

The Connection between Religion, Nature Orientation, and Environmental Beliefs

“We are of earth, and belong to You... Every step that we take upon You should be done in a sacred manner; each step should be as a prayer.” - Black Elk, Lakota medicine man

Religious teachings provide moral guidelines for followers. Religions establish humans' existence in relation to the rest of the living-world. As a profound source of human values, religions have a remarkable impact upon standards of behavioral decisions because followers adapt behaviors according to social expectations of religious institutions (Yang and Huang 2018). Therefore, religious guidelines regarding humans' relationship with nature influence repercussions on environmental judgements. Studies show religious teachings display strong correlations to beliefs about the environment. Adherence to a particular religious denomination predicts positive or negative environmental engagement (Yang and Huang 2018). Religious teachings guide ethics and values. Learned values are demonstrated in personal behaviors, public behaviors, and policy determinations. Social leaders possess the opportunity to acknowledge and understand the connection between religion and ecology to advocate for positive environmental behaviors within religious populations.

Survey-studies provide quantitative data to research correlations between religious values and environmental values. Indexes of religious variables are compared to environmental variables and trends can be determined. Quantitative evidence supporting religions' connection to environmental beliefs and behaviors is discussed in research conducted in countries such as the United States, Mexico, Spain, and Australia (Pepper and Leonard 2016; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Among abundant literature available, traditional knowledge (TK) of the Indigenous inhabitants from the countries examined, is missing from the existing research. The lack of Indigenous perspectives within the field of religious ecology reflects a larger problem in

reconciling Western knowledge and traditional knowledge: scientific knowledge within academia is measured primarily by the Western method (White 1967; Menzies 2006). The Western-standard of science largely disregards Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous oral traditions as reliable evidence (Menzies 2006). TEK contains contributions for science to instruct Western theory on sustainability and reciprocal relationships between humankind and nature. My research compares values of Indigenous religion to Western religion and examines impacts upon environmental beliefs. The planet is in the midst of the sixth great extinction, known as the Anthropocene extinction because it is the first human-caused mass-extinction (Films for the Humanities and Sciences 2006). The fundamental values of human-beings must adapt to preserve natural environments. Community leaders, both religious and secular, will be more prepared to develop socio-structural solutions to ecological crisis when the connection between religion and ecology is better understood. Religion remains a prevalent part of North American culture and can be a powerful positive influence upon environmental behaviors.

Literature Review

Cultural values are foundations of beliefs transferred through social institutions and family systems. Fundamental social values vary between diverse populations, yet social scientists identified core value-orientations shared amongst cultures. Sociologists Dr. Kluckhohn and Dr. Strodtbeck proposed that the environmental value-orientations of all human societies were defined by: dominion-over-nature, harmony-with-nature, or submission-to-nature (Hills 2002). Of the three orientations, researchers examined in-depth the environmental repercussions of a dominion-over-nature value orientation. Harmony-with-nature orientation was evaluated and

compared to dominion-over-nature orientation throughout my research regarding the Lakota and Judeo-Christian religious ecological values, respectively.

Native American religions are intimately tied to the original lands of the Indigenous peoples. Among the hundreds of Indigenous religions practiced in North America, traditional tribal values contain intrinsic themes of ecological interconnectedness to guide reciprocal relationships with the natural world (Deloria Jr. 2003; Hughes 1996; Menzies 2006). In spite of differences in tribal ways of life, an intertribal commonality exists in expressions of reverence to the Earth (Hughes 1996). Native American religions are spatial-based. Lands and places are held in the highest spiritual meaning (Deloria Jr. 2003). The values of spatial-based and temporal-based religions produce fundamental differences of great philosophical importance between Indigenous and Western worldviews (Deloria Jr. 2003). Sacred sites continue to be used by Indigenous peoples for religious ceremonies, gifts and offerings, and seeking spiritual visions.

