

Shamanism and Peyote Use Among the Apaches of the Mescalero Indian Reservation

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In a volume devoted to the study of shamanism and hallucinogenic drugs it is important to include data concerning a group whose experiences with the hallucinogenic peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) in shamanistic rituals resulted in serious conflict and, ultimately, proscription of the ceremonial use of the drug. In this contribution we present information concerning the Apaches of the Mescalero Indian Reservation, some of whom used peyote in shamanistic contexts between about 1870 until some time after 1910. We then examine some of the reasons why its use was abandoned and why their accredited shamanistic practices subsequently have excluded the use of hallucinogens.²

The Apaches presently living on the reservation include members of three tribes, in order of descending numbers, Mescaleros, Chiricahuas, and Lipans (R. M. Boyer, 1962, Appendix A). The reservation was established in 1873 for the Mescaleros. The Chiricahuas were taken as prisoners of war in 1886 after the capitulation of Geronimo and his followers. When they were freed in 1913, the majority chose to move to the reservation and to become part of the Mescalero tribe. The Lipans were destroyed as functioning groups during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when their few known remaining members joined the Mescaleros.

Nineteenth-century authors stated that the Mescaleros used peyote in religious rites in 1867 (Methvin, 1899:36-37), the Chiricahuas in 1875 (Tones, 1899:95)¹ and the Lipans in 1885 (Havard, 1885:521; 1886:38). Nevertheless, it is not generally known that these Apaches ate peyote. They were excluded from Shonle's (1925) map of the distribution of the use of peyote in the United States and they were listed as non-users in a booklet compiled under the aegis of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Newberne, 1925.)

During his field work in the 1930's, Opler (1936); learned that the Mescaleros had practiced rather elaborate ceremonies centering on the utilization of peyote for some forty years and that the Lipans had used it in shamanistic contexts (Opler, 1938, 1940, 1945).

According to the aged informant Antonio Apache, the Lipans obtained peyote from the Carrizo Indians (Opler, 1938); and the Mescaleros are said to have learned peyote rites from the Lipans not long before 1870 (LaBarre, 1938) or from the Tonkawas, Lipans, Yaquis, or other non-Apachean groups of northern Mexico (Opler, 1936:148). But for some slight degree of experimentation by today's young people with marijuana and perhaps LSD, the reservation Apaches are not known to have used any other hallucinogenic drugs with the exception of alcohol. Modern

informants affirm that peyote has been and may now be used for social purposes, but that formerly it was ingested only during Mescalero and Lipan shamanistic ceremonies. We have been unable to confirm its use during the years 1958-71. No one now has knowledge of peyote use by the Chiricahuas of the reservation.

To understand why the shamanistic use of peyote was abandoned requires an insight into Apache religious concepts and a cognizance of personality structure among these people. Initially we shall summarize the religious tenets.

Aboriginal religio-medical philosophies, the criteria for according the status of shaman to individuals, and shamanistic procedures have been similar if not identical among the three tribes in recorded times (Boyer, 1964). They conceive the world to be permeated by supernatural power which has no intrinsic attribute of good or evil; its virtue resides in its potency. Power approaches people through the agency of a plant, animal, or natural phenomenon by means of a dream or other hallucinatory experience; its acceptance is frequently accompanied by an ordeal. Ritual instruction may be received directly from the power or from other shamans. Any person is a possible power recipient. Thus, Opler (1936:146) described the Mescaleros as "a tribe of shamans, active or potentially active."

An individual might own any number of powers. If he is thought to use power for purposes which are not oriented toward the common good, he is accorded the status of witch. Yet those who are thought to use their powers for the benefit of the group, the shamans, are implicitly witches since a shaman who saves a life must then either sacrifice his own or that of a loved person. Obviously, jealousies, enmities, and suspicion abound. Each shaman has private instructions concerning the use of power, and his rites are individually owned. Consistent with native concepts of leadership and authority (Basehart, 1959, 1960, 1970), there has never been a chief shaman.

Opler's informants stated, and today's Apaches agree, that ritual peyote use was acquired from personal contact with power that approached people while it was invested in peyote flowers or "buttons." Various Mescalero shamans acquired peyote power and became leaders of a peyote camp in which curing and other ceremonies were conducted. During such rites, various shamans and other participants used and were affected by peyote, experiencing the usual perceptual and logical distortions, hallucinations, and physical effects. Whether the Lipans had a formal peyote camp is not known.

