CHAPTER ONE:

SHAMANS AND SHAMANISM: POINTS AND COUNTERPOINTS

Recent developments in qualitative research and the innovative use of conventional investigative methods have provided the tools to bring both rigor and creativity to the disciplined examination of shamans, their behavior, and experiences. However, a review of Western psychological perspectives on shamans reveals several conflicting perspectives. This chapter focuses on these controversies.

The term *shaman* is a social construct, one that has been described, not unfairly, as "a made-up, modern, Western category" (Taussig, 1989, p. 57). This term describes a particular type of practitioner who attends to the psychological and spiritual needs of a community that has granted that practitioner privileged status. Shamans claim to engage in specialized activities that enable them to access valuable information that is not ordinarily available to other members of their community (Krippner, 2000). Hence, *shamanism* can be described as a body of techniques and activities that supposedly enable its practitioners to access information that is not ordinarily attainable by members of the social group that gave them privileged status. These practitioners use this information in attempts to meet the needs of this group and its members.

Contemporary shamanic practitioners exist at the band, nomadic–pastoral, horticultural–agricultural, and state levels of societies. There are many types of shamans. For example, among the Cuna Indians of Panama, the *abisua* shaman heals by singing, the *inaduledi* specializes in herbal cures, and the *nele* focuses on diagnosis.

Shamanic Roles

Winkelman's (1992) seminal cross-cultural study focused on 47 societies' *magico-religious practitioners*, who claim to interact with *nonordinary dimensions* of human existence. This interaction involves special knowledge of purported *spirit entities* and how to relate to them, as well as *special powers* that supposedly allow these practitioners to influence the course of nature or human affairs. Winkelman coded each

type of practitioner separately on such characteristics as the type of magical or religious activity performed; the technology used; the mind-altering procedures used (if any); the practitioner's cosmology and worldview; and each practitioner's perceived power, psychological characteristics, socioeconomic status, and political role.

Winkelman's (1992) statistical analysis yielded four practitioner groups: (a) the shaman complex (shamans, shaman-healers, and healers); (b) priests and priestesses; (c) diviners, seers, and mediums; (d) malevolent practitioners (witches and sorcerers). Shamans were most often present at the band level. Priests and priestesses were most present in horticultural/agricultural communities, and diviners and malevolent practitioners were observed in state-level societies.

Most diviners report that they are conduits for a spirit's power and claim not to exercise personal volition once they have *incorporated* these spirit entities. When shamans interacted with spirits, the shamans were almost always dominant; if the shamans suspended volition, it was only temporary. For example, shamans surrender volition during some Native American ritual dances when there is an intense *perceptual flooding*. Nonetheless, shamans purportedly knew how to enter and exit this type of intense experience (Winkelman, 2000).

Shamanic Selection and Training

Shamans enter their profession in a number of ways, depending on the traditions of their community. Some shamans inherit the role (Larsen, 1976, p.59). Others may display particular bodily signs, behaviors, or experiences that might constitute a *call to shamanize* (Heinze, 1991, pp. 146-156). In some cases, the call arrives late in life, giving meritorious individuals opportunities to continue their civil service, or, conversely, an individual's training may begin at birth. The training mentor may be an experienced shaman or a spirit entity. The skills to be learned vary, but usually include diagnosis and treatment of illness, contacting and working with benevolent spirit entities, appeasing or fighting malevolent spirit entities, supervising sacred rituals, interpreting dreams, assimilating herbal knowledge, predicting the weather, and mastering their self-regulation of bodily functions and attentional states.

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

The Demonic Model

Point

The European states that sent explorers to the Western Hemisphere were, for the most part, the states that were executing tens of thousands of putative witches and sorcerers. Torture yielded confessions that they had made pacts with the devil, had desecrated sacred Christian ceremonies, and had consorted with spirits. Thus, many chroniclers were Christian clergy who described shamans as devil worshippers (Narby & Huxley, 2001).

A 16th-century account by the Spanish navigator and historian, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1535/2001) described "revered" old men, held in "high esteem," who used tobacco in order to "worship the Devil" (pp. 11-12). The first person to introduce tobacco to France was a French priest, Andre Thevet (1557/2001). He described a group of "venerable" Brazilian practitioners called the *paje*, describing them as "witches" who "adore the Devil" (pp. 13, 15). The *paje,* he wrote, "use certain ceremonies and diabolical invocations" and "invoke the evil spirit" in order to "cure fevers," determine the answers to "very important" community problems, and learn "the most secret things of nature" (pp. 13-15).

Another French priest, Antoine Biet (1664/2001), observed the rigorous training program undergone by indigenous practitioners or *piayes*. To Biet, the rigors of a 10-year apprenticeship provided the *piayes* the "power of curing illness," but only by becoming "true penitents of the Demon" (pp. 16-17). Avvakum Petrovich (1672/2001), a

17th -century Russian clergyman, was the first person to use the word "shaman" in a published text, describing one Siberian shaman as "a villain" (p. 18) who called upon demons.

Counterpoint

Shamans engage in shamanic rivalries, wars, and duplicity (e.g., Hugh-Jones, 1996, pp. 32-37). Even so, ethical training is a key element of the shaman's education; according to M. Harner (1980), shamanism at its best has an ethical core (but see M.F. Brown, 1989, for a discussion of shamanism's dark side). Walsh's (1990) study of

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

various shamanic traditions revealed rigorous systems of ethics: "The best of shamanism has long been based on an ethic of compassion and service" (p. 249). Dow (1986) conducted field work with don Antonio, an Otomi Indian shaman in central Mexico, who described his fellow shamans as warriors who must "firmly declare forever an alliance with the forces of good, with God, and then fight to uphold those forces" (p. 8). In addition, shamans must dedicate themselves to ending suffering, even it if requires them to forego their own comfort (p. 39).