Examples of reciprocal relationships with the natural-world are prevalent throughout tribal affiliations. However, it is important to appreciate that tribal languages, ceremonies, and ecological practices are unique and specific to tribal regions. Origin stories, cultural beliefs, and sacred sites vary among Native American tribes. Therefore, specific tribal epistemology must be centered within Traditional Ecological Knowledge for any ecological inquiry and implicated methodology to be effective (Kovach 2012). My research is centered upon the tribal epistemology of the Great Sioux Nation, People of the Buffalo (*Pté Oyáte*) of the Seven Council Fires (*Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*), from the North American plains. The name Sioux was given by the tribes' Indigenous neighbors and French explorers. Sioux was derived from mixed Ojibwe-French origins, (*Nā-towē-ssiwa* and *Nadouessioux*), translated in Ojibwe language as “people of an alien tribe” (Gibbon 2003). The chosen names of the tribal bands were *Lakǰóta*, *Dakǰóta*, and

Nakǰóta, translated in the peoples' native languages as "friendly." The collective tribes of the Great Sioux Nation are referred to as, the common-name, Lakota throughout my research.

The academic field of religious ecology was created to explore implications of religious values on environmental beliefs. The field was established after historian Dr. Lynn White Jr. proposed that the Judeo-Christian religion, particularly the belief in dominion-over-nature, instigated the planet's current ecological crises, including environmental degradation through resource exploitation (White 1967). The dominion-over-nature argument was grounded in the Judeo-Christian origin story which told that human-beings were created in God's image and closer to the Creator than the rest of creation (Berry 2013). The debate largely stemmed from the book of Genesis and the placement of nature and animal-beings under human dominion (Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Dominion-over-nature belief involved troublesome implications for natural environments because of the emphasis on anthropocentric concern.

The dominion-over-nature belief is introduced in the Judeo-Christian creation story. According to the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, "God said to [humankind], 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gn 1:28).'" Researchers empirically examined impacts of dominion-over-nature belief-system upon environmental beliefs and found religious teachings direct ethical values. Environmental ethical values are demonstrated in behaviors such as conserving gasoline by walking or bicycling, volunteering time toward an ecological cause, and recycling or encouraging others to recycle (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Evidence reveals a disparity of positive environmental values within Judeo-Christian denominations (Boyd 1999; Eckberg and Blocker 1996; Hand and Van Liere 1984). Anthropocentric worldview, dominion-over-nature belief, and biblical

fundamentalism are negatively correlated to environmental activism in independent studies conducted across the world (Pepper and Leonard 2016; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). When religious institutions encourage religious variables such as dominion-over-nature, religious populations engage in an anthropocentric worldview and thereby increase the likelihood of negative environmental risks. Examples of negative environmental implications include decreased environmental regulations on corporations, particularly in waste management and carbon emission, resulting in an increased risk for pollutants in the water and air.

Within traditional Lakota belief-system, religion and ecology are inclusive and act harmoniously. Religious actions are ecological in-nature and ecological actions are religious in-nature. Among abundant quantitative research conducted to analyze the connection between religion and the environment, Indigenous epistemologies are not represented in the findings. Indigenous peoples practiced spatial-based religions for thousands of years before the introduction of the Christian belief system. Spatial-based religions recognize the spiritual power of culturally significant places. The majority of Indigenous religions have a sacred center at a particular place: rivers, mountains, or other natural features (Deloria Jr. 2003). Indigenous ancestors maintained responsibility to preserve the integrity of sacred lands and created ceremonies and songs to detail social rules (Deloria Jr. 2003). The Indigenous peoples followed religious ecological standards which allowed them to hunt and fish for thousands of years without degrading the water, land, and ecosystems (Hughes 1996). Spatial-based religions of the Lakota were chosen for my research with a hypothesis of positive implications in a harmony-with-nature orientation for contemporary environmental beliefs and behaviors.

Research Methods

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods, such as textual and phenomenological analyses, provided contextual information for a greater understanding of the religious beliefs examined. Qualitative research methods involved analyses of traditional Lakota teachings and language. Indigenous framework and research ethics were employed through guidelines written by Indigenous researcher Dr. Margaret Kovach (2012). Lakota-epistemology was centered in my research to show respect for the complexity and abundance of North American Indigenous knowledge and avoid the oft-problematic pan-Indian approach. Historical geographer Jeanne Kay provided a textual analysis of dominion-over-nature themes within the Hebrew Bible (1989). Stories of the Hebrew Bible formed Judeo-Christian origin stories and acted as foundations for the Christian religion, before the introduction of Jesus Christ (Ivany and McCormick 2018). Kay's analysis proved a valuable qualitative method in my research to evaluate Western religion.

