

TRANSMITTING SACRED KNOWLEDGE:
ASPECTS OF HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY
OGLALA LAKOTA BELIEF AND RITUAL

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Anthropology,
Indiana University

April 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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March 12, 2015

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for their friendship, encouragement, criticism, patience, and support. This work would have never been completed or possible without them. First of all I want to thank my Lakota friends and adoptive relatives for sharing their lives and deep knowledge with me. I am very thankful for your friendship, acceptance, generosity, enduring support, and for allowing me to tag along with you on your many adventures. I am eternally grateful to each and every one of you and consider you as relatives. Thank you to Robert Brave Heart, Sr. and the entire Brave Heart family; Stanley Good Voice Elk; Alvin and Steve Slow Bear; Tom Cook and Loretta Afraid of Bear; Joe Giago, Richard Giago, and Tyler Lunderman; John Gibbons and his family; and Russ and Foster “Boomer” Cournoyer. Special thanks go to Arthur Amiotte and his wife Janet Murray, the late Wilmer “Stampede” Mesteth and his wife Lisa, Richard Two Dogs and his wife Ethleen, and their families. I cannot thank you all enough, and I am a better person because of you. Thank you to the Department of Anthropology at Indiana University Bloomington, the American Society for Ethnohistory, and Red Cloud Indian School for their practical support of my work. Thank you also to photographer Aaron Huey for permission to use his fine work. I am so grateful for all of my teachers, both within and beyond academia, and want to thank those who have been instrumental not only in this project but also in my development as a scholar. Thank you to Raymond Bucko, S.J.; Peter Klink, S.J.; Robert McKinley; Laura Scheiber; Christina Snyder and Jason Jackson for your advice, comments, and encouragement; and Douglas Parks for your kindness and support throughout the years and one-of-a-kind sense of humor. The most special thanks of all goes to my advisor and friend Raymond DeMallie, whose work originally inspired

me to pursue a Ph.D. in anthropology. Without Ray's unwavering support, encouragement, generosity, and wisdom I truly would not be who I am today. He is an uncommonly kind person, a wonderful mentor, and an even better friend. His brilliant and empathetic scholarship continues to inspire me to this day, and this dissertation has been greatly enhanced by his positive influence and steadfast guidance. Last but not least, I want to thank my wife Emily Posthumus for her patience and support. You are much appreciated, and I could never have finished without you. I sincerely hope that I have not forgotten anyone in these brief acknowledgements, and if I have, please forgive me. Finally, I am solely responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation in the work presented here.

David C. Posthumus

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The Lakotas are well known historically for their role in the so-called Sioux Wars of the nineteenth century and for the famous leaders counted among their ranks, including Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Black Elk. The Lakotas are also known for their relatively well-documented religious traditions preserved in classic works by Black Elk, James R. Walker, Frances Densmore, Clark Wissler, and Luther Standing Bear, to name a few.

In 1883 the United States government banned American Indian religious expression and ritual. Although traditional spiritual practices were observed in secret during the ban period, roughly spanning from 1883 to 1934, a great amount of religious knowledge was lost as elders passed on and members of the younger generations were raised as Christians. However, the Lakotas have long served as a model for other tribal groups in the retention of traditional values. The Oglalas of Pine Ridge are often considered the most traditional, a discursive term tied to conceptions of ethnic identity. Many beliefs and practices are perpetuated among the Oglalas that have become dormant on other Sioux reservations.

During my fieldwork at Pine Ridge I participated in the ritual networks of four practitioners, representing a broad spectrum of contemporary practice. I examined religious belief, ritual behavior, social networks, and the lives and practices of modern practitioners, trying to fit them into the broader picture of reservation life and the

dynamics of tradition. *Transmitting Sacred Knowledge* examines historical and contemporary Oglala belief and ritual and how they shape identity and ethnicity. Based on ethnohistorical and linguistic sources and over twenty months of fieldwork, my dissertation traces the development of Lakota religion from the pre-reservation period to the present, exploring key concepts and themes, Lakota disease theory, and positing a topology of nineteenth-century practitioners. Examining shifting and contested understandings of tradition, *Transmitting Sacred Knowledge* explores contemporary Lakota identity politics, practitioners, and the social organization of twenty-first century Lakota religion. Although the patterns of interaction have changed since the establishment of Pine Ridge Reservation in 1869 there remains a distinct and undeniable continuity with and fidelity to past traditions, beliefs, and practices.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

INTRODUCTION

The Lakotas or Western (Teton) Sioux,¹ and particularly the Oglala tribe of the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota (see Figure 1), have captured the imagination of millions the world over and captivated countless peoples for myriad reasons. Oglala warriors, political leaders, and religious practitioners of the nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, and Black Elk remain among the most well-known, enigmatic, and romanticized figures in American history. They have become emblazoned on the collective understandings of the past and fixtures of popular culture throughout the entire world since their rise to prominence in the mid nineteenth century. Their names alone evoke a multitude of powerful symbols and emotions—resistance, bravery, balance, harmony, mysticism—that define the ways in which many contemporary people conceptualize American Indians² and their histories. The Oglalas continue to inspire and inform people today from all over the United States and the world.

