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Identity and Healing in Three Navajo Religious Traditions: Sǫ'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhǫ́

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Identity and Healing in Three Navajo Religious Traditions: *Sq'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhó*

In this article, we elucidate how the Navajo synthetic principle sq'ah naaghái bik'eh hózhó (SNBH) is understood, demonstrated, and elaborated in three different Navajo healing traditions. We conducted interviews with Navajo healers and their patients affiliated with Traditional Navajo religion, the Native American Church, and Pentecostal Christianity. Their narratives provide access to cultural themes of identity and healing that invoke elements of SNBH. SNBH specifies that the conditions for health and well-being are harmony within and connection to the physical/spiritual world. Specifically, each religious healing tradition encourages affective engagement, proper family relations, an understanding of one's cultural and spiritual histories, and the use of kinship terms to establish affective bonds with one's family and with the spiritual world. People's relationships within this common behavioral environment are integral to their self-orientations, to their identities as Navajos, and to the therapeutic process. The disruption and restoration of these relationships constitute an important affective dimension in Navajo distress and healing. [Navajos, identity, religion, healing, health]

The complexity of contemporary Navajo society precludes the formulation of any kind of uniform Navajo cultural identity. This heterogeneous cultural landscape can be considered a borderland, a concept that emerged within the literature on ethnic and minority studies and draws attention to the construction of complex, hybridized identities for those who must live within, yet are excluded from, the dominant cultural order (Anzaldúa 1987; Behar 1993; Ortner 1996: 181–212). Within anthropology, the idea of a borderland has been used as a strategy to get away from bounded and timeless cultures and to attend instead to encounters between people and images across cultural and political spaces (Appadurai 1991; Clifford 1992; Ortner 1996). As an effort in this direction, this work is centrally concerned with the interplay of self, identity, and healing among the Navajo in the context of multiple religious traditions.

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Let us begin with a consideration of some of the social and political conditions that have inscribed themselves in the personal and cultural memories of the Navajo people. Beginning with their capture and removal to Fort Sumner by U.S. troops in 1864 and their subsequent return to the land that is now the Navajo reservation, the Navajos have been in a relationship of domination and control with the larger society in which they live. This pattern has continued through the active repression of native language and traditions. The enforcement of boarding school attendance and the manipulation of and threats to Navajo health, land, resources, and religious freedom have been experiential themes throughout the 20th century. These conditions have contributed to a pervasive sense among Navajos not only of external control, but also of alienation or disconnection from their own culture.

Although the last 30 years have seen movement toward political self-determination and cultural renewal, many Navajo families are fragmented due to myriad economic, social and health problems. The severity of problems such as unemployment, poverty, and alcoholism are well documented (Haraldson 1988; Kunitz and Levy 1994; Levy and Kunitz 1971, 1974). The rapidity of change over the last century is evident in the cultural and linguistic gaps between generations. It is not uncommon, for example, for Navajo-speaking grandparents to be unable to converse with their English-speaking grandchildren. Important cultural traditions, such as introducing oneself by one's clans, are rarely practiced by Navajo youth. It is within this context of change, fragmentation, and cultural disconnection that we must examine the issues of Navajo identity and religious healing.

Our discussion of healing and identity is based on the experiences of adherents of the three prominent healing traditions practiced on the Navajo reservation today.¹ Traditional Navajo religion has roots extending deep into Navajo history and consists of specific diagnostic and curative practices governed by gifted or trained specialists. The Native American Church is a pan-Indian religious movement centering on the cactus peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) as a sacrament. Originating in an area spanning northern Mexico and southern Texas, the only location in which the cactus grows, peyotism has since spread throughout the United States. Finally, Pentecostal Christianity has become widely practiced on the Navajo reservation over the past 40 years. Pentecostal churches tend to be independent, run by and for Navajos, and include healing prayer as an important part of Christian life.²

We aim to show how religious healing practices in each tradition provide a context for and means of addressing identity issues in a variety of ways. On the level of cultural or ethnic identity, what it means to be Navajo has been a fluid and contested issue, which is today articulated differently in each religious tradition. It is thus relevant to examine how the social and historical contexts of oppression and control have been met with a variety of responses and negotiations of identity. In addition to distinct bodies of knowledge, ritual procedures, and symbolic systems, each healing tradition produces cultural commentaries about efficacy and is associated with a variety of cultural representations.

As our primary focus is on the relevance of identity within the therapeutic process, however, we attend not only to the level of cultural representation, but also to processes of self-orientation. We propose to access cultural themes of self, illness, and healing through an elucidation of the Navajo synthetic principle *sá'ah naaghái bik'eh hózhó* (SNBH) (see Lewton 1997). This principle specifies, among

other things, that the conditions for health and well-being are harmony within and connection to the physical/spiritual world. People's relationships with and within a meaningful behavioral environment—to other people, to cultural traditions, to spiritual beings—are integral to their self-orientations and thus to their identities as Navajos. The disruption and restoration of these relationships constitute an important affective dimension in Navajo distress and healing.

Despite the considerable differences within and between each of these healing traditions, we argue that in all three, the therapeutic process invokes elements of SNBH. Specifically, each tradition teaches adherents about the importance of maintaining proper family relationships and of one's cultural/spiritual history. Further, healing in all three traditions entails affective engagement with other people and with the spiritual world through emotional expression and/or the use of kinship terms. These aspects of SNBH establish and reinforce a sense of connection that is integral to the therapeutic process. Often considered an abstract principle, we aim to illustrate how SNBH is encoded and transmitted in the self-reflective commentaries of the Navajo patients and healers with whom we spoke. Their discourses on religious healing, we assert, constitute discourses of identity (see also Csordas 1999).

We begin with a clarification of our approach to self and healing, and how these concepts can be made culturally specific to the Navajo through an elucidation of the synthetic principle SNBH. The body of the article consists of a presentation of each religious tradition, including the social and political context of its practice and the discourses of self and identity it produces throughout the therapeutic process. Narratives of patients and healers in each tradition illustrate these themes.

Navajo Self-Orientations: Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhó

In this ethnographic study of therapeutic process, our approach was to elicit self-reflective commentaries on illness, health, and healing (see Csordas, this issue). This was done both within and outside of the ritual context. Throughout these discourses, certain themes regarding Navajo concepts of self and emotion, and their relevance in the therapeutic setting, began to emerge.