Quantitative Methods

Survey research was the primary tool used by sociologists to find correlations in data. Quantitative research methods included analyses of survey literature provided from studies conducted in multiple countries, involving both Western and Eastern religions, supporting the religion-nature relationship (Pepper and Leonard 2016; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000; Yang and Huang 2018). Researchers created complementary question-sets, namely the New Ecological Paradigm, to measure ecological worldviews and address scientific inquiries regarding specific ecological beliefs and behaviors (Dunlap and Van Liere 2008). Variables were also created to judge scales of anthropocentrism, fundamentalist tradition, religious attendance and prayer (Boyd 1999; Eckberg and Blocker 1996; Hand and Van Liere 1984). Religious variables and measuring guidelines remained consistent within the field of religious ecology.

An empirically-tested standard of ecological measuring-indexes allowed for duplication of research methods. Sociologists Dr. Dunlap and Dr. Van Liere constructed a universal measuring instrument called the New Ecological Paradigm, or NEP (Dunlap and Van Liere 2008). The NEP included 15 indexes, designed to rate environmental beliefs and behaviors (Dunlap and Van Liere 2008). The NEP was designed to measure pro-environmental worldviews, including questions regarding the balance of nature, limited resources, and the extent of humankind's abuse on the environment (Dunlap and Van Liere 2008). The NEP was endorsed by multiple independent studies in North and South America, China, and Australia (Pepper and Leonard 2016; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000; Yang and Huang 2018). Groups with higher NEP scores proved inclined to support environmental sustainability and protection. The NEP provided means to accurately predict environmental involvement.

The use of survey index-analyses established by previous sociological researchers, in conjunction with Indigenous epistemological-centered qualitative methodologies, within Native American sample groups would answer the inquiry of whether contemporary Indigenous-based religious populations maintain the ecocentric nature-orientation of traditional religious teachings. The NEP is widely used as a tool to measure correlations between Christian-based values and environmental beliefs and behaviors. The same sociological device could be used to measure correlations between Lakota religious values and environmental values. What associations exist between Indigenous nature-orientations and environmental beliefs? What benefits of Indigenous harmony-with-nature perspectives exist for Western science? Quantitative analysis coupled with qualitative inquiry, such as the inclusion of language, oral tradition, and reciprocity with nature, would uncover Indigenous religious values holding enlightening perspectives on ecological relationships. Reconciling Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge is the first integral

step to allow for diverse perspectives to be shared and ecological issues to be addressed on an equal platform.

Dominion-over-Nature Theory

Anthropocentrism

Judeo-Christian denominations are associated with the dominion-over-nature belief-system. The dominion-over-nature theory is characterized by anthropocentric values. While anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are both associated with a desire for environmental protection, the underlying reasons for environmental concern define the foundational differences between the two orientations (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Anthropocentric ecological concerns focus on negative impacts of environmental damage to the quality of life of all human-beings (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Anthropocentrism prioritizes human needs above environmental implications. Anthropocentrism places the primary value of nature in service to humans. Anthropocentric groups are less likely than ecocentric groups to revere the intrinsic value of plants and animals (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Question-indexes designed to measure the effects of anthropocentrism show a negative correlation between anthropocentrism and pro-environmental behaviors, measured by a range of actions and policy orientations (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). One way to mitigate negative environmental behaviors is for anthropocentric groups to adopt ecocentric values of reciprocity and sustainability.

Measuring Environmental Beliefs and Behaviors

Researchers used the NEP and survey literature devices to reveal the implications of a dominion-over-nature worldview upon the environment. Social scientists sought to empirically

prove or disprove White's classic theory regarding Judeo-Christianity's dominion-effect and the implied negative environmental implications. Results predominantly supported White's theory (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Yet, because of the multidimensionality of religious beliefs, empirical evidence narrowed the scope of research to specific Judeo-Christian components that revealed frequent and significant negative implications for the environment. The variables that posed the most significant environmental risks included fundamentalism, biblical literalism, and anthropocentrism (Eckberg and Blocker 1996; Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). Common religiosity predicted a lesser likelihood for negative associations with environmental behaviors than fundamentalist traditions.