The Oglalas are especially renowned for their poignant religious philosophies and eloquent religious leaders and thinkers. Brilliant and exceptional individuals such as George Sword, Horn Chips, Nicholas Black Elk, Frank Good Lance, Frank Fools Crow, and Peter Catches, Sr. found ingenious ways, despite settler colonialism and difficult

¹ “Lakota” refers generally to the seven tribes of the westernmost division of the Sioux or Dakota peoples. The Lakotas are sometimes referred to as the Tetons, Teton Sioux, Teton Dakotas, or Western Sioux. I use the term “Sioux,” rather than “Dakota,” to designate the Lakotas, Yanktons, Yanktonais, and Dakotas (Sissetons or Eastern Sioux) peoples collectively. See Daniels (1970:216). For histories of the Western Sioux, see DeMallie (2001:718–760, 794–820) and Mekeel (1943). For histories of the Oglalas specifically, see Hyde (1937, 1993), Olson (1965), and Price (1987, 1996).

² The terms “American Indians” and “Native Americans” are used interchangeably throughout this work to refer to the native or indigenous peoples of North America. In deference to the common, everyday speech of native people and groups in the United States, “Indian” and “American Indian” are used more frequently than “Native American.” The terms “native,” “indigenous,” and “aboriginal” are also used interchangeably throughout this work.

historical circumstances, to translate their spiritual beliefs and traditions³ in such a way as to make them accessible to all. A number of publications in the twentieth century, the most influential of

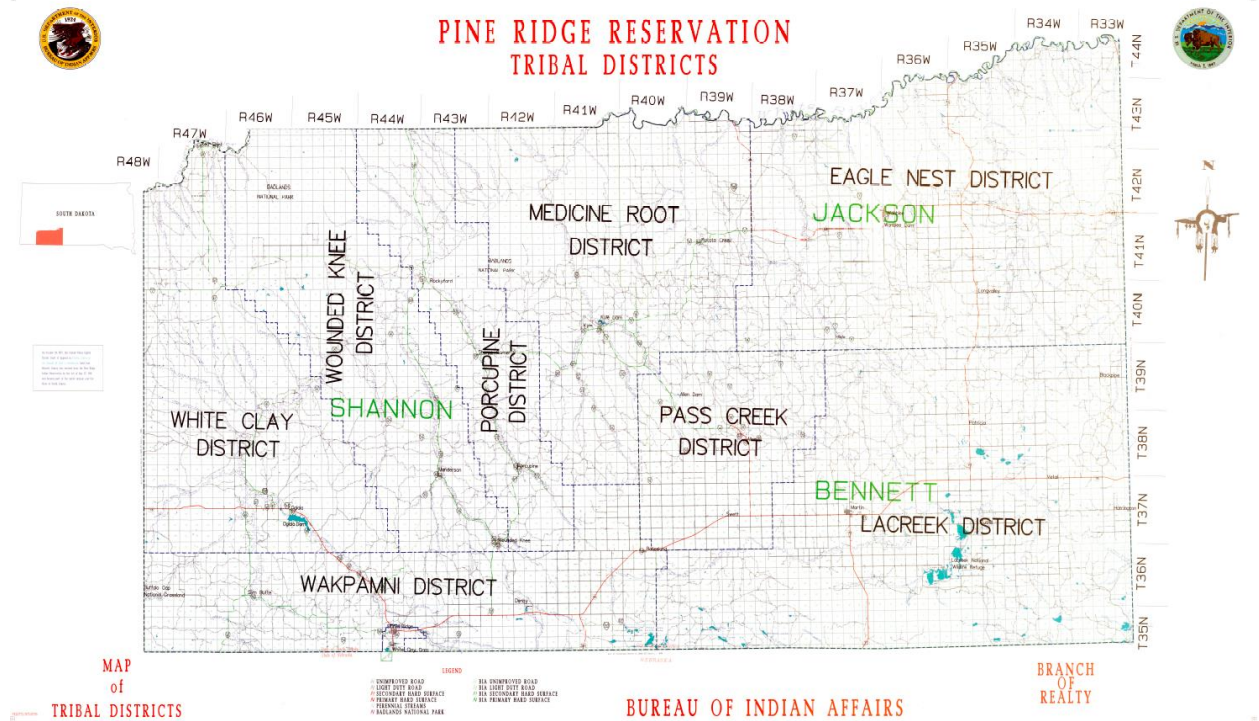


Figure 1: Pine Ridge Reservation (© Bureau of Indian Affairs)

which being the classic *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt 2008), and a renewed desire to (re)connect with Lakota traditions, among other things, led to a cultural and religious revitalization and renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s, the impact of which is still being felt today. Contemporary Oglala religious leaders such as Richard Two Dogs and Wilmer