Anthropological inquiries into the constructs of *self* and *identity* have been plentiful, particularly throughout the last 25 years.³ One fruitful trend in this literature is to move away from conceptualizing self as an entity and toward construing the self as an orientational process. Csordas (1994a), for example, approaches the self as a capacity for reflexive engagement with and orientation in the world. In this view, *self* is understood as a conjunction between culturally constituted milieu, situational specificity, and embodied experience (Csordas 1994a:5). Central in the examination of self-processes is reflection and engagement in and with the behavioral environment (following Hallowell 1955).

Hallowell (1955:89–110) proposes that culture plays a constitutive role in the identity of an individual by providing certain basic orientations that structure the behavioral environment of the self. The orientations that Hallowell delineates provide interpretations of events, a conceptual framework for location and action, an ability for moral appraisal, a sense of continuity, and patterns for relating to other beings in the environment. The composite of these orientations is what he calls the

behavioral environment, a culturally constituted field that is meaningful and perceptible for participants in a particular culture.

Understanding the nature of Navajo selfhood and the Navajo behavioral environment is a central task in understanding the therapeutic process in Navajo religious healing because it specifies the conditions of emotional force and meaning in that process, as well as the content and significance of emotional expression. With this approach, we can examine how culturally specific orientations structure Navajos' experiences of distress and healing. Our starting point for understanding these issues is an elucidation of the synthetic cultural principle, SNBH.

SNBH has been described as "the key concept in Navajo philosophy, the vital requisite for understanding the whole" (Farella 1984:153), and as constituting "in linguistic form the ideal world of the Navajo" (Witherspoon 1977:18). Etymologically, it has been interpreted to mean "according to the ideal may restoration be achieved" (Reichard 1990), "in old age walking the trail of beauty," and "long life and happiness" (see Haile 1943; Witherspoon 1977:18; Wyman 1970:28–30). It is a phrase that has multiple levels of meaning, which have been written about extensively (see Eppe 1994; Farella 1984; Reichard 1990; Witherspoon 1977; Wyman 1970). However, most authors have exclusively discussed SNBH as an abstraction. Our approach is to examine the way it translates into the lived experience of Navajo individuals. Our purpose here is neither to present a comprehensive review nor to argue for a particular translation but, rather, to examine the experience and expression of SNBH among Navajos. In other words, we understand SNBH not as a strictly religious principle, but as a cultural principle.⁴

The idea that health and well-being are associated with balance or harmony between an individual and his or her environment is common among many Native Americans. Among the Navajo specifically, SNBH encompasses complex ideas about the spatiotemporal environment, spiritual beings, and people's relationships with these elements. Harmony or balance requires the establishment and maintenance of proper relationships guided by principles such as respect, reverence, kindness, and cooperation. The *self* may be seen as oriented within this environment and guided by these values. An individual's correct orientation with respect to these elements is considered a kind of precondition for receiving that which is good in life—it is the very basis of healing and well-being. The Navajo emphasis on harmony and order is thus an emphasis on relatedness. A brief look at Navajo kinship will clarify this aspect of SNBH.

The Navajo kinship system guides, teaches, and orients. In the narrowest sense, it informs as to who one's blood relations are. More significantly, the kinship system classifies the world into categories such that proper relationships with everyone can be defined. These relationships allow an individual to live not within a world full of strangers but in a world full of relatives, with whom one ideally relates in a reciprocal, respectful fashion. The essence of Navajo kin relations embodies a "condition in which everything is in its proper place, fulfilling its proper role and following all the cultural rules" and "is a statement of the proper order of that universe—that is, the ideal state of affairs or the way things ought to be" (Witherspoon 1975:12).

Kinship relationships operate according to the principle of *k'é*.⁵ *K'é* is the principal mode or pattern of relating to other beings and refers to "affective action

and solidarity, encompassing such concepts as love, compassion, kindness, friendliness, generosity, and peacefulness" (Witherspoon 1977:84).⁶ As Witherspoon (1977:88) notes, "It is impossible to have order and harmony among unrelated entities. *K'é* terms refer to forms of social harmony and order that are based in affective action."

K'é refers to various kinds of affective actions that vary in scope and intensity, making the relationship between two particular people fluid over time and context. This active dimension of the meanings of *k'é* terms allows and even requires ego to constantly define and redefine his or her relationships according to the ebb and flow of social life. These active meanings are primarily reflected in terms of address (Witherspoon 1977:112). Thus, as ego's relationship with a particular kinsman changes, he selects a different term with which to address this kinsman. In so doing, *k'é* terms do not just represent social reality, they order it. To address a person by a particular *k'é* term does more than just describe the relationship; it orders the relationship toward a particular goal or ideal (Witherspoon 1977:114). Whereas personal names isolate the individual and emphasize distinctiveness and separateness, *k'é* terms establish, express, or recognize any relationship between the speaker and the person addressed (Witherspoon 1977:88). *K'é* terms thus actively engage individuals with others in a dialogic and emotionally expressive manner.

An example can be seen in the bond considered the strongest and most enduring among the Navajo, that between a mother and her children (Lamphere 1977:72). One receives one's clan name, land use rights, sheep, and other resources through the maternal line, and residence is preferably taken up matrilocally. In the Navajo frame of reference, a mother is one who gives and sustains life (Witherspoon 1975:15–22). Accordingly, the Navajo kinship term for mother—*shimá*—has a wide range of referents including one's birth mother, the earth, the sheep herd, the cornfield, and the mountain soil bundle (Witherspoon 1977:91). The Navajo consider the earth to be a living being, the inner form of whom is Earth Woman or Changing Woman—the Holy Person who gave life to the Navajo by creating the heads of the four original clans. The earth is therefore *shimá* to the "earth surface people" who are her children. The use of the term *shimá* is thus indicative of respect and affection. This and other kinship terms may be extended not only to people, but also to plants, animals, and other elements or aspects of the environment. Nonhuman beings are often referred to with familial terms as a sign of reverence and respect in that relationship. In short, according to the principle of SNBH, "One should have compassion and respect for people and things in nature and think and behave toward these things in the context of kinship" (Navajo Community College 1992:18, quoted in Eppler 1994:128).

