away: my land, my children, my way of life, my confidence, my self-worth, even my place in this world; but they cannot take away my sense of being. It is my sense of being that maintains my continuity with those that have gone before me and with those who are yet to be born. It is a gift I have received from my ancestors, and *I will never let it go*.

In summary, I have to say that SSHRC should not be funding Aboriginal research at all without fully understanding the true meaning of “a thriving research partnership with Aboriginal peoples,” which must include at the very least the kind of community-based research by Aboriginal peoples that I have outlined in this paper. It is not just that, if the intent is to help Aboriginal peoples, research focusing ON Aboriginal peoples is a waste of money without this kind of partnership. To carry out research without “a thriving research partnership with Aboriginal peoples” may be of benefit to some, like politicians, scientists, and academics, but in reality it will only cause much greater harm to our peoples, our cultures, and our communities than has already been done. In my view, research focusing ON Aboriginal peoples as objects or things to be studied, whether in a social context or for medical experimentation, may have been less culpable when we all enjoyed a degree of ignorance. But we can no longer hide behind our ignorance. Today we *should all* know better. Evidence supporting the record I have described in this paper is not mine alone. It comes from data readily available to anyone who may choose to look. From the little that I have learned so far I am absolutely convinced that we must stop the harm being done to Aboriginal peoples. It is time to say in the most stringent of terms that enough is enough.

\*The Canadian poet, and Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, obviously accepted this ship/shore dichotomy as is shown in his poem “The Piper of Arll.” Of course, for him, the “us” were the ones on the ship and the “them” were the ones on the shore. It is interesting that in the poem, as if it were a prophecy, both “us” and “them” die and are together transformed into another realm of being. Note: Arll is an imaginary place. I wonder if Scott was thinking of Turtle Island? Or an Indian Reserve?

\*\*Cf. Neuman, 2003: 25. “Action research is applied research that treats knowledge as a form of power and abolishes the line between research and social action. There are several types of action research, but most share common characteristics: Those who are being studied participate in the research process; research incorporates ordinary or popular knowledge; research focuses on power with a goal of empowerment; research seeks to raise consciousness or increase awareness; and research is tied directly to political action.”

#### Endnotes

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11. See Jackie Creber and Paul Zaludek. *Review of Funding Allocated to Lakehead University—Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, Final Report* (Toronto: Ministry of Education and Training Project, 1996), 95-96.
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18. James Kinneavy. “The Process of Writing: A Philosophical Basis in Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 7 (1987): 7. See also Timothy W. Crusius, *A Teacher's Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1991), 79.
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## COMMENTS

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### ***Living in a World of Bees: A Response to the Indian on the Lawn***

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As children, my friends and I used to wander around in the field behind our houses, looking for adventures and such, tossing a few dirt clods, chewing on grass stems. Sometimes we would catch bugs and put them in glass jars. My dad showed me how to punch air holes into the jar lids so that our bugs wouldn't die. But a bug in a jar really wasn't all the fun we'd thought it would be. It's better just to let them be bugs, even though you don't know that until you catch a few. When I was six years old, walking in this same field, I came across a hole in the ground where a colony of bees was living. For some reason, I thought it would be a good idea to cover that hole with my foot. Only problem was, I didn't have any shoes on. The next thing I remember, there were bees swarming all around me. My mother, who has always been allergic to bee stings, ran out into the field and pulled me free of the swarm. I made it home only mildly traumatized that day, but the bees have never forgotten. Every single year of my life since, one or more of them have sought me out and given me a nice welt or two as a reminder of the time I tried to close them in.

Oddly enough, I haven't received my stings yet this summer. Maybe that has something to do with the cleansing I did at my house last winter. With my front door open, and starting from that point, I walked sunwise around the entire inner perimeter of my home, burning sweetgrass on a sage coal, praying and telling any bad spirits to go away. When I again came to that open door and took the ashes outside to dispose of them, there was a dead bee on the ground. It was a liberating sign, and I've been considering its implications. Some mornings now, as I walk through the coulee bottom on my way to the University of Lethbridge, I pass casually along a narrow pathway through shoulder-height patches of yellow sweet-clover, where the bees are hard at work (something I wouldn't have done but at a running pace a year ago). Which is not to say that I expect to escape this season unscathed. In fact, if I were to sit out on the lawn for a month, I imagine my chances of avoiding bee venom would be very slim indeed, with or without my previous history. Bees will be bees, after all—always busy serving the royalty, and quite willing to sacrifice their lives attacking any perceived threat (whether real or imagined). Some people tell me that the original bees don't go around stinging people like these new European ones do. But then the hornet that stung me last year was pure Rocky Mountain, and he carried a pretty good whallop. I've personally never known a world where bees didn't sting people, and surely I never will. That doesn't mean I'm going to bring trouble upon myself by experimentally rattling their hive, or by ever again attempting to close their door. I guess

the best thing a guy can do, faced with a world full of bees, is go about his own business.