³ “Tradition,” a concept laden with meaning, is perhaps the most significant and controversial cultural symbol employed and manipulated by contemporary Oglalas on a regular basis today. Tradition and traditional are highly complex and discursive terms, and yet they are used frequently, and often indiscriminately, in daily life. Tradition is processual and dynamic, characterized by both change and stasis, and largely concerned with culture, meaning, transmission, creativity, and history. The term traditional is commonly used by Oglalas to indicate that an individual or social group tends to adhere in thought and action to values considered to reflect the Lakota past (see DeMallie 1991). We will explore the concept of tradition from Lakota perspectives in greater detail in the contemporary section below.

Mesteth continue to carry the torch of their ancestors and keep their traditions strong, vibrant, and relevant in the modern world.

The various groups of Lakotas, and particularly the Oglalas, are often considered as exemplars of authenticity and models of the retention of traditional values for other Sioux groups and American Indians in general. As far back as the 1830s, for instance, the geologist and explorer Joseph N. Nicollet, describing the Yankton or middle division of the Sioux, wrote, “all their practices and their customs come to them from the Teton — horses, songs, medicine ceremonies, dances, manners, etc.” In the 1930s the Yankton Sioux ethnographer and linguist Ella C. Deloria (n.d.:9) noted that, “The extreme Oglala . . . loved ceremonial perhaps more dearly than any other band.” Many traditions and rituals are perpetuated among the Oglalas that became dormant on other Sioux reservations.

The persistence of Lakota religious traditions has led to Oglala religious proselytization on other Sioux reservations and has spread even more widely, to Central and South America and Europe, for instance. For these and other reasons religion has become perhaps the dominant factor in or marker of both individual and collective Oglala identity since the mid twentieth century. Oglala religious continuity and the role of the Pine Ridge Sioux as the most authoritative voice concerning traditional culture and religion has perpetuated and reinforced what others have referred to as the “superstitious” nature of the Oglala people (Mekeel 1930:5, 11–12; Ruby 2010:xxi, 16, 26) and what I will call the “Oglala religious ethos and worldview” that has become the trademark and foundation of Lakota culture and identity.

My task in this study is to outline some of the major elements of nineteenth-century and contemporary Oglala religion and ritual and explore how they continue to impact identity among contemporary Oglalas. Focusing on continuity and innovation, my work illustrates the persistence of Oglala religious belief and ritual practice. I argue for a dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation in the development of Oglala religion and explore ritual as a decolonizing strategy in the modern, globalized world, serving as a major focus of personal and ethnic identity and providing spaces where Lakotanness, tradition, and meaning are articulated, performed, reinforced, and transmitted from one generation to the next. Specifically, based on anthropological and ethnohistorical approaches to the study of religion, ritual, kinship, and social organization, my study shows how twenty-first century Oglala religious organization derives from two institutions of historical Lakota social and religious organization; namely, the *thiyóšpaye*⁴ (extended family, band) and the *Ihánblapi Okhólakičhiye* (religious Dream Societies).

What is it about the Lakota people, and particularly the Oglalas, that makes them so religious-minded or religiously oriented, so deeply rooted in their spirituality and traditions? Why is there such a pronounced Oglala religious ethos and worldview? The phenomenon has been noted by nonnative outsiders, other American Indian peoples, other Lakotas, and by the Oglalas themselves. What is the basis for the Oglala religious ethos and worldview—its historical roots—and how and why has it persisted into the present when traditions on other reservations have eroded and proven less resistant to change? Has it changed and evolved along the way, and if so, how? How does history,

⁴ Transcriptions of Lakota terms in contemporary Lakota orthographies are given in italics. Bracketed insertions in quotations are mine unless otherwise noted.

geography, and identity, among other factors, influence the Oglala religious ethos and worldview? A common expression I heard in my discussions with Oglala people provides a simplified yet telling answer to these complex questions: the Oglalas do these things purely out of a deep love and respect for *Lakǰól wičhóǰ'an* or Lakota traditions and the Lakota way of life. This is an abridged explanation that calls for further unpacking, no doubt, but it can also help us understand generally the existence of the phenomenon. But more on that later.