In Retrospect

Modern social scientists do not accuse shamans of consorting with demons. These accusations, however, are still being made by some missionaries as well as by shamans themselves who may accuse rival shamans of using their powers for malevolent purposes (Hugh-Jones, 1996, p. 38).

The Charlatan Model

Point

Most writers in Western Europe's Enlightenment belittled the notion that shamans communed with otherworldly entities, much less the Devil. Instead, shamans were described as "charlatans," "imposters," and "magicians." These appellations undercut the Inquisition's justification for torturing shamans, but also kept Western science and philosophy from taking shamanism seriously.

Flaherty (1992), however, noted that Europe in the 18th century was not totally preoccupied with rationalism, humanism, and scientific determinism; manifestations of romanticism and the occult were present as well (p. 7). An example of this ambiguity appears in the writings of Denis Diderot (1765/2001), the first writer to define "shaman" and the chief editor of the *Encyclopedie* (Diderot and associates, 1713-1784/1965), one of the key works of the French Enlightenment. In his definition, Diderot referred to shamans as Siberian "imposters" who function as magicians performing "tricks that seem supernatural to an ignorant and superstitious people" (p. 32).

According to Diderot, shamans lock themselves "into steamrooms to make themselves sweat" (p. 33), often after drinking a "special beverage [that they say] is very important to receiving the celestial impressions" (p. 35). He remarked that shamans "persuade the majority of people that they have ecstatic transports, in which the genies reveal the future and hidden things to them." Despite their trickery, Diderot concluded, "The supernatural occasionally enters into their operations . . . . They do not always guess by chance" (pp. 34).

The French Jesuit missionary Joseph Lafitau (1724/2001) spent 5 years living among the Iroquois and Hurons in Canada and reported that the tribe's people discriminated between those who communicated with spirits for the good of the community and those who did the same for harmful purposes. Lafitau argued that the latter might be in consort with the Devil, but that demonic agencies played no part in the work of the former, to whom he referred as "jugglers" or "diviners" (p. 25), On the other hand, Lafitau admitted that oftentimes there was something more to these magicians' practices than trickery, especially when shamans exposed "the secret desires of the soul" (pp. 24).

According to Johann Gmelin (1751/2001), an 18th century German explorer of Siberia, the shamanic ceremonies he observed were marked by "humbug," "hocus-pocus," "conjuring tricks," and "infernal racket" (pp. 27-28). A Russian botanist of the same era, Stepan Krasheninnikov (1755/2001), reported to the imperial government that the natives of eastern Siberia harbored beliefs that were "absurd" and "ridiculous" (p. 29). Krasheninnikov wrote that shamans were "considered doctors" and admitted that they were "cleverer, more adroit and shrewder than the rest of the people" (p. 30), He described one shaman who "plunged a knife in his belly" but performed the trick "so crudely" that "one could see him slide the knife along his stomach and pretend to stab himself, then squeeze a bladder to make blood come out" (pp. 30).

Counterpoint

Not all Enlightenment scholars were hostile to shamanism; for example, the German philosopher Johann Herder (1785/2001) noted that "one thinks that one has

explained everything by calling them imposters" (p. 36). Herder continued, "In most places, this is the case," but "let us never forget that they belong to the people as well and . . . were conceived and brought up with the imaginary representations of their tribe" (p. 36). Indeed, "Among all the forces of the human soul, imagination is perhaps the least explored" (p. 37). Imagination seems to be "the knot of the relationships between mind and body" and "relates to the construction of the entire body, and in particular of the brain and nerves—as numerous and astonishing illnesses demonstrate" (p. 37).

The small body of parapsychological research conducted with shamans suggests that on irregular occasions some practitioners may be capable of demonstrating unusual abilities (Rogo, 1987; Van de Castle, 1977). These data were collected not only by means of controlled observations, such as having shamans locate hidden objects (Boshier, 1974), but also through experimental procedures such as asking shamans to guess the symbols on standardized card decks (Rose, 1956) or requesting that they influence randomly generated electronic activity (Giesler, 1986).

As for the use of sleight-of-hand, Hansen (2001) has compiled dozens of examples of shamanic trickery from the anthropological literature but adds that deception may promote healing (pp. 89-90). Unusual abilities, if they exist, are likely to be unpredictable; trickery may accompany their use, as shamans are prototypical "tricksters," and, as do some contemporary psychotherapists, believe that they must often "trick" their clients into becoming well (e.g., Warner, 1980).

In Retrospect

Shamans operate on the *limens*, or borders, of both society and consciousness, eluding structures and crossing established boundaries (Hansen, 2001, p. 27). As liminal practitioners, they often use deception and sleight-of-hand when they feel that such practices are needed. Thus, shamans can be both cultural heroes and hoaxsters, alternating between gallant support of those in distress and crass manipulation. Like other tricksters, however, they are capable of reconciling opposites; they justify their adroit maneuvering and use of legerdemain in the cause of promoting individual and community health and well-being (pp. 30-31).

The Schizophrenia Model

Point

When mental health professionals first commented on shamanic behavior, it was customary for them to use psychopathological descriptors. The French ethnopsychiatrist George Devereux (1961) concluded that shamans were mentally "deranged" (p. 1089) and should be considered severely neurotic or even psychotic. The American psychiatrist Julian Silverman (1967) postulated that shamanism is a form of acute schizophrenia because the two conditions have in common "grossly non-reality-oriented ideation, abnormal perceptual experiences, profound emotional upheavals, and bizarre mannerisms" (p. 22). According to Silverman, the only difference between shamanic states and contemporary schizophrenia in Western industrialized societies is "the degree of cultural acceptance of the individual's psychological resolution of a life crisis" (p. 23).