Stewardship Theory

A primary counterargument to the dominion-over-nature theory is the theological concept of humans' stewardship relationship with nature. The Biblical archetype of the good shepherd supports arguments for stewardship theory, such as stories of Adam and Noah (Kay 1989). In an analysis of the United States General Social Survey, researchers found all 15 variables of the religious index analyzed (belief in God, Christianity, the Bible, etc.) positively correlated with the belief that nature is sacred (Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Stewardship theory requires the sanctification of nature within Christian populations and also the desire for environmental protection. However, further analysis of the same religious variables revealed strong negative associations with personal pro-environmental behaviors (Eckberg and Blocker 1996). The contemporary Christian concept of sanctification of nature does not correlate with positive environmental behaviors, in fact, "the reverse is true (Eckberg and Blocker 1996, 350)." The same religious beliefs were positively associated with ranking the economy as more important than nature (Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Figure 1 shows examples of the correlations discovered

by sociologists Dr. Eckberg and Dr. Blocker from General Social Survey data (1996). The graph ranges from negative correlations (red) to positive correlations (blue.) An asterisk marks a strong correlation. Positive-symbols distinguish associations with positive environmental implications, and negative-symbols distinguish associations with negative environmental implications.

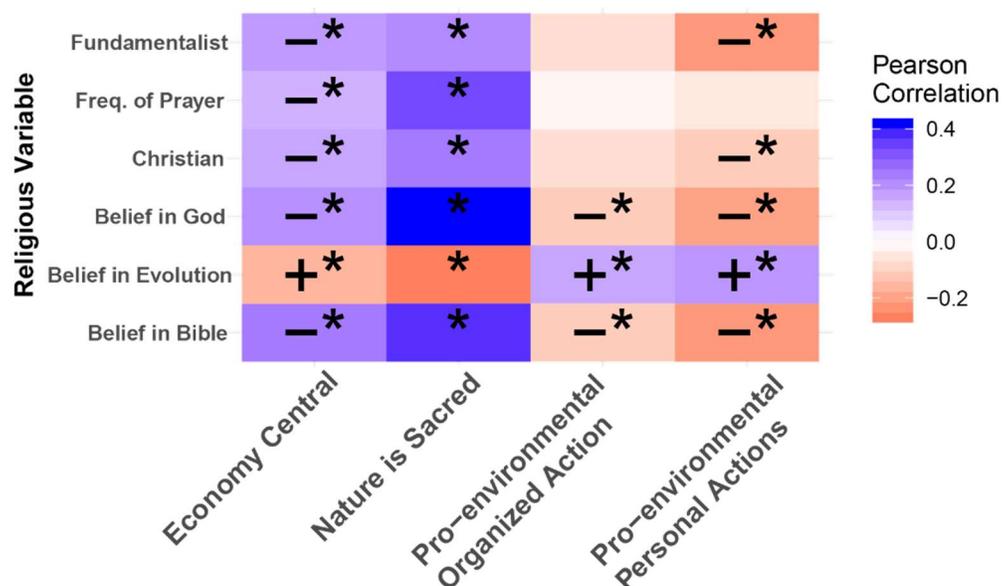


Figure 1. Religious variables and environmental beliefs and behaviors (Eckberg and Blocker 1996)

Denominational Diversity and Fundamentalism

The Christian religion belongs to many denominations defined by varying characteristics and levels of religiosity. The denominational diversity model highlights differences between the subjects of Christianity. Denominations committed to the fundamentalist tradition believe more prevalently in dominion-over-nature theory (Hand and Van Liere 1984). Negative environmental repercussions of Christian teachings are significantly correlated with fundamentalism (Boyd 1999; Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Fundamentalist tradition is distinguished from common religiosity in the increased degree of belief in biblical literalism, God's involvement in everyday

activities, and belief in obedience (Boyd 1999; Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Survey participants involved in fundamentalist practice participated in self-reported ecological behaviors less frequently (Boyd 1999). Researchers found less frequent negative correlations with a “green” lifestyle among variables of common religiosity (Eckberg and Blocker 1996). The denominational diversity model allows for an equitable review of the dominion-over-nature belief throughout Christian subsects.

Multinational Sample Study

Despite denominational diversity, dominion-over-nature theory has been confirmed in studies both nationally and internationally and performed within wide ranges of cultural contexts. A multinational study, conducted in 14 countries within North and South America, found anthropocentric ecological concerns were negatively correlated with environmental behaviors, including voting for a candidate who supported environmental issues or volunteering time to help environmental projects (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). The significance of the study, performed by psychologists and public health advocates, was throughout the large sample (n= 2,160) the relationship between anthropocentrism and environmental attitudes was consistent across 14 diverse societies (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). In all countries studied, a literal belief in the bible led to anthropocentric concern for the environment, “a general concern for oneself and other people but not necessarily a concern for plants and animals (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000, 588).” Anthropocentrism proved detrimental to environmental beliefs and behaviors, in countries across the world, because of the implicit instinct to prefer human needs to the needs of other living-beings.