Dennis McPherson echoes advice something along these same lines when, in the final conclusion of his paper, he writes “...as hilarious as it may seem to some, it is up to Aboriginal peoples to take responsibility to solve the ‘Indian problem’.” If I understand him correctly, this can be read as a challenge to First Nations communities, advocating a movement to decolonize from within and to regain control of the means and methods to education. Until that happens, he proposes that it’s too early to begin talking about research partnerships with non-Aboriginal people, and that it’s utterly dangerous for the Canadian government to continue disseminating monies toward “Aboriginal research” based in mainstream universities—dollars that inevitably benefit only Western scholarship and serve to further promote European traditions of thought above all others. A fine message, for the most part. Yet those who (like myself) attempt to work toward that decolonization, expressing concerns with an emphasis on local methodologies, protocols, and languages in the structure of research projects, are depicted as missing the point—as are those who choose silence as their voice in the face of polemics. We are all under the trance of a common “false conclusion”: that which validates the presentation of Aboriginal peoples as objects of inquiry. Our interests suggest that we are unwittingly adrift in invasive historical currents that have sculpted, and occasionally flooded, the North American—perhaps the world—landscape.

The complex processes McPherson warns us of, those which segregate and objectify essentialized Others in the context of power relation dynamics, are “important” ones that, as a student of anthropology, I find evoked around every corner. Although, refreshingly, McPherson never utilizes the term *power* as a motivational source for such practices—opting instead for *domination*, *oppression*, *racism*, etc.—his concerns seem to span the breadth of a thousand familiar voices, including many of those that have been legitimated and valorized within theoretical discussions of the social sciences and humanities. His claim that even those “of good will” cannot expunge the problems facing Native people in Canadian universities today infers that the systematic racism McPherson has coaxed out onto the lawn at Lakehead is symptomatic of larger structural elements at play beyond the university. What is curious to me is that not only has this breakthrough caught him off-guard, not unlike my own bewilderment in discovering that bees will sting the one who attempts to trap them beneath bare skin, but that he insists on our collective participation in his own disconcerted immobility.

Certainly I have heard, and lived, McPherson’s story before, as have we all to one degree or another. It is, like the occasional bee sting, part of the human experience. Even in the old days, when people here in Blackfoot territory still wore buckskin, and when buffalo roamed the prairies, folks were objectified, categorized, and sometimes victimized as a result of being thought of as Other. When you’d see a person far out in the distance, you might say, “oma matápi” (*there’s a human being*). But when he got closer, you’d notice the quillwork designs on his clothing, the particular facepaint he wore, and you could say, perhaps, “oma sináikoan” (*there’s a Cree*). Only when this guy came relatively close would you declare, “na so-and-so,” whatever his individual or family identity was. Depending on the political dynamics of the time, who you were as a member of that middle-range generic category played a determining factor in how you were perceived by various observers and whether or not you were considered a threat. Of course, this is not to say that I find the colonial realities of our present day in any sense excusable, an extension of the normal condition

between two groups of people. Rather, it is merely to indicate that what McPherson noticed at Lakehead University was that, when distancing himself into a nonstandard position on the lawn, he was perceived more strongly as “The Indian” by some of his colleagues, and that there were yet negative connotations imposed upon that identity. Given his resentment for this treatment, it was odd when he then claimed that Native people were imposing the same upon themselves, by attempting to discuss community-specific research methods, protocols, and languages, or by opting out of polemic debates. In my opinion, McPherson seemed to be situating these latter ideas within a wider doxa that assumes, indeed demands, an Aboriginal “victim,” an Indian in a jar.

When we borrow (aahkoma’tao’p) this aspect of McPherson’s theoretical framework, as properly it may seem to fit our experiences within an inter-ethnic context that is indeed forceful and oppressive, we are also bringing in tow an entire cosmological orientation, pyramidically phallic in shape, its boundaries segregating humanity from all that is “fallen” in nature, and its constituent beings thought to interact predominantly through forms of war. In this scheme, just as McPherson indicates, the Native individual will never be anything but an unwary casualty, the sympathetic character who—given the occasional brief window of opportunity—always seems to shoot himself in the foot. By trivializing the significance of the other Native voices who participated on SSHRC’s listserv discussion, insisting that our comments reveal a self-imposed objectification and domination, adrift with the currents of Eurocentric streams of thought, McPherson seems to suggest that he alone can see through the murky depths. Maybe somewhere down there he’s found a world without bees. A place, perhaps, where “violent” disgruntled professors do all the stinging, while expecting that they themselves be treated in reflexive dialogical fashion.

While I certainly agree that introduced notions have muddied the waters, that they have suffocated many to death, I myself can see that the creeks up this way, at the foot of the mountains, the backbone of the world, are becoming clear again. This is evident by the prevalence in what was expressed on the listserv, and elsewhere, of some of the very interests that McPherson dismisses, those which support research structured by local methodologies, protocols, and languages. I trust that as long as we persist in working with community-specific traditions, the rivers will eventually become healthy again. The contemporary era is not quite so terrible as some would have us believe; the bees are not all out to sting us. The scholars of Western academia are not unaware of the (admittedly thick) residue of colonial habitus inherent in all of their formal disciplines and underlying their inquiries in general. They are attempting, in-so-far as their culturally-biased assumptions will allow at any given time, to move away from this. As a means toward this end, they are receptive to the potential benefits of exploring some Aboriginal intellectual traditions, albeit very reasonably on their own terms and in their own ways (we are not evangelists, after all). And they are, in turn, prepared to allocate sizeable financial resources to projects controlled by the Aboriginal scholars in their midst, and benefiting First Nations communities. What we are experiencing together, I would maintain, are the early progressive stages of what will surely be a rather lengthy cleansing process. When it is complete, we will sense the liberation that comes with finding some of those dreaded *problems* dead on the ground. But we should not expect to walk out our front door into a bee-less world. On the other hand, if we don’t allow this cleansing to occur, if we are impatient and keep dredging up the silt just to prove that it is still there, then who’ll be to blame for the mucky flows?

