

# Psychology in the Snow: Reflections on Mental Wellness in the North

*A collaboration between Metis counselling psychologist, Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, and European-Canadian independent journalist, Scott Douglas Jacobsen.*

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*Scott Jacobsen*

section of [Psychology in the Snow](#) focuses on counseling psychology in an educational conversation or interview series based on the experience and expertise of Robertson with thematic framing by Jacobsen. The second section is composed of several articles by Robertson on critical points of controversy with humanist communities and public Canadian sociopolitical discourse.

Jacobsen said, “The purpose of this text is the provision of a public resource focused on presenting a social scientific account of issues in society and the aspects of counseling psychology capable of handling them. We’re both

humanists. So, the assumed premises in the conversations and articles are empirical, rational, and compassion based. As with all of my work, it’s an aspiring admixture between personal intellectual interest or curiosity and the creation of a public resource with a relevant expert source. Robertson is perfectly suitable for covering this subject matter.”

Excerpt:

When did the first self emerge? Well, I could say when the first ape-like creature recognized his reflection in a pool of water, but an argument could be made for millions of years earlier — when the first organism recoiled when penetrated by a foreign object. Of course, neither the ape nor the organism had a self we would recognize as such. The evolution of the self was aided by the invention of language that allowed for increasingly sophisticated conceptualizations, and equally important, a process whereby phonemes can be recombined to create new meanings — a process that is mimicked in the process of recombining memes in new and novel ways. The modern self with elements of uniqueness, volition, stability over time, and self descriptors related to productivity, intimacy and social interest, is one such recombination that proved to be such value that it was preserved in culture and taught to succeeding generations of children. This modern self occurred as recently as 3,000 years ago, but had such survival value that it spread to all cultures.

When I use the term “modern self” it should not be confused with “modernity” which is said to have occurred with the European Enlightenment. Foucault mistook the ideology of individualism that flowed from the Enlightenment with self-construction in declaring the self to be a European invention. Let me explain. To engage in volitional cognitive planning each person must first situate themselves within a situational and temporal frame. Even when engaged in group planning, each individual must so situate themselves in determining their contribution to the group effort. The Europeans did not invent this. While the potential benefits to societies containing individuals who can perform forward planning are obvious, the individualism inherent in defining oneself to be unique, continuous and volitional are potentially disruptive. I have argued that the rise of the great world religions was an effort to keep the individualism inherent in the modern self in check. Confucians sublimated the self to the family and tradition.

Buddhists declared the self to be an illusion. Christians instructed the devout to give up their selves. Hindus controlled self-expression through an elaborate caste system. One of the accomplishments of the Enlightenment was to reverse the moral imperative. The individualism inherent in the self was now seen as a good and the enforced collectivism restricting the freedoms of the self, especially with regard to freedom of thought, was deemed to be oppressive. It is with this background early psychologists like Adler were able to declare the self to be central to a unique worldview.

#### About the Authors:

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson is a Registered Doctoral Psychologist with expertise in Counselling Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Human Resource Development. His research interests include memes as applied to self-knowledge, the evolution of religion and spirituality, the aboriginal self's structure, residential school syndrome, prior learning recognition and assessment, and the treatment of suicide ideation. His previous book, [The Evolved Self](#): Mapping and Understanding of Who We Are was published by the University of Ottawa Press.

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