



## Dr. Craig Love - Psychologist

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Sometimes you realize that there are certain moments in your life that influence you in a profound way. For me, one of those moments came when I was in junior high, and I saw a picture of an Indian doing a Sun Dance. Although I am Southern Arapaho, I did not live a very traditional life as a child. But when I saw this picture, I knew that I would some day do a Sun Dance—and from then on, my Native American background became very important to me. The Sun Dance represents the cycle of birth and death, whether symbolic or real, and it represents both tradition and transition. Now, years (and many Sun Dances) later, my cultural heritage defines much of the scientific work that I do. There have been many transitions in my life, some of which have been very unexpected, but my cultural heritage has provided me with a strong personal foundation, despite all of the changes in my life.

One of the very first surprise transitions in my life was when I decided, after beginning college that I did not want to become a minister, as everyone in my family had assumed I would. (I had been playing the role of counselor and mediator in my family for a long time.) I enrolled as a psychology major at the University of Kentucky, thinking that a minister needed to understand how people work and think. My family did not understand my decision to go to college or support me while I was doing it. After delving into academic studies, I realized that I was not going to be a minister; I was going to be a psychologist instead!

However, the area of psychology that I wanted to study changed. My master's degree was in a field of psychology called radical behaviorism, which means that I studied how different types of punishment and reward change animals' behavior. But while I was working on my thesis, I realized that I was very bored with my work. I decided that I was going to have to rethink once more what psychology meant to me. This time, I decided that I wanted to work with people, so I went into cognitive psychology and got my Ph.D. at Temple University in 1978.

Before I'd even finished my Ph.D., my life took yet another unexpected turn. Jobs for cognitive psychologists were hard to come by in the late seventies, and the only job I could find was doing research for the Federal Bureau of Prisons at the University of Miami. Although I fundamentally disagreed with many aspects of the work, all my current research interests are a result of having taken that job.

After four years at the University of Miami, I worked in the prison system for another nine years. I became interested in substance abuse treatment and prevention because it occurred to me that 80–90% of the people I'd worked with in prisons were involved with drugs and alcohol. I knew from experience that prison did not help "cure" them of their addictions. Eventually, I left the prison system and went to work at Brown University, where I did research about substance abuse and prisons.

At Brown, I got to do a lot of things I hadn't done before. I designed a Native American studies curriculum and taught subjects that I really care about. I also helped Native American students adjust to the university system and then later adjust to going home again. That transition is very difficult in college because you aren't the same person when you go home as you were when you left. Sometimes this is especially hard for Native kids from reservations, who often feel that their communities don't understand them anymore.

Now I am the Senior Study Director at a corporation called Westat. I research substance abuse treatment programs in Native American communities. Substance abuse is a huge problem in many Native American communities because they tend to be poor and to have little hope that life will ever improve. I am strongly against the use of prisons to control substance abuse. I don't think that it helps substance abusers or the communities they come from. I work to develop programs that will help entire communities heal and to prevent more people from becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol.

One of the most important aspects of helping Native communities overcome substance abuse problems is to help them realize that their cultures and ways of living may be different from other people's, but they are just as valuable. When people realize that who they are and what they do is important, drugs and alcohol become much less appealing. Long ago, the Sun Dance introduced me to a new outlook on life—one that embraces change and impermanence. This foundation has given me the strength to help other Native people learn to value our heritage and contributions to the world so that we, as a community, can heal.