There is a fundamental incongruity between the principles involved in ordinary Mescalero shamanistic ceremonies and the rules that applied to peyote rites. In ordinary shamanistic practices, a single shaman is the principal figure and the experiences of attendants at ceremonies are subordinate. Religious ecstasy, visions, and communications with supernaturals are the shaman's prerogatives and validate his power and efficacy. The use of peyote by other people at ceremonies made its psychological and physiological effects common, and the uniqueness of the shaman's experiences disappeared. The peyote meetings became places in which shamanistic rivalries and witchcraft flourished. Disruption resulted, rather than cohesiveness through shared experience.

The peyote ceremonies were not accompanied by the acceptance of Christian beliefs and practices, and the Mescaleros never became involved in the Peyote Religion (see Slotkin, 1956). Instead, the use of peyote was intended to affirm the vitality of traditional religious practices at a time when the impact of reservation confinement contributed to an increased awareness of social and cultural deprivation. Yet antagonisms became so open and bloody that eventually the peyote gatherings were abandoned. The hostilities which became overt during the meetings were ascribed to the peyote. Since its use involved witchcraft practices, its ingestion was equated with the potential for witchcraft.

It will be recalled that, in the native conceptualization, power has no intrinsic attribute of good or evil, and can be used for moral or immoral purposes at the will of its human owner. To our knowledge, peyote power is unique among the Mescaleros in that it is uniformly considered to be bad. Some Mescaleros believe that one other power, the owl, is intrinsically evil. Thus, the hoot of an owl is considered to presage death. However, some Apaches regard the owl as the bearer of the power of a human witch, others believe ghosts to inhabit owls, and yet others deem owls to be witches whose actions are motivated by their own evil will or power.

During 1959-60 there were thirteen accredited Mescalero, Chiricahua, and Lipan shamans on the reservation. Perhaps fifteen Mescaleros, here termed pseudoshamans, claimed to own supernatural power but were considered generally to be imposters.

One of the shamans, Ancient One, was the sole living person known to have participated in the peyote camp. Of the shamans, only he and Black Eyes (Boyer, 1961; Klopfer and Boyer, 1961), both Mescaleros, were at times judged to be witches. It was said that they and two of the pseudoshamans still used peyote in the illicit practices of witchcraft and love magic ceremonies, rites which are potentially dangerous to those who perform them. The shamans, considered to be legitimate possessors of peyote power, were not punished by that power for their actions. However, the peyote had "turned back" on the pseudoshamans. As a consequence, one of them lost one of his legs in an accident and the other was castigated indirectly when one of his close relatives was killed and another lost a limb.

Let us turn now to a brief and partial recapitulation of facets of current socialization practices. R. M. Boyer (1962) found that child-rearing techniques tend to be uniform in emotional content, and usually in actual practice, provided the mother has been brought up on the reservation. Further, during the prelatency period of a child's growth, socialization practices strongly resemble aboriginal tactics.

Typically, there is gross inconsistency in the maternal care of children. Frequently, the baby of the family is afforded tender and loving care but periodically the mother will impulsively abandon the infant to the supervision of others, sometimes to children of only four or five years of age, for hours or days

while she engages in narcissistic pursuits, commonly involving drinking. Ordinarily, a husband does not object to such treatment of small children because his attention and regard are no more constant. Under such conditions, the development of a sense of basic trust (Erikson, 1950) is stultified; one result is the marked ambivalence and suspiciousness which form aspects of Apache personality.

With the birth of a baby, usually when the previous child is 18 to 24 months old, the older child is abruptly, and often brutally, displaced. The resultant sibling rivalry is intense but strongly disapproved. Nevertheless, its repression is insecure and its effects become blatantly manifest when teenagers and adults are under the influence of alcohol. We refer here to only two of the severe psychological traumata encountered by growing children.

In the aboriginal situation, other socialization practices were reasonably effective in directing hostilities engendered by such child-rearing practices, for example, those mentioned above toward outsiders, witches, ghosts and other culturally defined objects. During the long period when these Apaches were nomadic hunters, gatherers, and raiders, such externalization of aggression served to strengthen group solidarity. With changing life conditions, in the presence of feeble repression of interfamilial and intragroup resentments, individuals' hatreds are generally discharged in manners which result in anomie and various forms of self-destruction (Boyer and Boyer, 1972).

L. B. Boyer's essential research method consisted of conducting psychoanalytically oriented investigative interviews (Boyer, 1964a). He had from 1 to 145 interviews each with 60 different persons of both sexes, ranging in age from 4 to 65 years. He found a personality configuration which was typical for these Apaches.