Given this emphasis on proper relationships as the basis for health and well-being, illness and distress derive from a disruption of harmony or balance, particularly in the form of improper or disconnected relationships. Likewise, the therapeutic process involves the transformation of self in relation to meaningful aspects of the environment. Healing entails the reestablishment of proper relationships according to the principles of SNBH.

The proper maintenance and restoration of relationships requires affective action, as specified in the concept of *k'é*. Although relationships are characterized by flexibility and vary according to context and other variables, they require a certain

engagement, characterized by kindness and generosity, positive words, and the use of kinship terms. The language of kinship is, in fact, a primary mode of emotional communication and expression. One's relationships within and with the behavioral environment are then essentially affective—they disturb, frighten, motivate, encourage, and heal people. The phenomenon of being a part of something larger is most immediately affectually based. Farella writes:

The feelings that matter to human beings . . . have sa'ah naagháí bik'eh hózhóó as their source; other emotions that matter are derivatives of these. But, all affect of any consequence to human beings is associated with incompleteness. Navajos know that the rigidification of form is something of an illusion . . . our feelings and thoughts are aspects of connectedness, rather than attributes of an illusory self. [1984:181]

SNBH can be seen, therefore, not only as an abstract principle, but also as a principle that is encoded and transmitted in ways of speaking and behaving. Navajo identity and relationships, on an experientially relevant level, exist within a culturally meaningful milieu. The disruption and restoration of these relationships are so important in Navajo self-orientations that they provide the central affective dimension in Navajo distress and healing.

Furthermore, we argue that SNBH is a pervasive cultural theme that is understood, demonstrated, and elaborated not just in Traditional Navajo religion, but in each of the three healing traditions investigated. In the next section, we present each religious healing tradition in terms of several issues: sociopolitical and historical context, description of religious healing practices, and an elucidation of how the therapeutic process invokes elements of SNBH. This discussion is supported by narratives from patients and healers in each tradition. Throughout, our focus is on the context and practice of religious healing.

Identity and Healing in Three Religious Traditions

Traditional Navajo Religion

Traditional Navajo religion has roots extending deep into Navajo history and consists of specific diagnostic, curative, and restorative practices governed by gifted or trained specialists. There exist dozens of ceremonies, and healing practices vary in length from an hour-long prayer to a nine-night "sing" or chant. Some of the procedures involved in the ceremonies include praying and singing; ingestion of herbal medicine, including emetics; bathing with yucca soap; sandpainting; consecration of the hogan; and the offering of corn pollen. The specific ceremony that is held depends on the findings of the diagnostic process (see Milne and Howard, this issue).

The discourse of Traditional religious practice articulates themes of Navajo identity on a number of different levels. Such discourse is often heard in the context of sociopolitical battles between the Navajo Nation and outside interests. For example, Traditional religious ideas have been used in public resistance activities to mineral development, stock reduction, and forced relocation (Fransted 1982:211), to justify the protection of cultural and environmental resources (Kelley and Francis 1994), and to explain disease outbreaks (Schwarz 1995) and

other misfortune (Farella 1984:30). Furthermore, traditional knowledge may be used as justification for the acts of individuals in the tribal government. Appeal to the tenets of Traditional religion and knowledge has been a rallying point for tribal officials seeking a means of resisting the unpopular acts of outside authorities (Fransted 1982).

Among the individuals with whom we spoke, the practice of Traditional religion often represents an effort to reconnect with one's culture. Most Navajo adults under the age of 50 or so were required to attend boarding school, where Navajo culture and language were actively repressed. Furthermore, many individuals work or attend school off the reservation. For these reasons, having or attending a Traditional ceremony is helpful in providing a sense of cultural identity and history. Many such Navajos describe Traditional religious practice as providing strength and direction. One young man describes how, after attending school off the reservation, he returned to the reservation and began to feel lost and depressed. It was at this point that he began practicing Traditional religion again:

I think after being here [on the reservation] for like two or three years, I find myself getting into depression, you know, no other thoughts. I guess in a way I was struggling, you know. And I guess somewhere along the way I got lost and I was trying to find that again, to re-identify who I am, my identity, my image, you know. I think I was lost with that, so, that's what got me back into it. [interview by the authors, May 2, 1994]

Another young Traditionalist, who is attending college off the reservation, describes what the traditional phrase *hózhǫ́ nasha*, or "walk in beauty," means to her:

To me, to walk in beauty would mean to know your whole self-identity, to walk in harmony, you know, with nature, your surroundings, and even, you know, your whole family. Having your whole family, being aware of everything around you. The main thing about that, about walking in beauty, will also be the person themselves, you know, knowing their traditional beliefs, their culture. Arising from that, once you know the whole background, that can be your backbone. Knowing that's your self-identity, that's your background, your backbone, to growth, and from there, you know, you won't get discouraged. You won't get disappointed. A lot of the negativity that one must feel won't be with you forever, 'cause you'll know how to deal with it, once you know your self-identity. [interview by the authors, April 13, 1995]

As noted by this individual, one's relatives play a crucial role in traditional ideas about well-being. Disrupted or disordered relationships, particularly within one's family, are often a central component of distress. A Traditional healer explained to us that when a person begins to feel badly about herself or is starting to feel helpless, she will often say, "I have no relatives" or "I don't know who my relatives are." When a person says that, the healer told us, "that's a sign that something is wrong" (see Lewton and Csordas 1999).

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that one's family is called upon to play an important role throughout the therapeutic process. Family members may play a role in making a diagnosis and in contacting Traditional diagnosticians and/or healers. In addition, a Traditional ceremony usually requires considerable familial resources, including food for all the participants for the duration of the ceremony and payment for the Traditional healer, or *hataa'í*. Finally, Traditional Navajo

ceremonies are ideally performed in a hogan, the traditional Navajo dwelling, and attended by as many of the patient's family members as possible. The prayers and support of the family are central in the efficacy of the ceremony, and all participants are thought to benefit from the involvement of kin.