This being said, there are some tasks that perhaps should be attended to foremost. McPherson notes many of these. First, we should control our own education. On the Blood Reserve, and I suspect in many other communities, this part of the cleansing project is well underway. The oral tradition is strong here, as is the language, and participation in ceremonies and social activities is growing. Knowledge gained through experience is still validated over abstract learning. In the grade-schools, there are tracks for full Blackfoot language immersion. At the junior high-school through to the college level, there is a movement unfolding that is very much akin to Jerome Bruner's (1996) ideas for a "cultural psychology": the young person is seen as challenged with the task of trying to master a Blood Indian way of life, and the purpose of the school is to provide a social production of Blood meaning, an organization of the adolescent's experiences and knowledge within living Blood Indian narrative/intellectual traditions. There is also the recognition that today's youth will want the prestige and validation, both on and off the reserve, that comes with advanced university training. For this reason, Red Crow Community College is developing its Kainai Studies Program. Part of the ambition here, aside from equipping students with the technical skills needed to enter mainstream universities, is to take (ma'tsihp) Western academic disciplines, in contrast to borrowing them (aahkoma'tao'p), and to explore their topics from the theoretical perspectives of a Blood Indian worldview. It is a decolonizing effort intended to benefit interests on both sides of the fence. While developing the Kainai studies courses, Red Crow is creating partnerships with the University of Lethbridge (long known for its Native Studies orientation), working toward shared accreditation and student exchange opportunities, hoping to eventually build degree-producing Blackfoot-specific programs, fully controlled by members of the Blood community. Is this just a continuation of the residential schools? Or is there something new emerging here?

Early in his paper, McPherson advises that we follow the intents inherent in the commitments of the old people, like Chief Sah-katch-away. We should share "what is good." It is true that, to date, the sharing has been aimed almost entirely in one direction, with Aboriginal people making the journey into the Western institutions. It is also true that there is a heavy Christian ethos underlying what has transpired, that non-Aboriginals continue to frame their participation within story-lines that have them "helping" the Indians, that systematic racism is indeed a factor. If it is a dialogue we seek, or if it is partnership, this must certainly change. Native studies programs, in my opinion, are a step in this direction, an attempt to bring Aboriginal ways of knowing into the university itself. Similarly important are the works of Native scholars entering and productively critiquing, from the inside, the tenets and theories of mainstream academic disciplines. There are, of course, inherent dangers in attempting such strategic change from within the academy. Many presentations staged from this position can be seen to essentialize "First Nations culture" as a coherent subject, promoting Pan-Indianism. For this reason, again, I believe it is critically important to allocate some "Aboriginal research" funding toward even university-based, Native-controlled projects that incorporate community-specific protocols, languages, and methodologies. Similarly, it is important to support the development of alliances between universities and the colleges on reserves, partnerships based in stories advocating mutual benefit rather than paternalism, and working toward student exchanges and an appreciation for difference.

Perhaps the most important task to realize immediately is to simply do away with all contingencies that have federal social science research funds necessarily flowing through

university channels, at least when those funds are slated for "Aboriginal research." As regards this point, McPherson and I are in close agreement. "Aboriginal research" funds must first and foremost serve to benefit the interests of Native communities. In most cases, this would require that research projects be based on-reserve, that monies offered toward these projects be entrusted to Native organizations or respected individuals, and that such studies be principally controlled by community members. Exceptions to this rule could, I feel, be granted for Native scholars completing degree work at the graduate level or working in academic departments, and equally for Non-Native scholars who are working under the close guidance of reserve-based organizations. The principal message here is that SSHRC's claims of supporting "Aboriginal research" and/or "research partnerships with Aboriginal peoples" simply can't be considered valid so long as funding allocation is constrained by requirements of university association.

Similarly, if SSHRC truly intends to assist "Aboriginal research" endeavors, it must be willing to broaden its appreciation of research models, methodologies, and protocols. McPherson, dreaming of a world without bees, may view such talk as inherently colonial, or as assimilationist, but I see it as the current step in that prolonged healing cleanse that we all, for the sake of our future generations, so greatly need. One of the major symptoms of external imposition I've noticed in the federal "Aboriginal research" discussions is the "capacity building" mythology, depicting reserve communities as devoid of individuals who *know how to do it*. But what is *it*? If we are talking about standard data collection and writing skills, there are plenty of qualified people on most reserves. Clearly, the referent here is "Western research," perhaps even the scientific method in particular, rather than "Aboriginal research"—for surely no amount of external capacity building assistance will succeed at teaching a Native person how to go about learning, organizing, analyzing, disseminating, or applying information in his or her community's own way. Take, as an example, the Blood community. Here, knowledge is not something that can be gained through abstract means. Instead, it comes through experience, *niitáistotsspi*. The closest equivalent to this in Western methodology is anthropological participant observation, except that in the Blood way this technique would become simply *participation or becoming experienced*. Blackfoot research, paid at the expense of the investigator and his contributing family members, has been forever ongoing in this community, its resultant applied effects being the whole of Kainai culture at the macro-level, and the ceremonial traditions as more condensed and structured units. I know plenty of Blood Indian scholars who have never set foot in the academy, much less completed high school, but who have still spent their lifetimes conducting Blackfoot research, and who are now (even in their old age) much sought after for advice by those younger people struggling through all stages of their own projects.