They are impulse-ridden, fear loss of control, especially of feebly repressed hostile urges, and are suggestible and phobic. They tend to avoid introspection and seek outer controls and explanations for their behavior and thoughts. They are suspicious and dependent and their libidinal attachments are unstable. The men, who are caught between passive and aggressive urges, have insecure sexual identities. The typical Apache personality configuration corresponds with the Western psychiatric diagnosis of character disorder with hysterical and impulsive attributes.

L. B. Boyer was generally considered to be a shaman and, accordingly, was in an unusually good position to learn about shamans and their activities. He found them to have personality configurations that concur with those which are typical for the Apaches, differing only to the degree to which they successfully employ imposture and in their having greater creative potential (Boyer, 1962).³ They are not autocultural deviants who have resolved serious psychopathological conditions through assuming shamanistic roles (Ackerknecht, 1943; Devereux, 1956; Silverman, 1967). The personality structure of the impostor as delineated by psychoanalysts (Greenacre, 1958) is clinically similar to that of the usual Apache shaman.

A capacity to regress in the service of the ego (Kris, 1952) and an ego-controlled availability of primary process thinking (Freud, 1915) are related to creativity and showmanship. These characteristics appear to be necessary for the successful practice of shamanism and for convincing impostureship. It is noteworthy that the pseudoshamans who were interviewed were found clinically to lack creative potentials and the capacity to use regression in the service of the ego.

Because it was impossible to conduct psychiatric interviews in depth with all of the shamans and pseudoshamans, the Rorschach test was employed as a research adjunct. Protocols were obtained from all Apaches of fifty years of age and older (referred to here as the old-age group), 12 of the 13 shamans and 7 pseudoshamans (Boyer, Klopfer, Brawer, and Kawai, 1964). The protocols of the shamans and pseudoshamans were compared with those of the old-age group and with each other. As expected, the protocols of the old-age group showed hysterical signs. The shamans demonstrated more hysterical signs and, additionally, a way of handling data with keener awareness of peculiarities and more selective theoretical interest; they had creative characteristics and a high degree of reality testing potential in addition to a capacity to regress in the service of the ego. Viewed heteroculturally, or within Devereux's framework of the ideal psychological normal, they more nearly approached normality than did their culture mates." The personality of the pseudoshamans was strikingly different. They were not hysterical, had variable degrees of reality testing potential, and impoverished personalities. Klopfer concluded from indirect data that the shamans were able to use imposture convincingly whereas pseudoshamans could not.

COMMENT

Historical and modern data provide some partial and tentative answers to the intriguing question of why the Mescaleros abandoned the use of peyote in shamanistic rituals and today forbid its use.

Apache child-rearing practices engender much hostility. Aggression was and is addressed institutionally toward outsiders, witches, ghosts, and cultural bogies in an attempt to produce individual repression of hostile impulses originally directed toward familial and societal members. The effort was more effective aboriginally but has never been strikingly successful. In the past, as today, when individuals were under the influence of hallucinogens, including alcohol, their unstable repression of hateful impulses toward parent and sibling surrogates became blatantly overt and threatened tribal unity.

The use of peyote in the camps introduced a foreign element into Apache shamanistic procedures, the simultaneous assumption of authority by more than one practitioner. Each of them vied for supremacy of power and status. The physiopsychological effects of the hallucinogen reduced the efficacy of their repression of the hostilities which had resulted from their socialization experiences.

The drug-induced regression resulted in their releasing aggression in its earlier, childish form, directly toward parent and sibling surrogates. Bloodshed and feuds occurred; the Apache wisely banned the peyote camps.

It would appear that the ascription of the quality of evil to peyote (power), an act which involved basic deviation from the conceptualization of power without intrinsic properties of good or evil, was intended to deny the presence of intragroup hostility.

The use of peyote was proscribed for shamans; thenceforth it was employed by possessors of supernatural power solely in witchcraft rituals, as was owl power, and love magic practices.

It can be no coincidence that only peyote and owl power have been considered to be evil in themselves. In each instance, murderous wishes are projected onto the power in question.

The Mescaleros, Chiricahuas, and Lipans fear the use of peyote for two stated reasons: (1) it has an evil power which will drive them to do evil and (2) it causes hallucinations, that is, reduces their capacity to perceive and judge external reality accurately.

There is fear of the visual aberrations and of the strange qualities of movement encountered. In the first case, intrapersonal asocial tendencies are projected onto the peyote. Sexual transgressions arouse little overt anxiety among these Apaches except when inter-generational incest has occurred, but they fear their poorly controlled aggressive impulses. The second case is similar. The Apaches may displace their fear of loss of control over destructive urges onto fear of loss of control of perceptual accuracy.