Taking a psychohistorical perspective, deMause (2002) proposed that all tribal people "since the Paleolithic . . . regularly felt themselves breaking into fragmented pieces, switching into dissociated states and going into shamanistic trances to try to put themselves together" (p. 251). According to DeMause, shamans were "schizoids" (p. 250) who spent much of their lives in fantasy worlds where they were starved, burned, beaten, raped, lacerated, and dismembered, yet were able to recover their bones and flesh and experience ecstatic rebirth. This account by DeMause is reminiscent of the portrayal of shamans as "wounded healers" who have worked their way "through many painful emotional trials to find the basis for their calling" (Sandner, 1997, p. 6) and who have taken an "inner journey . . . during a life crisis" (Halifax, 1982, p.5).

Counterpoint

Roger Walsh (2001), an American psychiatrist, provided a penetrating analysis of shamanic phenomenology in which he concluded that it is "clearly distinct from schizophrenic . . . states" (p. 34), especially on such important dimensions as awareness of the environment, concentration, control, sense of identity, arousal, affect, and mental imagery. Critics of the schizophrenia model claim that shamans have been men and

women of great talent; Basilov's (1997) case studies of Turkic shamans in Siberia demonstrate their ability to master a complex vocabulary as well as extensive knowledge concerning herbs, rituals, healing procedures, and the purported spirit world. Sandner (1979) described the remarkable abilities of the Navajo *hatalii*: to attain their status, they must memorize at least 10 ceremonial chants, each of which contains hundreds of individual songs.

Noll (1983) compared verbal reports from both schizophrenics and shamans with criteria described in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. He reported that important phenomenological differences exist between the two groups and that the "schizophrenic metaphor" (p. 455) of shamanism is therefore untenable. This assertion is supported by personality test data; for example, Boyer, Klopfer, Brawer, and Kawai (1964) administered Rorschach inkblots to 12 male Apache shamans, 52 nonshamans, and 7 pseudoshamans (practitioners who considered themselves shamans, but had been denied that status by their community). Rorschach analysis demonstrated that the shamans showed as high a degree of reality-testing potential as did nonshamans. Boyer et al. concluded, "In their mental approach, the shamans appear less hysterical than the other groups" (p. 176) and were "healthier than their societal co-members . . . . This finding argues against [the] stand that the shaman is severely neurotic or psychotic, at least insofar as the Apaches are concerned" (p. 179). Fabrega and Silver's (1973) study used a different projective technique with 20 Zinacanteco shamans and 23 of their nonshaman peers in Mexico and found few differences between the groups, but described the shamans as freer and more creative.

The first epidemiological survey of psychiatric disorders among shamans was reported in 2002. A research team associated with the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization of Amsterdam (Van Ommeren et al., 2002) surveyed a community of 616 male Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and assessed International Classification of Disease disorders (World Health Organization, 1992) using structured diagnostic interviews. Of the refugees, 42 claimed to be shamans; after controlling for demographic differences, the shamans' general profile of disorders did not significantly differ from that of the

nonshamans. Indeed, shamans had fewer of the general anxiety disorders that afflicted nonshamans.

Wilson and Barber (1981) identified *fantasy-prone personalities* among their hypnotic participants. This group was highly imaginative but, for the most part, neither neurotic nor psychotic. It is likely that many shamans would fall within this category, as shamans' visions and fantasies are thought to represent activities in the *spirit world* (Noel, 1999; Noll, 1985). Ripinsky-Naxon (1993) concluded, "The world of . . . a mentally dysfunctional individual is disintegrated. On the other hand, just the opposite may be said about a shaman" (p. 104). Along these lines, Frank and Frank (1991) traced the roots of psychotherapy back to shamanism, and Torrey (1986) asserted that the cure rate of shamans and other indigenous practitioners compares favorably with that of Western psychologists and psychiatrists.

In Retrospect

Contemporary social scientists rarely pathologize shamans, and when they describe them as wounded healers and fantasy-prone, these attributions are often combined with admiration, respect, or indifference. Of course, the variety of shamanic selection procedures undercuts these generalizations, especially when shamanism is hereditary and a novice assumes the role even without having experienced a "wounding" illness. A far greater commonality among shamanic practitioners is the consideration they give to resolving the psychological problems and challenges faced by individuals, families, and communities within their purview.

The Soul Flight Model

Point

The Romanian American religion historian Mircea Eliade (1951/1972) integrated the many tribal variations of shamanism into a unified concept, referring to them as "technicians of ecstasy" (p. 5). According to Eliade, "The shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" (p. 5). Many other writers have agreed, stating that altered states of

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

consciousness (ASCs) are the sine qua non of shamanism, particularly those ASCs involving *ecstatic journeying*, (i.e., *soul flight* or *out-of-body experience*). Heinze (1991) wrote, "Only those individuals can be called shamans who can access alternative states of consciousness at will" (p. 13). Ripinsky-Naxon (1993) added, "Clearly, the shaman's technique of ecstasy is the main component in the shamanic state of consciousness" (p. 86).

Proponents of the soul flight/ecstatic journeying model point to the close association among rhythmic percussion (and other forms of perceptual flooding), journeying, and healing. Neher's (1961) investigations demonstrated that drumming could induce theta wave EEG frequency. Maxfield (1994) built on and extended Neher's work and found that theta brain waves were synchronized with monotonous drumbeats of 3 to 6 cycles per second, a rhythm associated with many shamanic rituals. S. Harner and Tyron (1996) studied students of shamanism during drumming sessions and observed trends toward enhanced positive mood states and an increase in positive immune response. Bittman et al. (2001) also reported that rhythmic drumming had a salubrious effect on immune systems.

The term *shamanic state of consciousness* (M. Harner, 1980) infers that there is a single state that characterizes shamans, even though it can be induced in several different ways. Winkelman's (1992) cross-cultural survey of 47 societies yielded data demonstrating that at least one type of practitioner in each populace engaged in ASC induction by one or many vehicles. For Winkelman (2000), each vehicle to the ASC resulted in an *integrative mode* of consciousness. This mode reflects slow wave discharges, producing strongly coherent brainwave patterns that synchronize the frontal areas of the brain, integrating nonverbal information into the frontal cortex, and producing visionary experiences and insight.