There is a second research model that is traditional in the Blood community, one that both complements the first and is more adaptive to the shape of Western qualitative styles. This is *i'powatomooa'pi*, the way of speaking vicariously. It is a model derived from Bundle transfer protocols and other social etiquettes, where an individual or group will send a messenger to speak on their behalf in the pursuit of a new or altered relationship with an Other. This system has been adapted to numerous contemporary research projects, wherever these are meant to communicate between individuals or collective members of the Blood Tribe and some faction of the Western world. In my own work, both as a repatriation consultant and as an anthropologist, I am often positioned in such a role. When someone seeking a Bundle that is in a museum comes to ask

my assistance as a vicarious speaker, he is not only counting on my ability to convey his request and sincere intent, structuring the interaction within an established Blackfoot framework, but also to meet the communicative expectations of the addressee—which, in this case, involves incorporating a good deal of library and archival research and a thorough familiarity with the negotiation protocols and emic views of the Other. And one does not have to be a direct mediator to be involved in research modelled on i'powatomooa'pi. For instance, I should refer the reader to a book called *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (1996), written by the Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider, and Sarah Carter. Here, it is the writing, the dissemination of the comprised findings of numerous generations of researchers, which speaks vicariously for the membership of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Similarly, there are the three volumes of *Kitomahkitapiiminnook niksi: Stories from Our Elders* (1995), compiled in both Blackfoot and English by Sikotan (Flora Zaharia) and Makai'sto (Leo Fox)—an excellent example of i'powatomooa'pi, solicited by the Kainaiwa Board of Education in the development of culturally appropriate primary school curriculum, bearing messages contributed from two-hundred elder community members toward the younger generations.

My point is that there are indeed archetypes of “Aboriginal research” that are community-specific and very much applicable in the current era. These are not borrowed means but time-honored systems that function just as well today as they ever have. Some of these methods bear no resemblance to Western scholarly traditions, and they shouldn't be required to. Others blend very well, to the point that—on the surface—they may not seem “Aboriginal” at all and, yet, are just as local as tongue soup. There are also Aboriginal philosophies and theories, both recent and classical. These have hardly even begun to be discussed by Native scholars in mainstream universities, but they inform local interpretations of events and happenings every day. Such philosophies and theories can be explored most readily through the study of language and narrative, but even words, grammars, and stories are part of larger gestalt structures, so that—as McPherson rightly suggested—the underlying values and worldviews can only be meaningfully surveyed by an individual whose essential being has been shaped or transformed by the cultural interactions of his community.

Although I've indicated that some of the suggestions and accusations made by Dennis McPherson strike me as emanating from a position that is a tad divergent from my own, there are certainly areas of generalized agreement between both of our contributions, congruent in their challenging SSHRC to demonstrate that “Aboriginal research” is what it claims to be and not just a mask for the disbursement of federal dollars to Western institutions, for non-Native purposes. In other words, it seems that what we may be asking is: Will there be funding for “Aboriginal research” that does not feature partners? And if not, which “partner” will be controlling the money, or the research design, or generating the topic of investigation? These are indeed the most important questions, those that must be addressed if we are to create a solid bridge across the cleaner rivers of tomorrow. Surely some will still be stung now and then, along the water's edge. That's part of what it's all about, as a human being in a world of bees. But I for one am no longer interested in rattling hives or closing doors.

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## A Response to Dennis McPherson

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Professor McPherson's insightful and passionate article (above) is provocative both in its breadth and its approach to historical and contemporary issues affecting research and funding associated with Indigenous communities. Going through the paper, I decided that I needed to set up a table to identify topics and the number of times they were mentioned. I found eleven broad issues: 1) Aboriginals have been studied enough (5 times); 2) European God (4 times); 3) civilization of tribes (1 time); 4) anyone can be a registered status Indian (1 time); 5) assimilation policies in education—roads out for Indian people (7 times); 6) many choose to work in and with communities (1 time); 7) have their own research needs and projects (1 time); 8) reciprocity (5 times); 9) funding—who gets it (5 times); 10) Aboriginal philosophy (4 times); 11) poverty (1 time). Since it would be too onerous a task to address the eleven or more issues presented in the discourse, I will attempt to respond to particular issues that I have personally experienced over the last two decades as a medical anthropologist.

“...is continuing to do positive harm to aboriginal people and their communities. This kind of research, not to mention medical research, may have been less culpable when we all enjoyed a high degree of ignorance...”. While I cannot speak for all other researchers, I would like to emphasize that not all researchers can be condemned for the methodologies employed by others. I recognize that some research has unintended negative outcomes and that some researchers can be unethical, but I characterize this as “bad science,” which must be avoided because it is misleading.