Ever since the Oglala Lakotas crossed the Missouri River circa 1750 in the vanguard of the westward migration of the Sioux and adopted (or adapted to) the Plains lifestyle the Oglala religious landscape has been evolving. Lakota religion was never static, even before the transition to the Great Plains. Religion, like culture in general, conceived of as a system or web of meaningful symbols, as practice and process, is first and foremost dynamic, not static, and characterized by constant change. From the adaptation to Plains life to the centrality of the horse, from the Sun Dance to the Vision Quest to *Yuwípi*, Lakota religion is and always has been dynamic, characterized by adaptation, individuality, innovation, and practicality, notwithstanding a small number of vital and significant continuities with the past.

Changes in the Oglala religious landscape accelerated dramatically with the dawning of the early reservation period almost 150 years ago.⁵ In 1871 Red Cloud

⁵ As a general baseline I follow DeMallie (2009:187) in referring to the prereservation period as ending in 1868, the early reservation period as 1868 to 1934, the period of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and Relocation as 1934 to 1961, and the period of self-determination as 1961 to the present. I would add to this timeline the post Declaration of War period, referring to the “Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality” (Mesteth, Standing Elk, and Swift Hawk 1993), written and passed by a number of Sioux community members, leaders, and elders in June 1993 at the Lakota Summit V. The declaration was

Agency was established for the Oglalas on the North Platte River in Wyoming Territory near present-day Henry, Nebraska. In 1873 the agency was moved to the northwestern corner of present-day Crawford, Nebraska overlooking the White River. In 1877 the agency was moved again, this time to a location on the Upper Missouri. Finally, in 1878 Red Cloud Agency was moved to southwestern South Dakota near White Clay Creek and the present-day Nebraska border, southeast of the Black Hills, where it has remained, later being renamed Pine Ridge Agency (and finally Pine Ridge Indian Reservation) in 1889 (Olson 1965:132–263).

The landscape at Pine Ridge is spectacular. Western yellow pine, red cedar, and juniper trees are abundant, and tall, majestic cottonwoods and willows cluster along creek beds. Chokecherries bloom in the spring, and the mixed-grass prairie and endless rolling hills are speckled with white-faced rock outcroppings. Part of the mysterious Bad Lands comprise the northern portion of the reservation, and a plan is currently in the works to transform that landscape into a bison range and the first tribally owned and operated National Park in the United States. Today, Pine Ridge is the eighth-largest reservation in the U.S. and home to an estimated 30,000 people (Oglala Lakota Nation 2014; Powers 1982a:9–10).

Adjustment to reservation life was complicated, to say the least. More dramatically than ever before, countless new and foreign influences impacted the Oglalas, pressing in upon—and indeed being forced upon—them like a fierce South Dakota blizzard pelting the people from all directions and shaking the very foundations

largely in response to the perceived appropriation, exploitation, and desecration of Lakota spiritual beliefs, practices, and sacred sites by nonnative, New Age individuals and groups. With that in mind I will refer to the period of self-determination as 1961 to 1993, and the post Declaration of War period as 1993 to the present.

of Lakota society. All the while Lakota religion evolved and continued as it always had, clutching tenaciously to a corpus of fundamental beliefs, customs, and symbols, while picking up new cultural and religious innovations and ideas and discarding outdated and unnecessary ones along the way.

The religious landscape on the Pine Ridge Reservation today is very different from what it was in the early 1900s and even the mid-to-late 1900s. The old, venerated, and now-famous religious leaders of the twentieth century, remarkable people such as Horn Chips, Black Elk, Little Warrior, Good Lance, Fools Crow, Peter Catches, Sr., Dawson No Horse, Sr., and their non-Oglala counterparts such as Crow Dog and Lame Deer—the kind of legendary old-school medicine men who need no introduction and are known by just their Lakota surnames—are long gone for the most part, but not forgotten by any means. Lakota religious leaders of a new generation are gaining followers, respect (and sometimes notoriety), and are leading their people on to new horizons in the twenty-first century.

The new generation of religious leaders is distinctive and diverse. Some have visions of the future of the Lakota people and their traditional ways that vary greatly from one to the next, while others just shore up their resistance and seek to remain steady in the face of the onslaught of outside influences and true to a past that seems farther and farther away with each passing day—a past that is ultimately unknowable and inevitably interpreted through a modern lens. As Raymond DeMallie (1993:525) suggests, “just as we are outsiders to other cultures, we are also outsiders to the past.”

I have spent roughly twenty months conducting fieldwork at Pine Ridge since 2008, during which time I have developed many reciprocal relationships with Oglala

friends and adoptive relatives. As I collaborated with Oglalas as a research associate working on a Lakota language curriculum development project I discovered that people at Pine Ridge were very interested and active in traditional religion and eager to talk about it. My research has given me the opportunity to participate in the ritual networks of four religious leaders, conventionally called “medicine men,” who represent a broad spectrum of contemporary religious practice, thought, and identity. I attended rituals; studied prayers, ceremonial songs, and beliefs; analyzed ritual behavior and social networks; and shared in the lives and practices of modern practitioners and their followers.