Another important aspect of a Traditional ceremony involves reconnecting the patient to the past, to the history and origins of the Navajo people. Traditional religion is integrally connected to the Navajo creation story. The creation story is a richly layered narrative that teaches about the history of the Navajo people and the meaningful world they inhabit. In addition to teaching about the creation of the universe, the stories teach how to properly relate within and with the universe: the central theme is the attainment of *hózhó*. In Navajo religion, understanding the universe and processes that make it up is the key to understanding how to live a good life and how to maintain health and well-being. In conveying these fundamental orientations and imbuing the world and one's place in it with meaning, the creation story can indeed be seen as "the soul of a distinct Navajo identity" (Zolbrod 1984:19). "It defines meaningful relationships among members of the community and between the community and the entire cosmos" (Zolbrod 1984:25). The prayers and songs that are recounted during a Traditional ceremony provide those present with a sense of their history. One healer describes how the prayers help to heal the patient during the ceremony:

The songs tell us about our history, tell us about our creation. To be able to do that is trying to restore, to cure the patient, for him or her to become part of harmony again. . . . During the night you have to talk about these songs, what they mean, so everybody, everybody is protected. And in the morning they give thanks. [interview by the authors, May 2, 1994]

From the patient's perspective, the ceremony is a link between one's current situation and traditional cultural history. One 24-year-old female patient says:

I could feel it within me. I could feel a mixture of all that he [the healer] was praying about. And I could feel it. You have to really understand, you know, why your ceremony was being conducted, and the reasons for it and the purpose of what it's gonna do for you. Behind every prayer and every song that's sung Traditionally, the medicine man always tells you why that song originated and what its purpose is and what it served for. So knowing that, knowing after he tells you, you think, "Okay, this is how I'm gonna get over this." [interview by the authors, July 27, 1995]

The creation story tells of the Holy People, who were present during creation and are still present today, though not in human form. The Holy People are understood to play a crucial role in the efficacy of the ceremony and in maintaining one's health and well-being throughout life. Patients often describe the most meaningful or significant aspect of the ceremony as the part wherein the patient is systematically associated with supernatural beings. Patients report feeling renewed and restored as their footsteps follow in the footsteps of the Holy People. They feel their relationship with the spiritual world is renewed and reordered. On a very concrete level, patients feel reconnected. One hataali we spoke with explains that as he is singing the prayers and telling the creation story, the patient enters the spiritual world. He says the ceremony has to do with relating the patient to the different

spiritual beings as kin—for example, Talking God is grandfather. The patient is learning “you have relatives out there.”

In the following narrative, a patient articulates how the Holy People will protect her and how she expects the ceremonial prayers to return her to her “normal self”:

Then from here on [since the ceremony], I won't have any more problems with my aches, or have any more pain or think bad thoughts. And that the Holy People will always watch over you, especially after the pain leaves. And you know that I'll enjoy things much more and now, I'll be back to almost my normal self. And you see, how it makes me feel, hearing the prayers or the words that he [the hataati] said to me, are dear to me. [interview by the authors, March 26, 1995]

Another aspect of the behavioral environment of the Traditionalist is specified in the creation story: geography. The creation story takes place on the very land on which the Navajo still live. Many landmarks on and near the Navajo reservation bear the mark of the Holy People who were born and lived in those places. The four sacred mountains of Navajoland provide the primary directional symbolism and are experientially relevant as well. Within these mountains, the Navajo are connected to the land and protected from harm. One patient explains:

As long as I'm in the four sacred mountains, within the four sacred mountains. 'Cause you get easy help, just have to go to a medicine man, to your family members and people you know. But when you're outside, if you're outside the four sacred mountains, that's your choice. [interview by the authors, March 21, 1995]

Traditional Navajo religion thus reconnects individuals to their home within the four sacred mountains, to their history as Navajos, to their families, and to the traditional way of life. An important affective dimension to the therapeutic process is a sense of connection: an understanding of the purpose and meaning of stories and prayers that tell not only of origins, but of appropriate behavior and the consequences of inappropriate behavior; a profound sense of connection through bodily associations with the Holy People who, within and outside of the ritual context, watch over and protect the patient; and a sense of support and concern by one's family. Often layered upon these experiential themes are discourses of cultural pride, political solidarity and independence, and Navajo self-determination.

The Native American Church

The Native American Church (NAC) is a pan-tribal religion involving ceremonies wherein participants ingest the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*). Most peyote meetings are held to cure individuals of illness through the power of peyote and prayer. Like Traditional ceremonies, peyote meetings may be held to address a particular illness or problem or in order to restore or maintain health. Meetings usually last from sundown to sunup, although shorter prayers are sometimes conducted. Meetings and prayers are presided over by the “road man” in either a Plains-style tipi or the traditional Navajo hogan. The road man does not use memorized, specifically prescribed prayer as in Traditional Navajo religion but, rather, spontaneous prayers and discourse.

The NAC became popular among the Navajo in the 1930s after its widespread acceptance among many Plains Indian tribes. Despite its popularity, peyotism initially

spread against strong opposition among the Navajo (Aberle 1983; Aberle and Stewart 1957). In 1940, legislation was passed by the Navajo Tribal Council which forbade the sale, use, or possession of peyote on the grounds that it was unconnected with, and contrary to, Navajo Traditional religious practice and was damaging and foreign to the Navajo way of life (Aberle 1983:565; Aberle and Stewart 1957:28–29). Today there is much wider acceptance of the NAC, even among Navajo Traditionalists, some of whom regularly attend peyote meetings.

What is striking with regard to issues of identity in the NAC is the extent to which participants identify themselves not just as Navajos, but as Native Americans. Because it is a pan-tribal religion, its participants are loosely organized and stress the common bond among Native Americans rather than the local cultural differences that characterize various tribes. This bond may derive in part from a common experience with regard to the larger society. It has been suggested, in fact, that the NAC is best understood as a “religion of the oppressed, which is responsive to the needs of Indians living under reservation conditions of domination, expropriation, exploitation, and dole” (Aberle 1983:563). Further, ongoing participation in the Native American Church has brought an awareness of other Native Americans facing similar distress and engaged in similar relationships vis-à-vis the Anglo world. For example, the issue of religious freedom has been a particularly pervasive theme around which Navajos have rallied with other Native Americans.