As a non-Aboriginal, I am offended by the phrase, “we all enjoyed a high degree of ignorance.” My medical anthropology research started out when I became aware that the fact sheets on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome designated the entire Aboriginal population as having the highest rate recorded of SIDS. As a skeptical human being, I wanted to ascertain if that information was correct, and if so, why were Aboriginal infants experiencing higher rates of SIDS than other populations. My aim was to assist the communities, not to “do harm.” The research consisted of interviewing mothers living full time on reserves and asking about their infant care practices. This material was published and did not condemn Aboriginal infant care practices. In fact, I am pleased to report on the extent of the knowledge and comprehension of issues related to gestation and infant development revealed in these interviews. It soon became apparent that the infant care practices utilized by contemporary Aboriginal mothers were not something transmitted in Western hospitals by clinicians; rather, it was traditional methods passed along from grannies and aunts and other familial females. The vast array of information held among women has protected their infants even though they are clustered in economically deprived situations. The differentiation in health by economic levels has been noted in an older publication (*Inequalities in Health*, 1988, The Black Report, Black, Morris, Smith, Townsend, Penguin Books, Middlesex). As this report points out, the burden of morbidity/mortality among those with lower incomes is considerably higher than other economic groups.



I concluded that traditional methods of infant care protected Aboriginal infants from SIDS because I had great difficulty finding any Aboriginal communities where SIDS was an ongoing experience. This of course leads to another issue about recording Aboriginal deaths accurately and thereby having a realistic rate of the incidence. My study of SIDS-attributed deaths in Alberta from 1980 to 1985 concluded that only half the Aboriginal deaths attributed to SIDS were actually Aboriginal infants.

Therefore, when McPherson states that “institutions regard Indigenous knowledge and heritage as inferior to Eurocentric knowledge and heritage.” I strongly object to this broad statement. My training in two of the more ethically stringent Universities in Canada and England demanded that I work with communities and “do no harm.” It is hopeful that my outcomes empower Aboriginal females to continue to comprehend the superior knowledge they hold in the birthing/infant care arena. Where some of the fault lies is in the collection of data and transportation of computer generated numbers.

The focus of my work has not been to promote my own career, since I have selected to remain a low-paid researcher. Instead, my focus has been to promote the knowledge of Aboriginals and assist them when needed in increasing their overall health level. If an infant starts out sickly, intervention by someone who cares for lives could lower the risk of a lifelong health challenging existence for that person.

As to the question, “...(haven’t) Indians been studied enough?” I would like to suggest that had no one taken up the issue of health among Aboriginals, the opposite argument would be made: i.e., that Aboriginal communities are suffering from poor health, diseases, deaths, etc., and no one seems to care. It’s a fine line between doing too much and walking away from a community experiencing and carrying the heavy burden of poor health superimposed by lower economic conditions.

Certainly improving educational levels would project an upward spiral of better economic circumstances. How would that be obtained? If universities simply represent another level of assimilation (McPherson’s letter), Aboriginal students will not be eager to attend. However, if they are attending with the intention of improving the overall circumstances of their own lives and those of their community members, are they participating in assimilation? It seems that we are looking at a catch 22: lack of education produces lower economic circumstances; university education to raise educational and qualifications is frowned upon as betrayal of Aboriginal heritage. Is there an answer? While we may not be able to find a complete answer at this historical juncture, a workable solution is certainly the first step.

Within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), a separate yet integral part of the overall schematic approach (one of 13 founding institutes under the CIHR) is the newly formed Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health (IAPH). Jeff Reading Msc. Ph.D. is their Scientific Director. The IAPH’s vision is to “support innovative research programs based on scientific excellence and aboriginal community collaboration, will support partnerships and alliances between aboriginal communities and non-aboriginal health research organizations; will support health research that respects aboriginal cultures, while generating new knowledge to improve the health and well-being of aboriginal people. Health research results will be presented to aboriginal people in a way that is accessible and appropriate. The aim is to include aboriginal people in all health research activities. The bottom line in all of the vision, mission and values statements is the one constant, to work with communities. Originally, IAPH established four Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environment centers

(ACADRE). These centers have been expanded and are based at universities in Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec City, and Halifax. The ultimate aim of the ACADRE is to produce rapidly a cadre of researchers in aboriginal health, especially researchers of aboriginal heritage. Forty percent of ACADRE funds support graduate students engaged in research. The IAPH has been able to begin to change the research enterprise through capacity building and community integration of research while maintaining what many students want, i.e., portable and internationally recognized credentials. That research funding to universities should stop is to say the community would miss out on the opportunity to address a growing burden of ill health. I think we can all agree that research has limitations but to suppress advanced knowledge would be counter productive. On balance, I think research is useful and the process needs work. I think real change will not happen overnight but through a supportive and measured approach that values the opinions and ideas of students as they are mentored.

Piaget’s terms as highlighted by McPherson involve assimilation and accommodation, to bend and deform so that learning fits inside the learner—how does that happen when each side thinks their way is the only way or the correct method of learning? An answer may have been found that has yet to spread its wings on the wind of acknowledgements.