Counterpoint

According to its critics, the soul flight model ignores the diversity of shamanic ASCs as well as activity that does not seem to involve dramatic shifts in consciousness. Peters and Price-Williams (1980) compared 42 societies from four different cultural areas

and identified three common elements in shamanic ASCs: voluntary control of the ASC, post-ASC memory of the experience, and the ability to communicate with others during the ASC. Peters and Price-Williams also reported that shamans in 18 out of the 42 societies they surveyed specialized in spirit incorporation: 10 were engaged in out-of-body journeying, 11 in both spirit incorporation and out-of-body journeying, and 3 in some different ASC. In other words, there are several shamanic states of consciousness, and not all of them use ecstatic soul flight (Walsh, 1990, p. 214). Eliade's statements are further constricted by his emphasis on flights to the shamanic *upperworld* rather than to the *underworld,* which is of equal importance (Noel, 1999, p. 35).

The soul flight model also has been criticized by those who deny that profound alterations of consciousness are the defining characteristic of shamanism. Some shamanic traditions do not use terms that easily translate into *alterations* of consciousness. Navaho shamans exhibit prodigious feats of memory in recounting cultural myths, and use sand paintings, drums, and dances in the process, but they insist "they need no special trance or ecstatic vision . . . only the desire and the patience to learn the vast amount of symbolic material" (Sandner, 1979, p. 242).

Berman (2000) suggested that the term *heightened awareness* captures shamanic behavior more accurately than *altered states* because shamans describe their intense experience of the natural world with such statements as "things often seem to blaze" (p. 30). Shweder (1972) administered a number of perceptual tests to a group of Zinacanteco shamans and nonshamans, asking them, for example, to identify a series of blurred, out-of-focus photographs. Nonshamans were more likely than shamans to respond, "I don't know." Shamans were prone to describe the photographs, even when the pictures were completely blurred. When the examiner offered suggestions about what the image might be, the shamans were more likely than the nonshamans to ignore the suggestion and give their own interpretations.

Paradoxically, shamans are characterized both by an acute perception of their environment and by imaginative fantasy. These traits include the potential for pretending and role playing and the capacity to experience the natural world vividly. During times of social stress, these traits may have given prehistoric shamans an edge over peers who had

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes
of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

simply embraced life as it presented itself, without the filters of myth or ritual (Shweder, 1972, p. 81).

In Retrospect

It may be more appropriate to speak of *shamanic modification of attentional states* rather than of a single *shamanic state of consciousness* (such as soul flight). Attention determines what enters someone's awareness. When attention is selective, there is an aroused internal state that makes some stimuli more relevant than others, thus more likely to attract one's attention.

More basic to shamanism may be a unique attention that they give to the relations between human beings, their own bodies, and the natural world—and their willingness to share the resulting knowledge with others (Perrin, 1992, pp. 122-123). The suppression of seances, spirit dances, and drumming rituals by colonial governments and missionaries led to the decline of altered states induction in some parts of the world (e.g., Hugh-Jones, 1996, p. 70; Taussig, 1987, pp. 93-104). The function of these procedures had been to shift the shaman's attention to internal processes or external perceptions that could be used for the benefit of the community and its members. Outsiders' bans of these technologies diminished the social role played by shamans and increased tribal dependence upon the colonial administrators.

The Decadent and Crude Technology Model

Point

The American transpersonal philosopher Ken Wilber (1981) divided what he called *higher states of consciousness* into several categories. His hierarchy started with the *subtle* (with and without iconography); proceeded to the *causal* (experienced as pure consciousness or the void), and thence to the *absolute* (the experience of the true nature of consciousness). He took the position that consciousness unfolds not only during the life span of an individual, but also during the evolution of humanity, with a select number of individuals attaining the "farthest reaches" (p. 141) of that development.

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

Wilber (1981) granted that shamans were the first practitioners to systematically access "higher states," but only at the "subtle states" level because their technology was "crude" (p. 142). He speculated that an occasional shaman might have broken into the causal realm, but insists that causal and absolute states could not be attained systematically until the emergence of the meditative traditions. Wilber placed shamanism at the fifth level of an eight-level spectrum.

Wilber (1981) supported his position by using examples from Eliade's (1951/1972) book, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Wilber described the book as "the definitive study of the subject" (p. 70). Eliade's position was that "shamanism is found within a considerable number of religions, for shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique" (p. 8). Eliade constructed a hierarchy of his own, however, taking the position that the use of mind-altering plants was a degenerate way to obtain visionary experiences. According to Eliade, those states attained "with the help of narcotics" are not "real trances" but "semi-trances" (p. 24). Eliade continued, "The use of narcotics is, rather, indicative of the decadence of a technique of ecstasy or of its extension to 'lower' peoples or social groups" (p. 477).

Counterpoint

Walsh (1990) accepted the validity of Wilber's (1981) categories, but retorted that shamanism is an oral tradition. If shamans have experienced states higher than those at the subtle level, their accounts may have been lost to subsequent generations (p. 240). In addition, unitive experiences, such as those described by Wilber, were not a priority of shamans because their efforts were directed toward community service (Krippner, 2000, p. 111; Walsh, 1990, p. 240).

D.P. Brown and Engler (1986) administered Rorschach Inkblots to practitioners of mindful meditation and discovered that their responses illustrated their stages of meditative development, which reflected "the perceptual changes that occur with intense meditation" (p. 193). One Rorschach protocol was unique in that it integrated all 10 inkblots into a single associative theme (p. 191). However, Klopfer and Boyer (1961) had obtained a similar protocol from an Apache shaman who used the inkblots to teach the

examiner about his worldview and his ecstatic flights through the universe. D. P. Brown and Engler suggested that this may have been a response that, regardless of the spiritual tradition, pointed "a way for others to 'see' reality more clearly in such a way that it alleviates their suffering" (p. 214). Shamans' attempts to alleviate the suffering of their communities and what Wilber called their "crude" technology might be exceptionally well suited for this task (Krippner, 2000, p. 111).