Whereas in Traditional Navajo religion there is a strong sense of home being situated within the four sacred mountains, participants in the NAC tend to identify with all native lands. Indeed, a powerful and unique form of patriotism exists among many NAC adherents, as they define themselves as the first Americans. There is greater geographic mobility in this tradition, with adherents traveling to Texas to gather the sacrament of peyote, to other states to participate with other tribes in the practice of this religion, and to Washington, DC, to fight for their religious freedom. The sense of an intertribal Native American community is conveyed by many Navajo road men who describe running and attending meetings among other Native American groups. Several road men we spoke to received their fireplaces from road men in other tribes.⁷ Some of the peyote songs sung in Navajo meetings are in the Sioux, Cheyenne, Ute, Comanche, or other Native American languages.

This sense of a broader community is carried over into the ceremonial setting. In contrast to Traditional Navajo ceremonies, which are generally only attended by members of one’s biological family, any Native American is able to participate in a peyote ceremony. Often, a traveling peyotist who passes a tipi will stop in to participate in the meeting. In a time when many Navajo families are not intact due to off-reservation work or school, or due to family problems, the members of this church in many ways become the new family of the patient, supporting him or her throughout the ceremony with their words and prayers. One patient explains how the support of others is helpful:

Each new problem offers something—somebody had a similar [experience] and so it’s like a history. Like people tell their problems and they seem helpless, you know. And they have the meeting, and the medicine man is there [saying] “things will be good,” and all the prayers. It’s a little overwhelming. And everybody, they sort of bond in there. [interview by the authors, March 14, 1995]

Throughout the meeting, peyote is passed around the group for each participant to ingest. Peyote, which Navajos refer to as *azee*, or “medicine,” is a “symbol of the Church, a means of communication with God, a power in its own right, and a cure of unique potency for spiritual and physical disease” (Aberle 1983:559). The road man offers prayers in which he beseeches the Great Creator to help the patient with his problems. The road man also regularly expresses his appreciation for all those in attendance. One road man describes how he talks to his patient in this setting:

I tell my patient, “You got sick and [there is] sickness in your body and now you come to this medicine, you come to this fireplace, you come to me and I want to help you. Whatever it is bothering your mind, whatever it is you think that’s bothering your health, get your mind off of it. You get on to this medicine, this fireplace, this singing that you hear. The prayers that you are hearing in here is all for you. People sitting here, they’re talking for you. They’re singing for you. Everybody wants you to get well.” [interview by the authors, July 28, 1995]

The atmosphere is one of support for the patient, and there is an emphasis on appreciation, fellowship, and forgiveness. In contrast to the formal, prescribed prayers of the Traditional ceremony, within the peyote ceremony individuals contribute spontaneous, often emotional prayers. Crying and other forms of emotional expression are common and even encouraged in peyote meetings. Through prayers, patients are often able to communicate their affection and concern for loved ones in a way that might be difficult or inappropriate in a nonceremonial setting. One patient, who was concerned about his younger brother’s drug problems, explained to us that when he prays out loud for his younger brother during the peyote meeting, he is able to express his love and concern for him clearly but indirectly. This kind of affective engagement, and its restorative effects on important relationships, is illustrative of the role of SNBH within the therapeutic process of an NAC meeting.

Another illustration of SNBH in the peyote meeting is the pervasive use of kinship terms as a mode of emotional expression and connection. Participants address each other as “brother,” “sister,” and so on, thereby establishing a familial, affective bond. Kinship terms are also used to express the affective bond between people and the spiritual world, including Grandmother Peyote.⁸ Participants often incorporate elements shared by Traditional Navajo religion (Mother Earth and Father Sky) and Christianity (our Father, the Creator).

As in Traditional Navajo religion, practitioners of the Native American Church recount stories of origin, history, and teachings. A road man refers to his “fireplace,” which is given by an established road man to an initiate, who may then run meetings as a road man himself. Fireplaces often have histories that go with them, stories describing their origination and the various road men who have used them. There are also stories recounting how peyote came to be given for healing and describing the “peyote road” an adherent should follow. An integral part of the therapeutic process is the resituating of the patient within this moral and historical framework.

This process may involve several elements. Through the effects of peyote, which “works on” the patient to clarify thought and emotion, the patient gains insight into her distress. The road man guides this process through his own insights, his link as a healer to the spiritual world, and his counseling on themes such as the

importance of love and fellowship. A patient's distress may have many layers of meaning and complexity, involving physical and emotional components. The road man encourages the patient to discuss her problems and, in the process, communicates the teaching and history associated with the NAC. One young man describes how the peyote ceremonies help him:

You relate your problems to other things, maybe see the source of your problem, why it's going on, why you are blinded by it. [The road man] tells a history with it—teaching history, the right way to do things. [interview by the authors, November 17, 1994]

A common theme in the informal teachings of the Native American Church is the importance of good family relations. Appropriate behaviors, guided by cooperation, respect, and affection, are emphasized by both patients and healers. These themes echo traditional Navajo values, but while they are often conveyed on an indirect, metaphorical level in Traditional religion, they are directly and explicitly discussed in the NAC. Below, a road man describes the importance of cooperation and communication within one's family as an aspect of following the peyote road:

A man and woman trying to make a life, they have to be together to communicate with each other, to understand each other, to meet each other halfway, to find out where their problem is and how to help each other and how to fix and how to go about it—to go on in life, you know. I mean this is what I understand, how I feel about it. Like they say, human being, if they want to make a life they have to know each other well, communicate with each other well, to make a better life, you know. . . . This is what I understand in this fireplace. [interview by the authors, July 28, 1995]

In the same vein, a patient summarizes the purpose of the peyote meeting succinctly:

Better relationships—I guess the whole Navajo thing is to have family relationships. Just to go in there in a gathering, just to be together, just to help each other, whether it's a problem or just wanting a little company. It's just the resolving of feelings and expression and what you said, and what you prayed. It's sort of like a reminder, like, "Now I want to do better, I want to do this." [interview by the authors, November 17, 1994]

These examples articulate the importance of proper relationships as a condition of well-being, and of affective engagement within these relationships as an important element of the therapeutic process. NAC adherents are guided by values of cooperation and respect through the teachings and counsel of the road man. Furthermore, participants reflect, pray, and sing within the supportive, spiritually charged atmosphere of the peyote meeting. Sentiments of forgiveness and fellowship create a bond and provide a sense of rejuvenation among meeting participants. The therapeutic efficacy experienced in this setting is evident among the people we spoke with and in the large numbers of Navajos who participate in the NAC.