Other Variables for Consideration

Sociodemographic variables such as knowledge and education, income-level, gender, and age should be considered in thorough analyses of ecological values and behaviors. Another important consideration is the differences between urban and rural communities. Urban areas often provide more eco-friendly opportunities for residents, such as greater access to recycle and compost or potential to commute via bicycle and public transit. Exposure to ecological issues, such as pollutants, creates an expanded ecological awareness and activism among stakeholders (Yang and Huang 2018). For example, the Water is Life movement (*Mní Wičhóni*), on the Standing Rock (*Húŋkpaǰá*) Lakota homeland, increased national awareness of risks of oil pipelines to water sources and Indigenous sacred sites. Indigenous populations present unique variables for consideration, such as tribal education systems and level of Indigenous cultural involvement.

Harmony-with-Nature Theory

Ecocentrism

Traditional Lakota religious practices display an ecocentric cultural orientation. An ecocentric epistemology exhibits a nature-centered, rather than human-centered, system of values. Lakota origin stories and traditions testify for the spirit of “everything that moves,” such as the Earth and Sun, plants and animals, and rivers and winds (Walker 1991, 72). Spirits are considered *wakǰán* (mysterious) and treated with consideration and respect (Walker 1991). The Western parallel to the Lakota concept of *wakǰán* is the Christian perception of *sacred*. Indigenous scholar, Dr. Daniel Wildcat explains, the Indigenous traditions recognize the *sacred* in a world both spiritual and physical (2009). Religious teachings regarding humans’ relationship with nature directly influence environmental ethics. Although little research has been done on North American ecocentric worldviews, it can be logically hypothesized that anthropocentric and

ecocentric environmental orientations hold contrasting consequences on contemporary environmental beliefs. Ecocentric cultures, because of inherent ecological mindfulness, would display positive associations with pro-environmental beliefs and behaviors.

Qualitative Evidence

Because the voices of Indigenous populations are nonexistent in the current data within the field of religious ecology, speculation regarding Lakota religious-nature orientation is currently reliant on qualitative methods. Study of tribal language, spatial-based belief system, and phenomenological research on themes of reciprocity are powerful tools for nature-orientation analysis. Quantitative data would strengthen my proposed harmony-over-nature theory. Religious beliefs are enormously complex, therefore influences on environmental beliefs should be studied from demonstrated measurement, not assumed from philosophical speculation (Kay 1989). A purely theological analysis of human-nature orientation limits the precision of research because of the profundity and intricacy of religious knowledge (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000). The hypothesis of my research requires Lakota religious values to display ecocentric environmental concern. To compliment qualitative methods, use of survey analysis devices such as the New Ecological Paradigm would enhance the accuracy of research and fill a gap in knowledge.

Indigenous Research Ethics

Indigenous peoples experienced negative histories of anthropological research during the colonization and assimilation of North America. Indigenous scholar, Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's accurate judgement addressed the Indigenous perspective of research: "the word itself, 'research,' is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary (Kovach 2012, 24)."

Researchers within Indigenous populations must be sensitive to serve Indigenous communities' concerns to break the cycle of historical trauma caused by previous negligence of the scientific community. Indigenous researcher, Dr. Margaret Kovach presented a comprehensive example of an Indigenous-based research model in the book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2012). An important aspect illustrated in Kovach's research model is the concentration on a critical and transformative paradigm (Kovach 2012). Because of the convoluted history of research in Indigenous communities, a critical aim is necessary in contemporary research. A critical aim works in coalition with decolonizing research methods (Kovach 2012). Another imperative aspect of Indigenous research is a specific tribal-centered epistemology to guide research decisions (Kovach 2012). Researchers within Indigenous communities have the privilege to decolonize Western-standards of knowledge acquisition and research format.

Researchers within Indigenous communities carry increased responsibility of tribal ethical standards. Indigenous knowledge is *wakh'áŋ* (sacred) and should be treated with discretion and respect. Participants of any given study must be provided the opportunity to review contributions and provide approval of the final work (Kovach 2012). Before beginning a project, researchers must consider substantial and meaningful contributions the study will give back to Indigenous communities (Kovach 2012). Qualitative methodology is a platform to incorporate Indigenous research methods, such as personal interviews, talking-circles, and cultural grounding (Kovach 2012). Indigenous knowledge must be given priority in research methods to promote decolonization of knowledge standards.