On a particularly sunny day at Pine Ridge my adoptive *lekší* (uncle), an influential practitioner, introduced me to his family, friends, and followers at his birthday party as a FBI secret agent because of the dark sunglasses I was wearing at the time. After everyone had a good laugh at my expense, he smiled and said, “No, just kidding. He’s just our anthropologist.” Lakota humor is really something special (see Bucko 2006). My experiences and participation at Pine Ridge as the “local anthropologist” allowed me to examine religious continuity and innovation, which are central topics of this study. But in particular I became increasingly interested in the social networks comprising the greater Oglala religious landscape in the twenty-first century.

When I first went to the field I had a strong scholarly foundation in historical Lakota culture, society, religion, ritual, and language. What I witnessed in terms of religious life seemed at first to deviate from the nineteenth-century models I was so familiar with. The practice of Oglala religion in the twenty-first century, at least on the surface, is quite distinct from what one reads in the classic ethnographies and collections

of texts on the Lakotas. I was intrigued by the modern, practical adaptations and the transnational, global scope of contemporary Oglala religion. I searched the web for “Lakota medicine man” and found a number of fascinating sites, some more elaborate and convincing than others. I smiled when I received my first text message from a religious practitioner, informing me that the rocks for that evening’s Sweat Lodge were almost ready to be loaded into the ceremonial lodge. Though I was a bit thrown at first, I persisted in my quest for understanding the deep continuities underpinning Oglala religious life, despite the clear presence of innovation and practicality; the darker, more sinister effects of settler colonialism; and the inescapable influences of modernity.

My major research questions came to revolve around these issues as I attempted to grapple with them. Is it possible to trace the historical development of contemporary Oglala religious organization? Is twenty-first century religious practice based on continuities with the past, an entirely new phenomenon, or a hybrid of both? Is Oglala religion characterized by inventions of tradition or traditions of invention?⁶ What does it mean to be traditional today from Lakota perspectives? And finally, why do Oglala people practice traditional religion in the modern world? These were the major questions I set out to explore, and I dove in headfirst, participating as much as possible in as many ritual networks as I could, interviewing people, listening, observing, and asking

⁶ See Sahlin (1993, 1999). Bruce Kapferer (2008:23 n 6) argues against simplistic explanations concerning invention of tradition theories of ritual, writing, “this is not always the case even though their personal, social and political import is achieved or reinvented in contemporaneity. But in this sense rites through their repetition are always being reinvented simultaneously with the attempt to make them continuous with what was practiced before. Ritual in the sense I am suggesting here is both continuous and inventive. These are not necessarily contradictions or oppositions as appears to be the implication of some invention of tradition perspectives.” Generally Kapferer sees no contradiction in the fact that ritual is both dynamic and static, characterized by both change and stasis (see Kapferer 2008).

questions. Sometimes I felt like I *was* transforming into the FBI agent from my uncle's introduction with my endless interrogations.

The Lakota religious landscape continues to change and evolve today. In fact, some of the few constants for Lakota culture and religion through time are change, adaptation, innovation, and adjustment. As Clyde Kluckhohn wrote:

. . . no cultural forms survive unless they constitute responses which are adjustive or adaptive, in some sense, for the members of the society or for the society considered as a unit. "Adaptive" is a purely descriptive term referring to the fact that certain types of behavior result in survival (for the individual or for the society as a whole). "Adjustive" refers to those responses which bring about an adjustment in the individual. [Kluckhohn 1944:46]

The essentially dynamic nature of Lakota religion continues to be relevant to Indian and non-Indian peoples alike as the significant elements of historical tradition are actively (re)constructed and made meaningful in the modern world. The seemingly endless waves of change and outside influences that crash down upon the Oglalas at all times and from all directions reminds me of Hokusai's *The Great Wave* and of a common analogy: Sioux reservations have been likened to islands surrounded by the white western world and its influences and that analogy surely fits here. The Lakotas truly are an incredibly resilient, pragmatic, practical, and admirable people.

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I have been fascinated with Native American culture and history since I was a boy, partly influenced by my grandfather, whose interest in and respect for indigenous peoples was contagious. I have always been particularly drawn to the Lakotas, and in high school I first read *Black Elks Speaks* (Neihardt 2008), which drew my focus toward religion. As

an undergraduate I first read *The Sixth Grandfather* (DeMallie 1984) and examined the discrepancies between what the Oglala holy man Nicholas Black Elk actually said and how it was represented by John Neihardt in *Black Elk Speaks*. This experience fueled my interest in traditional Lakota religion and the ways in which it is represented.