The Native American Church grew in popularity during a time when Navajos faced dramatic social changes. As many Navajo families became fragmented and an awareness of the plight of other Native Americans grew, many Navajos were drawn to this common form of worship. In contrast to the more structured, symbolic associations of the Traditional ceremony, NAC meetings involve spontaneous,

emotionally expressive discourses that draw participants together through common suffering, insight, and resolution. As brothers and sisters, children of the Great Creator, participants in the NAC see themselves as both Navajo and Native American, striving to restore health and harmony.

Pentecostal Christianity

While Christian missions of many denominations and mission-run clinics, hospitals, social services, and schools have been common on the reservation for many years, Pentecostal Christianity has a relatively short history on the Navajo reservation. The first widespread expansion of Protestant churches occurred in the early 1950s (Dolaghan and Scates 1978). At that time, traveling evangelists held camp meetings that drew large numbers of Navajos with the promise of healing. Independent Pentecostal churches headed by Navajo ministers began to spread throughout the reservation and are plentiful today. Such churches often exist in remote areas, attended and supported solely by local, rural Navajos.

The early mission schools, like other boarding schools of the past, placed an emphasis on learning English, forbade children to speak their native tongue, and otherwise attempted to exterminate native culture. Given this context, it is not surprising that many feel a Native American Christian identity to be culturally and historically problematic and that “native” and “Christian” are mutually exclusive identities. As James Treat has written, “A native who has become wholeheartedly Christian has lost some measure of native authenticity; a Christian who is still fully native has fallen short of Christian orthodoxy” (1996:5–6).⁹ Illustrative of this idea is the fact that a Navajo who converts to Pentecostal Christianity must dispose of any paraphernalia used in or symbolic of Traditional Navajo religion or the Native American Church.

Another theme within Pentecostal Christianity is that the Christian God is more powerful than the spiritual beings associated with the other two religions. One elderly woman who converted to Christianity from Traditional religion says: “A long time ago men use to pray like that—‘I will walk in beauty and live in beauty with my children.’ Now everybody just relies on God. We pray, ‘Take care of us, God.’ That’s more powerful that way” (interview by the authors, February 3, 1995).

In the same vein, whereas Traditional religion and the NAC are strongly associated with the four sacred mountains and indigenous America, respectively, the Christian God is considered to be transcendent and unrestricted to a particular geographical location. A Christian is no less protected across the ocean than she is on the Navajo reservation. In fact, many Navajo Christians consider it quite beneficial to send their children to mission schools off the reservation and even out of state. A Navajo Christian may also find a job in other parts of the country without worrying that she will not be able to practice her religion.

In contrast to the other two religions, Navajo Pentecostal Christian healing is not restricted to the hogan or the tipi, but may take place in a variety of settings and through a variety of practices. Among the most common venues are church services, prayer meetings held at church or in a home, and camp meetings, usually held under a large tent. Each of these events generally includes singing, reading from the Bible, giving testimony, and healing prayers. These activities may be performed

by a pastor, evangelists, or congregation members. The emphasis is not on specific ritual procedures but on the spontaneity of divinely inspired prayer.

Healing prayer may occur at any time, but is frequently offered toward the end of a church service or prayer meeting. A minister or evangelist may identify or heal an adherent's problems through "discernment," laying on of hands, anointment with oil, reading from the Bible, or offering counsel. More often than not, other members of the congregation will participate in the healing prayers as well, as prayer from the congregation is usually considered preferable to individual prayer by the minister. Participants gather around the supplicant, often weeping and beseeching God to help, laying on hands, and crying "Praise God" and "Thank you, Jesus." The patient may respond in a variety of ways, such as weeping, speaking in tongues, falling or collapsing, dancing, or singing. Many supplicants have visions or other sensory experiences, such as feelings of warmth, tingling, and lightness.

The necessity of affective engagement with others as a condition for well-being, as specified by SNBH, is clearly illustrated in Christian Pentecostal healing. The therapeutic benefit of such affective engagement derives from the idea that God uses one's fellow Christians as vessels through which to heal. It is illustrated vividly in the emotional force of the words and behaviors of the Christian supplicants.

In a broader sense, the idea of fellowship among Christians is central. One Navajo pastor explains that he tries to bring Christians together to build a body—a church with Jesus as the head, some individuals as the arms, and others the hands. "We all need each other," he says. The alternative leads to sickness: "Fear, along with bitterness and jealousy, can cause a lot of negative feelings, family conflicts, sickness, and hurt. This lack of fellowship is the opposite of the Christian way" (interview by the authors, July 17, 1994). Thus, living the Christian way, according to Christian teachings of fellowship, requires one to have proper relationships. One must not only be "right with God," but also right with one's fellow Christians.

For various reasons, many Navajos feel separated, physically or otherwise, from their families. Sometimes family members' participation in different healing traditions creates conflict. A central component of Pentecostal Christianity is providing a new family for adherents. Members of this family often share food and cooperate in many other ways. They provide support, guidance, and company. One Navajo Christian woman contrasts her biological family with her "church family":

And what I really remember is the church family here and that really brings up the atmosphere. I really like that. I like to socialize with them 'cause I feel more at home and instead of being with my own family. My family gets together, everybody starts arguing and . . . we're not like families anymore. . . . But the church people here, it's not like that. And every time I'm with them they talk about the Bible . . . and then they encourage you how to be strong in the Lord. [interview by the authors, March 17, 1995]

A theme of cooperation, support, and fellowship not just within one's biological or clan family, but within one's Christian or "church family" is articulated in the narratives of many Navajo Christians. One young Christian patient describes how the support and love of his church congregation helped him recover

from alcoholism in a way that the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings he had attended did not:

Two years and three months that I haven't had a drink. . . . Just the way these people, there's a lot of love [in church] compared to the AA meeting. There's no love there, there's no kindness there, even though they say, "We really care." God has a lot of love, care, tenderness, compassion, all this. At the church I go to here, they help me and they pray with me and tell me that they love me and that they care about me. They pray for me, they always wonder where I am [if I'm not there]. The [Christian] teachers made me realize that I am a person. I am somebody that they care about. [interview by the authors, September 29, 1994]