Wilber (1981) made sweeping generalizations about shamanism but did not recognize the many varieties of shamanic experience. For example, he identified "the classic symbolism of shamanism" (p. 70) as the bird, although in some shamanic societies, the deer or the bear is the central totem (Ripinsky-Naxon, 1993). He claimed that the "true" shamanic experience involves "a severe crisis" (p. 74), although there are accounts of shamanic callings that do not involve catastrophes. Indeed, the shamanic "crisis" could be a political strategy that limits the number of contenders for the shamanic role (Krippner, 2000, p. 111).

As for Eliade's charge that the use of mind-altering drugs represents degenerate forms of shamanism, Ripinsky-Naxon (1993) responded that "Eliade failed to recognize the critical role of hallucinogens in shamanistic techniques" (p. 103). The archeological evidence indicates that mind-altering substances date back to pre-Neolithic times, rather than being a later, degenerate addition to shamanic practices (p. 153).

In Retrospect

After surveying the cross-cultural research data, Coan (1987) warned, "It would be a mistake to assume that shamanism represents just one stage either in the evolution of human society or in the evolution of human consciousness" (p. 62). Wilber's (1981) relegation of shamans to the subtle level of his higher states hierarchy virtually ignores the role played by shamans in their community. Such descriptors as *crude* and *degenerate* ignore the "cultivation of wisdom" (Walsh, 1990, p. 248) that has long been a hallmark of shamanism.

The Deconstructionist Model

Point

   Deconstructivism is a central strand in the intellectual movement known as *postmodernism*, which challenges the "modern" notions of rationality and objective reality. Postmodern scholarship, according to Gergen (2001),

   . . . poses significant challenges to pivotal assumptions of individual knowledge, objectivity, and truth. In their place, an emphasis is placed on the communal construction of knowledge, objectivity as a relational achievement, and language as a pragmatic medium through which local truths are constituted. (p. 803).

   Deconstructionism has its roots in literary criticism, but its influence expanded as members of other disciplines attempted to show that words are ambiguous and cannot be trusted as straightforward, dependable representations of reality or of something outside oneself. George Hansen (2001), an American parapsychologist and magician, identified *deconstruction* as a key shamanic role. Shamans break down categories; confound boundaries, especially those between worlds; and specialize in ambiguity. Trickster tales are an example of how language can use double meanings and paradox to provide instruction to their listeners (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975).

   Deconstructionists maintain that polarities and privileged positions are simply arbitrary human constructions, a position that calls into question the notion of objective reality (Hansen, 2001, p. 64). By consorting with spirits, shamans deconstruct the polarity of life and death. By breaking taboos to obtain magical power, shamans challenge authority. After returning from their journeys, shamans describe strange dimensions of reality, thus confounding their community's sense of what is real. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975/2001) observed that shamans mediate "between superterrestrial forces and society" (p. 217).

Shamans' status depends on the complexity of their societies. Winkelman (1992) found that shamans hold high status in bands and lower status in agricultural states. When Western rationality becomes the dominant paradigm, shamans are often denigrated as "psychotic," "epileptic," or "deviant" (Hansen, 2001, p. 101). Writing about Siberian shamans and their persecution by both church and state, Hamayon (1996) concluded that shamans are "simultaneously adaptive and vulnerable" (p. 76) and that "there is an absence of shamanistic clergy, doctrine, dogma, church, and so forth" (p. 77).

Deconstructionism is no longer limited to literary texts but is often used to describe the impact of politically and financially powerful groups on societies' priorities and worldviews. Hansen used deconstructionism to describe how power is applied both by shamans and against shamans. Shamans speak of *power places* and *power objects*, and their quest for power is carried out in service of the community, usually in public rituals (Langdon, 1992, p. 14). Once shamans are relegated to the fringes of society, they become the victims of people and institutions that operate under different paradigms. Shamans may find support in communities that also have been marginalized. These shamans, in the tradition of deconstructionism, then challenge "privileged" authority, hierarchies, and structures.

M. F. Brown (1989) provided an example of the shaman as deconstructionist in his description of "Yankush," a pseudonym for a prominent shaman among the Aguaruna of northeastern Peru. Yankush specialized in treating victims of sorcery. Brown noted, "Shaman and sorcerer might seem locked in a simple struggle of good against evil, order against chaos, but things are not so straightforward. Shamans and sorcerers gain their power from the same source" (p. 11).

M. F. Brown continued, "The ambiguities of the shaman's role were brought home to me during a healing session I attended in Yankush's house" (p. 253). The clients were two women, both apparent victims of sorcerers' darts. Yankush waited until evening (an example of blurring boundaries, in this case between night and day), and drank ayahuasca, an herbal concoction, just before sunset. "As Yankush's intoxication increased . . . he sucked noisily on the patients' bodies in an effort to remove the darts" (p. 253). Suddenly, a woman called out, "If there are any darts there when she gets back

home, they may say that Yankush put them there. So take them all out!" (p. 254). Brown wrote, this "statement was an unusually blunt rendering of an ambivalence implicit in all relations between Aguaruna shamans and their clients . . . . If . . . results are not forthcoming, the shaman himself may be suspected of, and punished for, sorcery" (p. 254). Finally, the participants left Yankush's house, expressing their contentment with the results of his effort (p. 255). This account is marked by a dissolution of boundaries (drinking a mind-altering brew at sunset) and by ambivalence (doubts regarding the shaman's competence), both hallmarks of deconstructionism.

Another example is provided by Townsley (1993/2001) who explored the epistemology of the Yaminahua, a people living in the Peruvian Amazon, and decoded the *secret language* used by its shamans. In the spirit world referred to in the songs of this language, "everything . . . is marked by an extreme ambiguity" (p. 264). This language "is made up of metaphoric circumlocutions or unusual words for common things which are either archaic or borrowed from neighboring languages . . . . They also create new songs and invent fresh metaphors" (p. 268). "The important thing, emphasized by all shamans, is that none of the things referred to in the song should be referred to by their proper names" (p. 269). Hence, this deconstructionist model returns to its original emphasis on language.