When I first turned to the study of contemporary Lakota religion I focused on ritual—concrete, usually public performances of “consecrated behavior” (Geertz 1973:112). Ritual has been described as “different forms of action from everyday life” aside from basic subsistence needs usually performed for “different purposes” from those for which they would be performed in the ordinary, everyday world. An example would be the act of ingesting bread during the Christian ritual of Holy Communion, in which the act of eating bread is different from eating bread at any other time (Mitchell in Barnard and Spencer 1996:490). According to Jon P. Mitchell (in Barnard and Spencer 1996:490), “The difference relates to the meaning attached to the ritual act, which is suggested by the use of symbols. Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture, David Kertzer defines ritual as ‘action wrapped in a web of symbolism’ (1988:9). This assumes that ritual has a communicative role. . . . There is assumed to be a purpose, a function and a meaning behind ritual action.” But once I moved to Pine Ridge in August 2011 and began participating in ritual networks and ceremonial activities my focus shifted considerably.

I realized that my interest lay not so much in the how or what of Oglala Lakota religion—in behavior and ritual acts themselves; in “the prescribed performance of conventionalized acts manifestly directed toward the involvement of nonempirical or supernatural agencies in the affairs of the actors” (Rappaport 1967:18)—but rather in the *why* of Oglala religious expression—in the underlying meaning of religious and magico-

ritual beliefs and practices. Why do Lakota people in the twenty-first century practice traditional religion? How can the persistence of the Oglala religious ethos and worldview be explained? What do modern Lakotas think about what they are doing when they perform their religion and express their spirituality and identity through traditional religion? What do Lakota religious symbols mean to contemporary Oglala people? Why is there a compulsion and need to practice traditional religion in the modern world? Where does this urge to be a traditionally religious person come from and why has it emerged with such force since the mid-twentieth century? What does Lakota religion mean to Lakota people?

Initially I was concerned that people would not be open or willing to discuss religious matters with me, a nonnative outsider from western Michigan. But I was immediately and pleasantly surprised to find that most Oglalas were more than willing and even eager to discuss these matters with people who were respectful, deferent, and genuinely interested in Lakota culture, history, and religious expression. Religion is a very common topic of discussion and debate among the Oglalas at Pine Ridge, and many discussions that began around totally different topics ended up making their way towards religion and religious identity. Getting down to the task of exploring contemporary Oglala Lakota religion and how it relates to both individual and collective identity I attempted to explain and characterize the phenomenon I call the Oglala religious ethos and worldview. Delving into that led me to the contemporary social organization of Oglala religion.

Much of the Oglala religious outlook appears to be wrapped up in conceptions of the self—in individual and group identity. Like many other cultural and social constructs

religiosity and identity frequently appear to be reactionary and/or adjustive: they may develop as reactions to or against forces and influences within one's self, one's community, or frequently from outside forces. They change in the form of adjustments to certain internal and external stimuli. The development of (religious) identity could be likened to a stone being dropped into a body of water, the stone being the reaction-inciting agent, causing a ripple effect that gradually influences the whole in ways both unforeseen and oftentimes unconscious. In this way Lakota identity and indigeneity can be conceptualized as decolonizing strategies aimed at distinguishing Oglala identity, tradition, and religion and maintaining a clear boundary between Oglala and non-Oglala, or Lakota and non-Lakota, ethnicity and identity.

Another analogy for the reactionary and adjustive nature of (religious) identity formulation, drawing on Geertz's classic conceptualization of culture and cultural institutions such as religion as webs of meanings and symbols spun by humans themselves (Geertz 1973:5), would be to think of a fly (in this case, representing a reaction-inducing agent) that gets caught in one of those webs of meaning. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. If a hapless fly winds up in a spider's web, the fly may or may not be devoured eventually but in some ways it remains: as nourishment for the spider (in this case, representing a given society), as a lingering memory, or what have you. The fly, whether or not it is incorporated into the web or expelled from it, leaves its mark and causes additional effects: the spider may or may not eat it or the fly might break free and create a breach in the web that will need repair or reinforcement. A force, whether it is from within one's self, one's community, or an

external agent, will cause a reaction, no matter how subtle or significant. Religious identity frequently seems to operate in a similar manner.

Clearly religion and ritual provide an important space where Lakota identity is negotiated, performed, and reinforced; where tradition is articulated, maintained, and perpetuated. Religion and ritual also clearly function as decolonizing strategies, providing a platform for the social organization of cultural difference and maintaining indigeneity and the distinctiveness of Lakota identity and tradition in opposition and resistance to non-Lakota belief and practice, neocolonialism, and the homogenizing effects of globalization. But I began to notice how Oglalas were organized into relatively distinct ritual groups—usually identified by and with the name of its religious practitioner and leader or by geographical or residential criteria—that at first seemed to be incongruent with any type of religious or ritual organization from the past.