Spiritual Power

Spiritual powers of the physical world play a significant role in the Lakota religion and the practices of ceremony and offering. Religious power-structures shape the hierarchal beliefs of followers. For example, the Christian religion places God as all-powerful, human-beings under the mercy of God, and the rest of creation under dominion of humankind (Kay 1989). In Lakota religion, *Wakǵáŋ Tháŋka* (The Great Mystery or Spirit) created all things: first the sky, then the earth, and then *wakǵáŋ* spirits (Walker 1991). *Wakǵáŋ* are all spirits that are more powerful than humankind and call for gifts and offerings (Walker 1991). Some animals are considered *wakǵáŋ* and should be treated with great respect. *Wamákhá naǵí* are the spirits within animal-beings, particularly good-natured and helpful animals such as horses, dogs, and buffalo (Walker 1991). The spirits of humankind (*wanaǵí*) display equality with the other spirits of creation and act harmoniously with four-legged and winged-beings on tasks provided by *Wakǵáŋ Tháŋka* (Walker 1991). The Christian concept of separation between human souls and animal-beings, presents a dichotomy to the Lakota belief of harmony between spirits. In fact, Lakota religion values the spirits of animals and plants as more mysterious (*wakǵáŋ*) and closer to sources of spiritual power (Hughes 1996). In Lakota belief, many great spirits of nature and natural forces are more powerful than human spirits. Human dominion does not fit within traditional Lakota ecological beliefs.

Figure 2 is a visual example of the hierarchal separations within the two religions. The figure shows how religious hierarchal worldviews direct human-to-nature orientations, in this case the anthropocentric dominion-over-nature and ecocentric harmony-with-nature orientations. The infographic details items considered sacred and *wakǵáŋ*. The items are intended as primary examples to educate the fundamental differentiations between the two religions, and are not all-inclusive lists. Within Lakota religion, spiritual attributes are distributed to all things human and

non-human. Within Christian religion, sacred value is given to items directly pertaining to God. The separation of human-beings, animal-beings, and spiritual power within Christian worldview, presents a fundamental difference between the two religious' traditions.

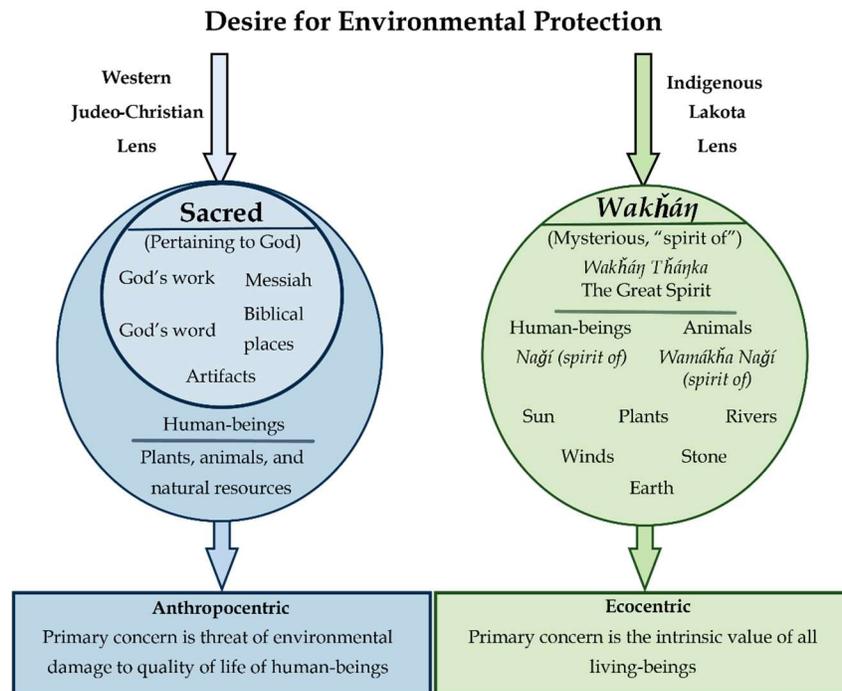


Figure 2. Desire for environmental protection filtered through two different cultural and religious lenses reveals primary reason for environmental concern