Counterpoint

As Hansen (2001) noted, there have been many "furious denunciations" and "frantic utterings" (p. 27) about deconstructionism and other aspects of postmodern thought. Gross and Levitt (1998) agreed with Hansen that postmodernists are imbued with non-Western modes of thought, but concluded that this posture leads to higher superstition instead of to insight. They admitted that Western science has been "culturally constructed" (p. 43); that its projects "reflect the interests, beliefs, and even the prejudices of the ambient culture" (p. 43); and that "no serious thinker about science, least of all scientists themselves, doubt that personal and social factors influence . . . the acceptance of results by the scientific community" (p. 139). Nonetheless, Gross and Levitt used the term *shaman* derisively each time it was mentioned in their 1998 book, *Higher*

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science, as when they deride the "mentality of LSD mysticism, shamanistic revelation, and ecstatic nonsense" (p. 224).

Is shamanic thought incompatible with Western rationality? Hubbard (2002a), after evaluating the issue from the perspective of cognitive psychology, concluded that "conceptual structures underlying shamanism may result from the same types of cognitive processes and the same cognitive constraints (e.g., properties of mental representation) also experienced by non-shamans and by scientists" (p. 135). Hubbard continued, "Shamanic thought thus would not reflect regressive or psychotic tendencies, but would instead reflect normative cognitive functioning" (p. 136).

Physical deconstruction is evident in many of the dreams and visions in which some shamanic initiates report being torn apart and dismembered. For the prospective shaman, however, this deconstructive procedure is eventually followed by a *reconstruction* of bones and flesh, during which there is an ecstatic rebirth. In a similar way, shamans often reconstruct a shattered psyche. Pansy Hawk Wing (1997), a Lakota medicine woman, described the Yuwipi ceremony in which a practitioner intercedes between community members and spirit entities to "pull together all the various parts of the whole" (p. 199).

The American anthropologist Jean Langdon (1992) wrote that power is the key concept that links shamanic systems, enabling shamans to mediate between "the human and the extrahuman" (p. 13). Langdon granted that shamans have an "ambiguous position in society" (p. 14) because they may employ power in negative ways, especially when they direct it against enemies outside of their social group. Nevertheless, shamanic power is usually manifested "in public ritual for the benefit of the community or for individuals" (p. 14).

In Retrospect

Conflicts between shamans and zealous administrators of organized religion can be seen as a struggle between deconstructionists and "privileged" authority. Those writers who call shamanism a "religion" ignore the fact that there are Buddhist shamans, Christian shamans, Muslim shamans, pagan shamans, and so forth. Shamans are of great

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

interest for many postmodernist writers because they represent the "marginalized other." More often than not, shamans engage in trickery, improvise and engage in unpredictable behavior, embrace the fluidity of different planes of human existence, and exhibit ambiguous sexuality. In their efforts to share esoteric knowledge with their community, it is essential for shamans to deconstruct order, especially if a person's or a community's rigidity and inflexibility have blocked adaptation and growth. Nevertheless, shamans must eventually assemble what has been disassembled and reconstruct what has been deconstructed if they are to be of service to their community.

Discussion

Shamans appear to have been humankind's first psychotherapists, first physicians, first magicians, first performing artists, first storytellers, and even the first timekeepers and weather forecasters. Dow (1986) proposed that shamans not only represent the oldest profession but are "the world's most versatile specialists" (p. 6). This review of controversies regarding shamans and shamanism indicates that Western interpretations typically reveal more about the observer than they do about the observed and that the construction of a psychology of shamanism needs to address this challenge.

Referring to shamanism, Walsh (1990) remarked, "People's interpretations of the phenomena will be largely determined by their personal beliefs, philosophy, and 'world hypothesis'" (pp. 257-258). This world hypothesis or *personal mythology* (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) consists of the fundamental beliefs about the nature of the world and reality that underlie one's life and work. Most people simply take the consensual assumptions of their culture and subculture unquestioningly and interpret the world accordingly (Walsh, 1990, pp. 257-258).

Information concerning world hypotheses and personal mythologies could predict the stance that individuals and groups will take when confronted with shamans or shamanic phenomena because these phenomena are multilayered and can be interpreted from various perspectives. Unfortunately, as Walsh (1990) pointed out in his discussion of shamanism, "At the present time, psychological studies are almost non-existent" (p. 270). Nevertheless, the psychological study of shamanism would have something to

offer, among others, to cognitive neuroscientists, social psychologists, psychological therapists, and ecological psychologists.

Cognitive neuroscience

Cognitive neuroscience studies the neural processes that underlie the mechanisms, potentials, and limitations of mental operations. Winkelman (2000) has proposed that a "neurophenomenological framework" (p. 75) is needed to explain the worldwide distribution of specific constellations of shamanic characteristics and the role played by altered states in shamanic practice. Meanwhile, researchers in *neurotheology* have used brain imaging techniques to study spiritual contemplatives and have observed that prayer and meditation trigger a shift in brain activity that is associated with such unitive experiences as "the presence of God" and "oneness with the universe" (Newberg, d'Aquili, & Rause, 2001, pp. 115-116). The Canadian neuroscientist Michael Persinger (1993) utilized electrical stimulation to produce reported unitive experiences from volunteer subjects, and Austin (1998) singled out the thalamus and the temporal lobe as structures that may be associated with these effects. The British cognitive psychologist John Taylor (2002) has proposed an attention-based model of consciousness that identifies parietal lobe neural structures as crucial for attentional control. Taylor's model subsumes what contemplatives often refer to as *pure consciousness*, i.e., prereflective consciousness, as basic for attentional control rather than as being 'generated' by it" (p. 208).