I came to label these social groups “ritual *thiyóšpayes*,” using the Lakota word for band or lodge group, the extended family and historical basic unit of kinship and social organization. This study is an exploration of the development, composition, and functions of these contemporary ritual groups. As religion has increasingly come to define Oglala individual and ethnic identity since at least the dawning of the early reservation period (see DeMallie 1991; Powers 1982b:202–203), membership in a ritual *thiyóšpaye*—sometimes referred to as an “altar” or Sun Dance family—has become the major expression of Oglala religiosity and worldview and a significant unit of social organization at Pine Ridge today.

In Part I we will discuss the theories and methodologies utilized in this study. Part II examines aspects of pre- and early reservation period Lakota religion and ritual,

including the basic concepts and themes that provide the framework for nineteenth-century Oglala Lakota religion, social organization, ritual practitioners, and Dream Societies. In Part III we will explore aspects of contemporary Lakota religion and ritual since the revitalization period beginning in the late 1960s, examining the concept of tradition among the Lakotas and the development of a distinctive Lakota religious ethos and worldview. We will analyze contemporary Oglala social categories, social organization, modern religious practitioners, and religious continuity and change in the twenty-first century, before returning to ritual *thiyóšpayes* and the social organization of contemporary Oglala religion.

PART ONE: THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

1. SYMBOLIC, INTERPRETIVE, AND COGNITIVE ANTHROPOLOGIES

The primary methods I used in this study were participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, intensive study of the Lakota language, and archival research. My work is broadly informed by Geertz's symbolic and interpretive anthropology and James Clifford's interdisciplinary approaches to the intersections of colonialism, post-colonialism, and indigeneity. My research is framed by the sensitive and compelling work of Raymond DeMallie, whose interests in the Lakotas, ethnohistory, belief, ritual, and kinship continue to serve as a well of inspiration for my scholarship.

I was inspired by the work of David Schneider (1969) and Hervé Varenne (1977, 1986) on kinship and the social organization of religious and secular groups. Their work led me to Fredrik Barth's (1966, 1998) writings on similar topics concerning ethnicity as the social organization of cultural difference, ethnic group identity, boundary maintenance, and transactional approaches to social organization.⁷ Insights from Åke Hultkrantz (1981:1–25) also influenced this study, particularly a passage in a collection of essays in which he states that the religious organizations of Plains Indian tribes reflected their social organizations and environmental factors. As above, so below. This insight, coupled with a careful reading of E. E. Evans-Pritchard's classic *Nuer Religion* (1956), solidified my thinking and framed this work.

Before continuing I must echo an important analytical distinction first proposed by A. L. Kroeber and Talcott Parsons in 1958:

⁷ Clifford's (1988:277–346; 2000) insightful work on identity (politics) also framed and influenced this study.

We suggest that it is useful to define the concept *culture* for most usages more narrowly than has been generally the case in the American anthropological tradition, restricting its reference to transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior. On the other hand, we suggest that the term *society*—or more generally, *social system*—be used to designate the specifically relational system of interaction among individuals and collectivities. To speak of a “member of a culture” should be understood as an ellipsis meaning a “member of the society of culture X.” [Kroeber and Parsons 1958:583]

It is important to keep this distinction in mind as we proceed.

Many anthropologists and other academics will immediately notice that in my examination and analysis of the Oglala religious ethos, worldview, and religious identity I use a number of problematic and controversial concepts born from social theory. Concepts such as religion, ritual, identity, ethnicity, indigeneity, ethos, worldview, tradition, and authenticity, just to name a few, are by no means simplistic or universally agreed-upon concepts. Much ink has been spilled on their explication and derivations. There is little consensus among scholars as to any one “correct” definition of these types of terms, if indeed neat definitions are possible, and surely many will disagree with my employment of them here. However, one must wade through these contested waters if one wishes to say anything of substance about anything, so we will do our best.

My conclusions are based on fieldwork, interviews, and years of research, reading, writing, and thinking about the topic. Even though many academics scoff at the use of a term like “tradition” without a corresponding lengthy definition, the Lakota people use the term productively on a regular basis and seem to have a general, agreed-upon, although discursive, definition of it. How an Oglala person conceptualizes “tradition” and “authenticity” is very different from how an academic would and for our

purposes here Oglala perspectives⁸ are much more significant and preferred. One of the major goals of this study is to explore the exegetical semantics of these pervasive religious symbols from native perspectives.