Creation Stories and Themes of Reciprocity

The Lakota creation stories encompassed themes of humans' interconnectedness to nature and reliance upon balanced, reciprocal relationships with nature. Lakota religion, in contrast to Christian belief, refused to represent the Creator (*Wak'háŋ Tháŋka*) anthropomorphically (Deloria Jr. 2003). Great spirits were represented in the natural world. In North American Indigenous traditional stories, animals played essential roles. Creation stories were reliant on the skills of animals. Lakota creation stories were told differently depending on tribal band, yet the

emergence story from Wind Cave (*Makǎ́ Oníya*) in the Black Hills (*Paha Sapa*) was shared by all bands (Fritz and Lammers 2016). Many renditions of the emergence story told that the buffalo surfaced with the first peoples, tunneling out of the cave entrance. In another version of the emergence story, the first group of people to leave the underground world of Spirit Lodge, compelled by the trickster (*Iktomi*), were transformed into the first buffalo herd by *Wakǎ́n Tǎ́nka* (Fritz and Lammers 2016). Creator told Lakota to follow the buffalo, relatives of the people, and have everything needed to live (Fritz and Lammers 2016). The buffalo provided food, tools, clothes, and shelter (Fritz and Lammers 2016). Lakota shared a physical and spiritual connection with the buffalo since the beginning of time on Earth.

Indigenous epistemologies place the spirits of animals and humans in a kinship relationship, while Christian origin places humans above rest of creation. Black Elk, an esteemed Lakota medicine man (*wičháša wakǎ́n*) said, “With all beings and all things we shall be relatives (Hughes 1996, 17).” The Lakota interrelated relationship with nature promotes respect for animal relatives. Indigenous religions recognize the lessons and sacrifices given by animal-kind. Lakota tradition places human-beings as dependent on nature, not dominant over nature (Hughes 1996). Harmony-with-nature orientation acknowledges the important roles of all living-beings in the natural world.

Spatial-based Religions

Spatial-based religions recognize spiritual power within the environments of traditional tribal-lands and significant places. Thousands of years of occupancy taught Indigenous peoples sacred landscapes and the structure of religious ceremonies (Deloria Jr. 2003). Spatial-based Indigenous religions grant the same reverence to natural monuments as the Christian faith provide to temporal-based sacred scriptures. Native American ceremonies are performed in

designated places within the environment and aligned with natural occurrences, such as seasonal changes of crops and harvest. The celestial objects are honored participants in ceremony (Hollabaugh 2017). The Sun, Moon, and stars are members of the *thiyóšpaye*, Lakota extended family (Hollabaugh 2017). The structure of Indigenous religions is based on all elements of the surrounding world (Deloria Jr. 2003). Lakota peoples strived to understand the mysterious workings of the natural world as a spiritual way of participating in the Great Mystery (Hollabaugh 2017). In Lakota tradition, ecological activities were means to spiritual fulfillment.

Discussion

Traditional Indigenous religions emphasize ecology in social ethical standards. Spatial-based ethical-systems are directly related to the physical world, real human situations, and are valid at all times (Deloria Jr. 2003). Spatial-based thinking prioritizes a harmonious relationship and holistic view of all elements of the environment. Indigenous religions instruct followers that each action in nature directs a reciprocal action (Hughes 1996). Heightened consideration and respect of the natural world are cultural values that encourage sustainability and environmental preservation. The Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Lakota religious orientation guides balanced relationships in nature and a respectful reverence within ecological perspectives. Religious ecology presents a platform for decolonizing research methods, Indigenous self-determination, and expression of Indigenous religious freedoms.

. The hypothesis proposed by my research, to be considered by future researchers, is regarding the human-nature orientation of Indigenous peoples. Previous research demonstrates the negative environmental associations of an anthropocentric ecological orientation. The implications of an ecocentric orientation are excluded from the existing quantitative research. Lakota traditional cultural teachings reveal themes of harmonious relationships with nature. My

research proposes that Lakota religious values would be positively associated with the New Ecological Paradigm and present a harmony-with-nature orientation. Wisdom from the Indigenous harmony-with-nature orientation has potential to educate Western-science on sustainable ecological approaches. Indigenous environmental ethics are protective and life-preserving (Hughes 1996). The ecocentric wisdom of the Lakota religion contains Traditional Ecological Knowledge to direct contemporary values and develop ecological solutions.

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