The Christian teachings of confession and forgiveness are comparable to the teachings of the NAC, as are instructions to avoid alcohol, drugs, and other negative influences from the outside world. Christianity, like the NAC and Traditional religion, instructs participants to treat their family well and value their family, home, and land. The emphasis on thinking and speaking correctly also parallels traditional Navajo emphasis on the importance of practicing "right thinking" (*hózhó ntséskées*) in order to live a life characterized by harmony. One Christian adherent relates a minister's sermon to his own personal prayers:

He preached on how it is within the home. You don't do bad things, you get along with your wife and not to commit adultery, not commit evil and not lie to your wife. Don't be doing bad things in front of your children. Talk to them right and all those things like that. I really like what he preached on how it's supposed to be within the home. . . . I really liked the Word that was preached there and I wanted to think good and I really wanted to understand the Word real good and I want to live according to it and my children and my wife, all of them. My job, my home, my land, and other people who I live with. I pray for all those. [interview by the authors, April 7, 1995]

This man explains how the traditional Navajo phrase "walk in beauty" (*hózhó nasha*) is, in Christian terms, living "according to the Holy Spirit":

When you want to think, "I walk in beauty," is when you want to have a nice home and I will have good thinking, and I will live nicely with my spouse, my children. Have a nice home, good health, sleep, job, nice vehicle, it consist of everything being nice, beautiful. That's what it means when you're walking in beauty. The traditional people used to say that a long time ago. . . . I think also of the church. It's also the same when you say, "I walk in beauty"—you live according to the Holy Spirit. You live according to that and it also is the same that you walk in beauty because you gain some good things. That's what it means but you have to straighten out your language, how you see things, speaking positively, in everything. That's what it means to walk in beauty. [interview by the authors, May 7, 1995]

While all three traditions can be seen as guiding and encouraging one to live a good life and treat one's family well, Christianity's teachings in this regard are often so emphatic that a person is encouraged to adopt a new, Christian identity. Indeed, being born again through a conversional experience is a requirement in Pentecostal Christianity. This kind of Christianity often demands that adherents destroy religious paraphernalia from other traditions and terminate any kind of religious participation in other traditions as well. Thus, adopting this new identity may lead to

separation from or conflict with family members who participate in other traditions. It may also lead to conflict if the Christian adherent *does* decide to participate in another religion.

However, Navajo Pentecostal Christianity is not a homogeneous entity. While some Navajo Christians adopt entirely new identities, many do not reject traditional Navajo culture and are less exclusionary in their approaches to the other two religions. Many Christians take great pains to point out how Christianity fits with many aspects of traditional Navajo lifestyle and value orientations, including humility, hard work, and deep spirituality. In fact, there is often an ambivalence or tension among Navajo Christians as they struggle to reconcile the foreign roots of Christianity with their own Navajo perspective. They allude to Biblical analogies of sheep herding and the desert environment and associate Biblical parables with the Navajo creation story. One 58-year-old Christian minister explains that he relates Bible stories to the Navajo creation stories in order to help congregation members, especially the elderly ones, understand Christian teachings:

We compare like Jesus did in the parable story. We read some of these verses, some of these parable story, we try to tell the Navajo ways, you know. I always bring out the old story, because my father teach me a lot of things. My father wanted me to be a medicine man before. He teach me lots of them and he tell me all the stories about those coyote stories and I still remember that. So I compare with the Bible. . . . You can tell that way. If you know both story, some people understand that. [interview by the authors, June 13, 1994]

As in the other two traditions, an important element of Christian healing derives from a sense of connection to the spiritual world. The use of kinship terms to address God is extensive. Furthermore, profound experiences of connection are often described. Below, a woman recounts being saved as a tactile, embodied experience:

And so when I got saved, I had to say my own prayer from my own heart, from my inner self, just give everything, all my problems, everything back to the Lord. Let Him take care of it. So the day I got saved, I felt that chill feelings on my back, like somebody was standing behind my back. And I remember when I got saved, too, I felt somebody's hand right here and I think it was the Lord and He's holding me. Because I was really down and I was just, and I felt a hand on my shoulder and I felt somebody's . . . and I turned around there was nobody there. Just like somebody's just comfort me. I think that was the Lord, you know, just telling me that everything's taken care of. I felt that relief. It just left my body and I felt more calm and more light. 'Cause when I went to church I was this, heavy load on my back. But when I walked out I felt real light like I was just walking on the clouds. [interview by the authors, March 17, 1995]

Navajo discourses on Christian religious practice thus specify a variety of identities that may be negotiated—from a “born again” Christian to one who draws parallels to traditional Navajo teachings. In any case, the history and teaching of Christianity, as conveyed through the use of the Bible, connect Navajo Christians to a meaningful past and orient them within the moral framework of Christian theology. Of the three traditions, Christianity has the broadest geographical referents: the Christian God is considered omnipresent and all powerful. Navajo Christians articulate connections to fellow Christians everywhere, and themselves feel connected

as a Christian family. This sense of connection is integral to the process of Christian healing among the Navajo.

As with the other two traditions, one's relationships to others and to the spiritual world are of central importance in the therapeutic process. Engagement with others in the therapeutic setting, through healing prayers and other practices, is both meaningful and tangible. The supplicant's orientation is one of letting in the Holy Spirit so that healing may take place. In these ways, healing is accomplished through the words and actions that affectively engage the supplicant within her meaningful behavioral environment.

Conclusions

Religious practice provides a context for the negotiation of identity on a number of levels. The social, political, and economic events of the last century, particularly the various forms of Anglo control, have contributed to a pervasive sense of external exploitation and cultural repression. Many Navajos feel disconnected from their families or their cultural traditions. Religious practice can fulfill a desire to reaffirm a distinctly Navajo or Native American identity. Alternatively, Navajo Christians may adopt a new, "born again" identity and reject all other forms of religious practice. Others have practiced or continue to practice more than one of these three traditions, drawing at any particular time on the tradition that best addresses their particular problem (see Begay and Maryboy, this issue). What it means to be Navajo, then, is multifarious and negotiable.