Several psychologists (e.g., Farthing, 1992) have proposed that attention, memory, and awareness are the three major components of the consciousness construct. Because attention involves both neural processes and mental operations (Ornstein & Carstensen, 1991, p. 741), shamanic practices provide cognitive neuroscientists an exceptional opportunity to study the neurological foundations of a technology that maintains awareness, enhances perception, and facilitates recall while the adept's attention moves between internal and external foci.

Some theorists have suggested that neural networks may be instrumental in making connections between the cognitive processes of the organism and its

understanding of the natural world (e.g., Hardy, 1998). They view some tasks, such as hunting and navigation, as a single cognitive activity that is distributed among several individuals (Hutchins, 1995). Such theoretical perspectives mirror the Native American assumption that all living beings are related, a concept that is shared by shamans worldwide. Hubbard (2002b) proposes that this adage could provide an appropriate *web* and *network* models for cognitive psychology since it relies less on *artificial intelligence* and *digital computer* metaphors for the architecture of the nervous system. Web and network metaphors not only resonate with shamanic worldviews but also reflect the multidimensional nature of human cognition (Hubbard, 2002b).

These insights could be applied to the cognitive neuroscientific study of what Winkelman calls the (2000) "ubiquitous nature" (p. 27) of shamanic constructs. Neurological research in combination with the investigation of shamanic verbal reports could yield clues as to whether the basis for these constructs is "hardwired" (p. 5) and may contribute to a deeper understanding of both cultural and personal human evolution.

Social psychology

Social psychology, the study of individual attitudes and behaviors in settings where other people are present (or imagined), bridges the foci of psychology, with its emphasis on the individual, and sociology, with its emphasis on social structures. The typical shamanic worldview defines individuals in terms of their clans and kinship systems and provides a framework that is well suited for study by social psychologists. The human species is an incredibly social animal; unlike other animals, humans are neither strong nor fast. Survival thus depends on abstract problem-solving and group formation. There is probably a genetic basis for forming groups, as it has been highly adaptive in human evolution; even so, the social world modulates gene expression.

In this regard, McClenon (1997) hypothesized that shamanism is a cultural adaptation to biologically based adaptive potentials, especially those that foster hypnotizability, which coincides with anomalous and spiritual experiences (p. 346). Based on these experiences, shamans developed rituals that promoted intragroup cohesion, fertility, and therapeutic outcomes; McClenon cited Winkelman's (1992)

findings that shamans were the only magico-religious practitioners found in hunting and gathering societies. McClenon has further proposed several testable features of his model (pp. 346-347).

Social modeling involves clear presentations of the behaviors to be learned in a training program (Sprafkin, 1994) such as those given by magico-religious practitioners. An interest in the role of social modeling in nonpathological dissociation motivated Negro, Palladino-Negro, and Louza (2002) to test 110 mediumistic practitioners in São Paulo. They reported mediumship activity as well as "control of the religious-related dissociative experiences" (p. 52) to be associated with high scores on tests for dissociation in spite of positive scores on socialization and adaptation tests. The investigators "found evidence of social modeling of nonpathologic religious dissociative experience for a population with extensive formalized mediumship training," but not for "social modeling as a causation of pathological dissociation" (p. 70).

Since Aristotle recorded his impressions of argumentation in the *Rhetoric*, humans have attempted to refine the principles of *social influence,* the study of persuasion, influence, and compliance. In any social group, people spend a considerable amount of time cajoling, exhorting, and even manipulating each other to attain their goals. Credibility is essential to persuasion, and credible practitioners display a degree of competence in their field and are commonly viewed as knowledgeable (Winkler & Krippner, 1993, p. 482). After studying both Western and indigenous health care practitioners, Torrey (1986) concluded that the nature of an effective treatment reflects one or more of four fundamental principles: a shared worldview between practitioner and client, personal qualities of the practitioner, positive client expectations, and procedures that engender a sense of mastery on the part of the client. Social influence and persuasion are apparent in each of these principles. Much of the effectiveness of shamans rests on the fact that their concepts of sickness are the same as those of their clients (Rogers, 1982, p. 14). In addition, shamans burnish a positive image of themselves and their powers in order to impress their clients (p. 8). Emotional arousal, and the evocation of faith, hope, and trust enhance client expectations. Group processes may implement a sense of mastery; Western African shamans may invite half a dozen clients into their

homes, spending considerable time with them each day (Torrey, 1986, p. 39). The net effect of these and other social procedures is to equip the client with strategies to cope with problems in living.

Opler (1936) described the way in which Apache shamans maximized their reputation as effective practitioners, by selecting receptive clients and rejecting skeptics as well as those with apparently incurable conditions. They demanded payment in advance, bringing additional pressure on their clients to get well. They explained to the clients' families how they had achieved shamanic status so as to enroll the family's support for the treatment. They enlisted the aid of the community in the healing ritual, which further motivated the client to recover. This appeal to a client's community enlists *social support*, or resources from the social environment that can be beneficial to the client's psychological and physical health (Lepore, 1994, p. 247). Psychological research has indicated that people who receive social support from their social network, particularly if it is from significant others, tend to have fewer psychological problems than people who do not receive support, but there is less evidence regarding physical health (Lepore, 1994, p. 251; Vaux, 1988). Indigenous communities provide an excellent arena for research on this topic because social support is a mainstay of shamanic intervention.