A number of questions remain, of which we shall deal briefly with three.

First, why did two shamans continue to use peyote in illicit practices! Both were considered to be very powerful and were feared by most Apaches. Black Eyes, intoxicated, frequently bragged that he was a witch and once flaunted peyote buttons before the psychoanalytic author. Ancient One had no need to flaunt his witchcraft potential. He was said to have killed many individuals, both tribal enemies and Apaches, sometimes by means which appeared to have required the intervention of the supernatural. His own children were so awed by his presumed powers that they even hesitated to whisper their conviction that he was a witch. Perhaps these two men deemed themselves to be so strong that they were above social sanctions and continued to use peyote both to demonstrate their contempt for their fellow Mescaleros and for material purposes. It is probable that they could demand greater recompense and command greater respect from performing rituals which were conceptualized as illegitimate in Apache practice and belief.

Second, why did two pseudoshamans use peyote in their rituals? They had impoverished personalities, and were generally scorned both as shamans and witches and employed solely by the most suggestible. We postulate that they used peyote in an attempt to raise their esteem in their eyes and those of others, hoping that they would truly become powerful if they could exploit the effects of the hallucinogens. Each of them confided to L. B. Boyer while intoxicated that they doubted their own claims of power possession and consciously sought to deceive others.

Third, the use of alcohol among these Apaches is commonplace. While it is officially and to some extent socially disapproved, it is accepted as "one way of life," a way accepted even prior to white domination. Under its influence, hallucinosis is frequent, and exceedingly violent actions often occur. Further, in the drunken state, perception is blurred and distorted, paralleling one aspect of the experiences induced by the ingestion of peyote. Why, then, was the use of alcohol socially permissible, while peyote was proscribed? A significant reason would appear to be the incorporation of peyote into the shamanistic ritual complex from the time of its introduction to the Apaches; the consumption of alcohol, to our knowledge, has never been culturally acceptable in ceremonial contexts. Where the group situation at peyote meetings fostered conflict centering on the varying powers controlled by and controlling particular individuals, aggression released during drinking parties was channeled outside the personally mediated world of the supernatural.

It will be most interesting to observe future Apache involvement with hallucinogens, inasmuch as their use has become commonplace among adolescents and young adults throughout the United States. Will the ban against the use of peyote extend to other hallucinatory agents with which Apaches may become familiar in their increasing intercourse with the world beyond the reservation? Or, might acquaintance with some hallucinogens pave the way for the re-definition of peyote, especially in view of the diminished commitment of the majority of present-day Apaches to the system of supernatural beliefs associated with shamanism?

Research designed to answer these and related questions should yield significant data for cross-cultural comparison of processes of sociocultural change.

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The ultimate purpose of the research is to delineate areas of interaction among social structure, socialization, and personality organization. Harry W. Basehart has

been responsible for collecting data pertaining to social structure. He was assisted in 1959-60 by Bruce B. MacLachlan. Ruth M. Boyer has gathered socialization data and also aided Basehart. L. Bryce Boyer has studied personality organization. The principal psychological consultant was Bruno Klopfer; his assistants were Florence B. Brawer, Hayao Kawai, and Suzanna B. Scheiner. Basehart has spent more than a year on the reservation, MacLachlan over fourteen months, and the Boyers over two years.

L. BRYCE BOYER, M.D., RUTH M. BOYER, PH.D., and HARRY W. BASEHART, PH.D., have worked as an inter-disciplinary team in their studies of Mescalero Apache shamanism. L. Bryce Boyer is a practicing psychoanalyst in Berkeley, California, who in his considerable field research: specializes in shamanism. Ruth M. Boyer is an anthropologist and Lecturer in the Department of Design at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Basehart is Professor of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico and Editor of the Southwestern journal of Anthropology.

2. The Apaches call peyote hoos. Almost no one remembers an aboriginal name, xucladjin-dei (Castetter and Opler, 1936:61)

3. Subsequently, Boyer reviewed the relevant literature on shamanism and concluded that, cross-culturally, shamans have personality configurations similar to those exhibited by Apache practitioners (Boyer, 1964b).

4. Devereux's (1956) stand has been frequently misunderstood. He held that shamans must be considered to be seriously neurotic or psychotic when compared with the hypothetical psychological normal. Boyer's viewpoint has been similarly misunderstood. Thus Handelman (1968) has stated that Boyer considers shamans to be psychologically abnormal, inferring therefrom that he deems them to be autocultural deviants, which is not true (Boyer, 1969).