Because the research is community driven, it could help the community develop its own programs to deal with health issues. In addition, aboriginal people will be hired and trained to act as field workers for the various studies and to develop valuable skills that can be used in other ways for the community. It may be argued that the students are trained in the way of the dominant culture. I cannot refute that point, but I do think that, as Chief Sah-katch-away foresaw, both communities (Aboriginal and academic) must meet at the apex and each will teach the other, without compromising the deep-seated cultures of each community. The IAPH is one of the most significant new approaches I have witnessed that appears to respect all cultural values, while demonstrating the need to approach the ongoing issue of health. Maybe down the road these trained Aboriginal researchers will assist other Indigenous communities in applying for grants based solely on community health needs.

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## RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

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### *Living with Bees, W.A.S.P.s, and Other Stinging Critters: A Reply to Ryan Heavy Head and Elizabeth Wilson*

**Dennis H. McPherson**  
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In my paper “Indian on the Lawn: How are Research Partnerships with Aboriginal Peoples Possible?” one of my main concerns is how systemic discrimination that is present within mainstream institutions negatively influences the Aboriginal research agenda. It is my understanding that this systemic discrimination is not a mere chance happening. Although some of the discrimination may have grown out of historic events, its legitimacy within Canadian society is definitely by design. The framers of Canada’s constitution continued the colonial policy of segregating the Aboriginal population under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, as Indians, and Lands Reserved

for Indians. In so doing they set the stage for development of the kinds of perspectives submitted by each of the respondents. As far as arguments go, if Ryan Heavy Head is on one end of a continuum, then Elizabeth Wilson is on the other. Though they may be coming at the issues from different directions, they each provide good examples of the difficulties to be overcome if SSHRC is to be effective in developing an Aboriginal Research Policy. I thank these two respondents for their arguments, which provide further clarification on these matters.

I find Heavy Head's response has missed the point. I am not looking to live in a world without bees. To attempt to compare these societal issues with a beehive is naïve, although it does provide the kind of noble savage imagery some Aboriginal people apparently prefer mainstream society to perceive. It makes me wonder if Heavy Head is one of those seen by Howard Adams as having fled from the anguish of negative stereotypes by taking refuge in "strange myths, pseudo-traditions, unusual spiritualism, ecstatic dances and festivals."<sup>1</sup> Heavy Head gives us this impression in his invocation of Blackfoot language. In speaking of "Other," Heavy Head claims the Blackfoot refer to this as "oma matápi" ("there's a human being") and "oma sináikoan" ("there's a Cree"). If the words being used are traditional Blackfoot words to refer to the Other, as he would have us believe, then how can they translate to *human being* and *Cree*? Why not admit these terms, whether in English or Blackfoot, are derived from the colonizers. Isn't it time we stop pretending there is some great hidden secret to being a Native? Shouldn't Heavy Head, as a fluent speaker of Blackfoot, know that Native languages are based on process, not reification?

I would say where Heavy Head is most misguided is in his misplaced trust in the improvements he believes have occurred in the "contemporary era." He says that "the bees are not all out to sting us." But those are the bees I am most concerned about. They are the ones that have come to help us. They see us as objects of their inquiry. The help they give to us has to be in accordance with their instructions and presuppositions. Heavy Head admits as much in saying that:

The scholars of Western academia are not unaware of the (admittedly thick) residue of colonial habitus inherent in all of their formal disciplines, and underlying their inquiries in general. They are attempting, in-so-far as their culturally-biased assumptions will allow at any given time, to move away from this. As a means toward this end, they are receptive to the potential benefits of exploring some Aboriginal intellectual traditions, albeit very reasonably on their own terms and in their own ways (we are not evangelists, after all). And they are, in turn, prepared to allocate sizeable financial resources to projects controlled by the Aboriginal scholars in their midst, and benefiting First Nations communities.

*Benefiting First Nations communities?* I have never seen this happen. I have seen universities benefit from such research grants dealing with Aboriginal issues. And if the perception is that the communities benefit, that is a façade, because the *Indian Act* does not allow for First Nations communities to benefit from financial resource allocation in any way. Financial benefit can only accrue with ownership and Indians cannot have ownership of anything. That is why we have the First Nations Governance Act (FNGA) going through Parliament.

Heavy Head goes on to say, "Native studies programs, in my opinion, are a step in this direction, an attempt to bring Aboriginal ways of knowing into the university itself." Native studies programs have grown out of anthropology. Heavy Head does not see that Native studies programs are not positive influences, and even if they were, they still comprise only five

credits of a fifteen-credit degree. The other ten credits are made up of courses heavily laden with European values. In my opinion, giving an Indian at the head of the class a textbook on anthropology and calling it a Native Studies program does not make the grade.

In Heavy Head's argument there is room for an Elizabeth Wilson. To Heavy Head, she is one of the bees that do not sting. In her own words, she is out to help us Indians. Wilson says that in "selecting to remain a low-paid researcher" her "focus has been to promote the knowledge of Aboriginals and assisting them when needed in increasing their overall health level." Wilson relates her experiences in researching Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in the Aboriginal population. Wilson says her research grew out of her awareness "that the fact sheets on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome designated the entire Aboriginal population as having the highest rate recorded of SIDS." She says, "As a skeptical human being, I wanted to ascertain if that information was correct." She says she went about "interviewing mothers living full time on reserves and asking about their infant care practices" (emphasis added).