Psychological therapy

Psychological therapy is a deliberate attempt to modify attitudes, behaviors, and experiences that clients and their social groups deem to be dysfunctional, that is, that inhibit interpersonal relationships, stifle competent performance, or block the actualization of the clients' talents and capacities. Like other types of psychological therapy, shamanic healing procedures attempt to modify dysfunctional attitudes, behaviors, and/or experiences through a structured series of contacts between a socially sanctioned practitioner and distressed, but compliant, clients who acknowledge the status of that practitioner. Failed relationships, flawed performance, and faulty personal development are problems common to the human condition. When distressed individuals decide that neither their own resources, nor those of their families and friends, are

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

sufficient to alleviate the distress, they often look for assistance from culturally sanctioned practitioners such as shamans (Krippner, 2000). However, what is considered dysfunctional in one culture (for example, seeing ghosts, hearing voices when nobody is present, engaging in competitive behavior) may not be considered problematic in another culture. Problems that are widespread in one part of the world (for example, demonic possession, suffering from the *evil eye*, anorexia nervosa) may be virtually unknown elsewhere. Cultural myths that one society classifies as valid (for example, sickness as the result of breaking social taboos, malevolent spirits as the major causal factor in accidents, imperfect child-rearing practices as a contributing factor in emotional problems) may be considered magical thinking or superstitions in another.

As developed countries become more multi-cultural, Western-oriented psychological therapists need to be well informed regarding the belief systems that might accompany their clients to the counseling session. Cultural competence is a relatively new concept for the helping professions, but it developed from a long tradition of providing services to people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Hurdle, 2002). The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) has attempted to enhance its universal validity not only with a brief mention of *dissociative trance disorder* but with a supplemental category of *religious or spiritual problem* and a glossary of *culture-bound syndromes*. Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinman (1995) admitted that this aspect of *DSM-IV* is the ""main clinical development in current cultural psychiatry in North America"" (p. 437), even though they judged the overall attempt to have been less than successful (p. 439). For example, Hopi Indian shamans identify five distinct indigenous categories related to "depression," only one of which shares significant parameters with *DSM-IV*'s *depressive disorders*. In addition, *DSM-IV* categories rarely are contextual. For example, in 1996 this author (SK) learned of a 70-year-old Native American woman who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic because she had answered affirmatively when a psychiatrist asked if she heard voices when she was alone. The psychiatrist had not inquired as to whether this was an aspect of her culture as a Native American where her life style involved listening to the earth's messages for signs sent by a higher power. This woman

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

was hospitalized as a result of this diagnosis and remained in the hospital until her *inner voices* told her what measures to take in order to obtain a release (Breasure, 1996).

Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinman (1995) noted that such *DSM-IV* disorders as those involving eating behavior and sexual behavior "show such pervasive Western cultural determinants that they cannot, as presently formulated, be compared across different cultures" (p. 437). Many mental health practitioners (e.g., Garcia, 1990) feel that the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, which includes a category for trance and possession disorders, is more culturally sensitive.

Finally, shamanic healing procedures provide a challenge for psychologists in the designing of outcome studies. Should the outcomes be defined in shamanic terms (for example, successful *soul retrieval*, regaining one's *flow of chi energy*) or in Western terms (for example, cessation of symptoms, resumption of daily work patterns)? Should the outcome be based on the purported "recovery" of the individual, of the family, or of the entire community? Should the ritualistic aspects of treatment (such as chanting and sand paintings) be separated from the possible impact of interpretive methods (such as dream sharing and shell reading) and that of herbal medicines and psychotropic drugs (such as ayahuasca and peyote)? Kleinman (1980) wrestled with these issues while conducting an outcome study of *tang-ki* (Taiwanese shamanic) healing, as did Leon (1975) in his seven-year study of spirit possession in Colombia. Another confounding factor is the fact that many shamanic healing systems do not discriminate between so-called physical and mental disorders, but do discriminate in terms of the basis of age, gender, or social position (Krippner, 1992; RozakRoszak, 1992, p. 75).

Ecological psychology

Ecological psychology (or ecopsychology) attempts to understand behavioral and experiential processes as they occur within the environmental constraints of animal-environment systems, focusing on perception, action, cognition, communication, learning, development, and evolution in all species. There are several variants of this field, but all of them criticize what they see as mainstream psychology's emphasis on the individual's separation from other people and the natural environment. To be

psychologically healthy, one must acknowledge that the planet is endangered and make real-world efforts to save it. Writing from an ecopsychological perspective, Metzner (1999) proposed that "healing the planet" is basically a shamanic journey (pp. 165); if so, the psychological study of shamanism can play a vital role in this endeavor. Perhaps the prototypical shaman could serve as the "responsible person model" called for by Kaplan (2000) to exhibit "environmentally responsible behavior" (p. 491).

Roszak (1992) has posited an *ecological unconscious* representing the "savage element" in humans "that rises up to meet the environmental need of the time" (p. 96). As a sense of "ethical and psychological continuity with the nonhuman world deepens, we have the chance to recapture . . . some trace of the ancestral sensibility" (p. 97). Shamanic models play an important role in evoking this sensibility; shamanic healing "is embedded in a place and a history, in the rhythms of climate, in the contours of a landscape where the birds and beasts have been close companions for centuries" (p. 76). Shamans were the original "group therapists," and their groups included animal spirits, ancestors, and the like (p. 89).

Ecopsychologists take the position that human beings are an integral part of a greater system, and that the health of this system requires sustainable and mutually nurturing relationships not only among its parts, but also between the parts and the whole. Healthy functioning needs to include the realization of this interconnectedness and interdependence, an insight that has been an essential part of shamanic traditions for at least 30,000 years.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature on this topic, Narby and Huxley (2001) concluded, "Even after five hundred years of reports on shamanism, its core remains a mystery. One thing that has changed . . . however, is the gaze of the observers. It has opened up. And understanding is starting to flower" (p. 8).

Although so-called *neo-shamanism* is becoming faddish in the West (Taylor & Piedilato, 2002), indigenous shamans are becoming increasingly endangered (Walsh, 1990, p. 267). It is crucial to learn what shamanism has to offer the social and behavioral

sciences before archival research in libraries replaces field research as the best available

method   for   investigating   these   prototypical   psychologists.

Krippner, S. (2002). Shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints. In R.-I. Heinze
(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes
of Healing* (pp. 174-194). Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia.

Transformative Groups – December 1, 2010
Posted at www.transformativegroups.com

Transformative Groups – December 1, 2010