Within this context of diversity, we have attempted to show how common themes throughout the three traditions point to similar self-orientations, as specified in the Navajo principle of SNBH. In contrast to other works, which have focused on SNBH in terms of the specialized knowledge of ceremonialists or highly abstract formulations, this work has sought to elucidate how SNBH is experienced and expressed by individuals. We have shown that this principle is not transmitted as a "concept" per se, but in such grounded phenomena as the kinship system and healing modalities.

SNBH specifies that well-being requires the establishment and maintenance of proper relationships guided by such principles as respect, reverence, kindness, and cooperation. This entails affective engagement through the use of kinship terms and other positive words and behaviors within the therapeutic context. Each religious tradition allows adherents to live within a world of relatives with whom they can emotionally connect. Using SNBH as a framework for understanding Navajo self-orientation illuminates the emotional force of healing practices in each tradition.

The cohesion in Navajo culture can therefore be discerned not so much in terms of universally shared symbols, artifacts, or lifestyles, but in terms of certain orientations and ways of relating. The themes expressed by SNBH are pervasive in Navajo culture and are encoded and interpreted in a variety of ways of speaking and behaving. Phrases such as "I have no relatives" (to convey a complaint or criticism) or "walk in beauty" (to convey a state of harmony or well-being) have salience to individuals in all three traditions. Each tradition articulates issues important to the negotiation of identity—teachings about the right way to live, definitions of home and family, and orientations toward one's culture and to others. Thus, in

the Navajo borderlands, identity is a central component of healing as Navajos in all three traditions strive to “walk in beauty.”

NOTES

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1. In the Navajo Healing Project, as well as in this article, *healing* is broadly understood to include prayers or ceremonies for specific illnesses, as well as the purposeful adoption of a way of life that promotes and maintains general health and well-being. Patients who participated in this project suffered from a wide range of distressing conditions, from acute illnesses to general malaise.

2. In this work, we focus only on the independent Pentecostal fellowships for two main reasons. First, on the more remote western side of the reservation where we worked, this form of Christianity is predominant. Second, although several denominations, including Presbyterian, Baptist, and Roman Catholic, are present in the two main towns of Tuba City and Kayenta, healing was not found to be a central concern in these fellowships, and they were therefore not included in the study. Catholic Charismatics are not present, to our knowledge, on this part of the reservation.

3. With the fairly recent but intense anthropological focus on the self has come significant conceptual ambiguity with regard to the use of *self*, *person*, and other related terms (see Csordas 1994b; Fogelson 1982; Harris 1989; Hollan 1992; Whittaker 1992 for reviews). Whether explicitly distinguished and defined or not, *person* is often associated with a cultural objectification or representation (Dumont 1970; Fajans 1985; Geertz 1973; Mauss 1985) and *self* with a more psychological interest in the reflexive forms of subjectivity (Csordas 1994a; Ewing 1990; Gergen 1991; Hollan 1992; Marsella et al. 1985; Rosaldo 1980; Singer 1984). Our approach to the term *self* is described here. Our use of the term *identity* fits within these same parameters but emphasizes the presentation and representations of self within a specific social, historical, and cultural context.

4. According to Wyman (1970:28), the meaning of *SNBH* is often withheld by a *hataali* (Traditional Navajo practitioner) until he or she is advanced in age or approaching death: “It is breath and life to the owner who will not part with this knowledge. . . . Knowledge of this kind is too valuable to pass on.” Wyman goes on to say that this attitude prevents free discussion among *hataalii* as to the meaning of the phrase, and accounts for the differences of opinion among them. While many Traditional Navajo practitioners with whom we spoke expressed hesitancy or frustration at a direct translation of the phrase, they frequently gave examples or told stories that illustrated the principle. Others, particularly patients, did not provide a translation of the phrase, but spoke of its meaning to them, and of the meaning of certain components (e.g., *hózhó*). Since we are interested in the experience of Navajo patients and healers rather than in abstract ideas, our analysis focuses on this level.

5. *K'é* terms are polysemic, in that they signify both categories of relationship as well as behavior codes associated with that relationship. Within the broad term *k'é* are two more specific terms: *k'él* (static and invariable) and *k'é* (active and variable). *K'él* refers to categories of relationships that are invariable and unalterable, into which ego is born. It refers to the

vast set of relationships that are initially defined by the very fact of birth and are further differentiated by the components of sex, generation, age, and lineality (Witherspoon 1977:95). This aspect of ego's identity is static.

6. The affective opposite of *k'é* solidarity is the cluster encompassing jealousy, meanness, "thinking against someone," and witchcraft practices (Lamphere 1977:53). The suspicion of witchcraft serves to define uncooperative behavior and thus to reinforce the commitment to an ethic of cooperation and solidarity. The Navajo witch or werewolf is prototypical of antisocial, anti-Navajo, and even anti-human behavior (Lamphere 1977:53). Further, in most cases of emotional disturbance, witchcraft or ghostly influence is suspected (Kaplan and Johnson 1964:209). The witch's power or the ghost is considered to enter the victim and take over, causing him or her to behave in strange ways. Such illness is thus visualized not as something a person has control over or takes responsibility for, but as "an ego-alien realm with which the person does not identify" (Kaplan and Johnson 1964:215).

7. An individual is said to receive his fireplace when he has learned from an established road man the symbols, history, and stories associated with that fireplace. When a road man has received his fireplace, he may then preside over a peyote meeting.

8. Peyote is often referred to with a kinship term. In the meetings we attended, we heard peyote addressed as grandmother, grandfather, and mother.

9. Several authors have noted the apparent incompatibility of Christianity with Traditional Navajo religion (Adair et al. 1972:13–14; Csordas 1992:8; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1974:133; Reichard 1990:45–46). Adair et al. (1972:13–14) argue that Christianity "preaches against the very core of (traditional) religion." Whereas the earlier Catholic missions allowed Christian Navajos to make some use of Traditional ceremonies and still be Christians, Protestants are generally more exclusivist. Most Pentecostal churches require participants to end participation in NAC and Traditional Navajo religion (Frisbie 1987:206; Lamphere 1977:28) and often consider anything associated with either to be evil. However, this is not necessarily the case for all Pentecostals. Frisbie (1987:209) notes that some pastors speak out against the burning of Traditional medicine bundles and the equation of anything Traditional with the Devil. Further, there is some suggestion that due to external pressures there is some effort on the part of Christians to pull together with Traditionalists (Aberle 1982:226).

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