From the perspective of a Native scholar who has spent his career teaching research methodologies in an Indigenous Learning program (not a Native studies program), I have a number of simple questions. Is her research ethical and/or legal? Was she a trespasser on the reserve? Did she get permission to be there? And if so, from whom did she get permission? If she was there without permission then is she susceptible to being charged under the *Indian Act*? Did she get informed consent to conduct her interviews? If she did, then who did she get informed consent from? If she obtained informed consent from the mothers that she interviewed how could she do that if they are status Indians? Were they in fact status Indians? Since they were "living full time on reserves" one might assume they were status Indians, but one could also be wrong since not all residents on reserves are status Indians. But even if they were status Indians there is no guarantee that they were Aboriginal since there is no legal requirement for a status Indian to also be an Aboriginal person. In fact, many status Indians are not of Aboriginal descent at all. For example, some status Indians in Canada were born in England to English parentage, in Holland to Dutch parentage, etc. They were war brides who married Canadian soldiers who were status Indians and upon marriage they automatically became status Indians themselves. In fact, up until April 16, 1985, any female who married a status Indian male became a status Indian. Certainly not all Aboriginal peoples live on Indian reserves. Wilson concludes that "traditional methods of infant care protected Aboriginal infants." But I would ask how one could reach this conclusion based simply upon "interviewing mothers living full time on reserves"? How would one even know the infants are Aboriginal?

Getting informed consent in the case of status Indians is far different from dealing with any ordinary citizen in the general population. As surprising as it may seem, this fundamental ethical principle of informed consent cannot apply to status Indians in Canada under the present day legal regime. When status Indians are involved in any research, we do not have any rights. We cannot on the one hand voluntarily participate in a research project of any kind while on the other we are legally captured specimens for anybody's curiosity, including those who would carry out laboratory experiments.

In mainstream society when it comes to rights, informed consent is the right of the individual and holds in almost all cases very near to an absolute right. For example, if one chooses to give their body parts to science after their death, that is their right, and their choice will be honored when practical. It may be a different matter if the individual happens to be comatose,

but even then informed consent is given by family members or whoever has power of attorney in the matter. As a last resort, the issue in question can be addressed by the courts.

In the case of status Indians, whoever is the Minister of Indian Affairs on any given day is the one who is responsible, is the one who gives consent and is the one who lawfully makes decisions at the time of death of a status Indian. Historically, consent has been given by the Minister, or his designate, at least from his perspective, for our protection and/or for our betterment. For example, in a letter dated October 3, 1922, from J. D. McLean, Assistant Deputy Superintendent General to J. Wright, Indian Agent, on the topic of the dental care of the children attending the Fort Frances residential school, it was stated that “it would be better to remove the teeth than go to any unnecessary expense in having fillings made.” This was supposedly for our betterment? And so it remains today, if a dentist, working under the auspices of the Department of Indian Affairs, comes to the school my child attends and decides to extract my child’s teeth, the dentist can proceed without my permission. And do I appeal to the court? No. I can only appeal to the Minister of Indian Affairs or his designate that sent the dentist in the first place. I wonder how many practitioners in the medical field know any of this.

Given the foregoing I am extremely skeptical of this type of research. As I have said in my paper, “The best that such research can provide is accounts of Aboriginal peoples, their communities, and their cultures using outside view predicates.” And these outside view predicates, as we can see from the Heavy Heads, are harmful and damaging when applied to the self. I am really saying that even if Wilson did get the consent of the Minister of Indian Affairs to do her research, and her research would pass the test of legality, from an Aboriginal perspective it would still fail to be good research on ethical grounds because of the implicit doubts mentioned above.

In addition to the problems of obtaining informed consent already discussed, there is also the problem of discrimination. Clearly, though it was once acceptable to discriminate against all Aboriginal peoples, ethical arguments to uphold the lawful discrimination against “Indians” within the jurisprudence of Canadian society are no longer valid. How does one tell who is an Aboriginal person and who is not? There is no particular racial profile to be followed. The moral beliefs of society in general have changed as a result of the human rights movement of the last forty years. Even apartheid in South Africa has been dismantled.

Wilson says, “As a non-Aboriginal, I am offended by the phrase, ‘we all enjoyed a high degree of ignorance’.” Wilson does have a responsibility as a researcher. Wilson admits she is a non-Aboriginal who has worked “over the last two decades as a medical anthropologist.” She says, “My training in two of the more ethically stringent universities in Canada and England demanded that I work with communities and ‘do no harm’.” I would have to ask how much of her educational experiences in these institutions included information on the legal or social issues pertaining to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Did they discuss the Royal Proclamation and the various Treaties; or that the only ones who can lawfully be on reserves are the Indians, the Minister or his designate, or those living there under Band membership regulations? Did they explain that there is much more to know about how the law applies to Aboriginal peoples than the one standard of law in Canada most citizens abide by? From my experiences I think the answer would be they did not tell her anything. They did not tell me and I earned my law degrees at an “ethically stringent” law school in Ottawa. If I am correct, then how can any like researcher knowingly expect to “do no harm”? I will say it again, “we all enjoyed a high degree of ignorance.”

To her credit Wilson does raise an interesting point. She says, “It seems that we are looking at a catch 22: lack of education produces lower economic circumstances; university education to raise educational [sic.] and qualifications is frowned upon as betrayal of Aboriginal heritage. Is there an answer?” As I have said, “I would argue, as have Howard Adams, Marie Battiste, and Sa’ke’j Henderson, for example, that systemic racism is inherent in the very essence of mainstream universities in North America” and it is not going to change. And why should it? These are Euro-western schools based on Euro-western values. They are not Aboriginal schools based on Aboriginal values. And all of the Dennis McPhersons or Ryan Heavy Heads in the world are not going to change them. Yes, I have gone to these schools and what I have learned, as have many other Aboriginal students, is that there is very little there for me or for us. I want to learn about my own community and myself, but that is not available in mainstream schools, be they universities or otherwise.

It definitely is a “catch 22.” It is not a lack of education that has produced lower economic circumstances for Indian communities, it is the application of the *Indian Act* that has done that, and it was done for a reason. And yes, university education is frowned upon as betrayal of Aboriginal heritage when this same education is used to produce class distinctions within the Aboriginal community. Howard Adams, for example, draws attention to the use of a “Métis and Indian elite to control other Aboriginal Peoples.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to document how: “This use of an educated Native elite to help governments deal with the ‘Native problem’ has parallels around the world.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the “smart” Indians that are used as tokens are no longer to be trusted by the Aboriginal communities. I agree with Wilson, a solution to this catch 22 situation must be found before SSHRC can “build a thriving research partnership with Aboriginal peoples.” However, Aboriginal peoples themselves have identified and dealt with this sort of catch 22 situation. For example, the periodical *Ayaangwaamizin: The International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy* says in its Statement of Purpose:

Attempts to clarify Indigenous ideas and practices by Indigenous thinkers face charges of “subjectivism”: the claim that to truly understand one must have an “outsider’s” perspective. These attempts are charged with lacking the outsider’s perspective that would allow for full understanding. For Indigenous scholars this Journal breaks the “Catch 22” that often leads to excluding them from participating in the dialogue representing themselves and their cultures.

Indigenous people not only need their own journals, we need to set up our own schools to meet our own educational needs. We need to grant our own degrees. We are, in fact, developing such a school called The Ayaangwaamizin Academy of Indigenous Learning (<http://www.ayaangwaamizin.ca/>) to meet the following objectives: to provide educational programming to on-reserve status Indians in particular and to all others who may be interested, and to promote the delineation of customary practices of Aboriginal/Native communities. The curriculum for The Ayaangwaamizin Academy of Indigenous Learning is founded on community-based research.

The Academy has links to mainstream institutions but wishes to be seen as clearly different.

All degree programmes offered by the Ayaangwaamizin Academy have a thesis component which requires approval by an external examiner. The external examiners are usually Indigenous scholars from mainstream universities in North or South America,

Australia and New Zealand. This is how the Academy seeks recognition from those mainstream universities; but as an autonomous institution based on Indigenous values it should not and will not use accreditation procedures designed by and for those foreign institutions.<sup>4</sup>

If the purpose of research is truly to build new knowledge about the world, I strongly feel that SSHRC is presenting a fundamental opportunity to do the right thing in developing an Aboriginal Research Policy. This is an opportunity to debunk the false conclusions of past endeavors. To do so will require SSHRC to come to grips with researchers focusing ON Aboriginal peoples as objects of inquiry; as things to be studied. It will take much more than having the odd *Elder* sitting on a board as a token representative of the Aboriginal community reviewing research proposals. In fact, it will take a complete resurgence of trust relationships, long strained and not always glorious for both sides, between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The onus is on SSHRC to stop dumping money into lost causes. In order “to build a thriving research partnership with Aboriginal peoples,” at the very least, SSHRC must trust that the principal researcher on any research project dealing with Aboriginal peoples must be Aboriginal. And preferably, any research dealing with Aboriginal peoples must be community-based research. To be effective, SSHRC must recognize that we are different and we will never be the same. If we respect our differences as a given in this situation, we can do some great things together. If we do not respect our differences, one or the other of us has to suffer.

In conclusion, I must say that it is time to give up the pretense of doing good for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples. Whether it is good works or “bad science” is not the question; these erroneously informed projects continue to cause harm to Aboriginal peoples in so many different ways. Let us now relegate them to history and leave them there. For all of the harm they have done, there is no recourse in vengeance or revenge. Rather, today I, for one, would like for all of the children of my community to have equal opportunities to succeed. I would like to see them able to exercise their own informed choice on an equal footing, regardless of their differences to all other Canadian citizens, rather than having so many of them intentionally choose suicide as their only way out of a bad situation they had no hand in creating.

#### Endnotes

1. Howard Adams. *Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1999), 144.
2. *Ibid.*, 54.
3. *Ibid.*
4. From The Ayaangwaamizin Academy of Indigenous Learning mission statement.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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