Exploring just what an Oglala means by concepts such as tradition(al), authentic(ity), and medicine is a fascinating exercise and one of the main goals of my research. What are the symbols of tradition among Oglalas today and have they evolved since prereservation times? If so, how have they changed? There is something to be said for saying something that everyone can hear and understand without getting bogged down in endless, oftentimes fruitless discipline and postmodern deconstruction. After all, anything and everything can be deconstructed. In the following discussion I will attempt to explain and define various key concepts employed in a manner consistent with and acceptable to (I hope) both anthropological and Oglala understandings, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. The goal here, however, is to explore the Oglala religious ethos and worldview, religious identity, and the social organization of contemporary Oglala religion, not to reinvent the wheel and definitively define “ethos,” “worldview,” “identity,” and “social organization,” for instance.

The bottom line is that today there are many diverse ways to be a traditional religious Oglala person and what that means exactly is complex, multimodal, discursive, and dynamic, characterized simultaneously by both change and stasis. In addition, there are countless symbols manipulated to express Oglala, and more generally Lakota, religious identities. As DeMallie (1991:4) suggests, “[Lakota] identity has been

⁸ I follow Geertz in the usage of the term “perspective” as being closely related to the term “attitude” and meaning “a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of ‘see’ in which it means ‘discern,’ ‘apprehend,’ ‘understand,’ or ‘grasp.’ It is a particular way of looking at life, a particular manner of construing the world” (Geertz 1973:110).

unquestioned throughout the last century, since the beginning of the reservation period; its expression, however has undergone many transformations.” Religion and ritual involve representation in terms of economic, political, and social processes, but, more importantly, they also encode the affective realm and creative and generative potentialities of human existence. Exploring what makes individuals and collectivities religiously oriented from their own perspectives can shed light on the universal impulses and motivations in all of us. It can also hopefully say something about the role of “religion” as a universal cultural phenomenon and analytic category for cross-cultural comparison in the modern world, explaining some small part of its pervasiveness and appeal.

In an attempt to best capture and describe the complex, textured, and nuanced nature of the Lakota religious and magico-ritual domains I draw from a wide variety of anthropological, folkloristic, and philosophical theories and methodologies. Central to this eclectic mix are insights derived from symbolic and interpretive anthropology, cognitive anthropology, and anthropological approaches to religion, ritual, kinship, ethnicity, identity, indigeneity, ethos, worldview, and social organization. For the most part these concepts will be defined throughout the text as they arise, but as a general framework for the following study we will first briefly outline symbolic and cognitive approaches in anthropology and the concept of worldview.

Symbolic anthropology developed in American anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s out of the work of Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and David Schneider. Symbolic anthropology resists positivist scientific methodology and emphasizes cultural particularism, focusing on local realities rather than grand comparisons. It involves the

study of culture, conceived of as a system of meanings embodied in symbols, as a relatively autonomous entity that the anthropologist attempts to elucidate and decode through the work of interpreting key symbols and ritual performances. Decoded symbols interpreted in tandem by the anthropologist and native interlocutors are put into an analytical framework. This exegetic process often illustrates how symbols evoke discursive meanings in an indeterminate manner, rather than carry fixed and unambiguous meanings (Barnard and Spencer 1996:535–539).

Symbolic anthropology emphasizes the integration of various social and cultural domains, employing concepts such as condensation, extension, conglomeration, and cross-referencing. It often centers on the analysis of symbolic forms in behavioral context, rather than the elicitation of social and cultural domains. Symbolic anthropology seeks to explain or interpret the totality of the relevant associations of these domains in an autonomous system of symbols and their associated meanings. Schneider defines a cultural system as “a system of symbols,” and a symbol as simply “something which stands for something else” (Schneider 1968:1). Schneider is less interested in the project of decoding individual symbols, focusing more on the idea that symbols constitute an autonomous system. Within this system, according to Schneider, certain symbols are central points of orientation on which all else depends (Barnard and Spencer 1996:535–539; Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981:423; Schneider 1968).

Benjamin Colby, James Fernandez, and David Kronenfeld wrote:

Geertz (1973) has long argued that the entire cultural system is best understood through the analysis of symbols and their constitutive power in structuring and motivating that system, a point of view that is expressed in Schneider’s (1968) “symbolic system school,” in which an understanding

of the structure of symbolic associations in many domains is taken as crucial to the understanding of the normative in behavior. [Mary] Douglas's (1966, 1970, 1975) work is similarly systematic, indeed cosmological in import, seeking to relate symbolic structures to social structures as a form of total analysis. [Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981:424]

DeMallie cogently summarized the major premises of symbolic anthropology, writing that it is based on:

. . . a sharp analytical distinction between "culture" and "society," and proceeds in a dialectical fashion by comparison between the two dimensions. Developing out of the work of Talcott Parsons, "society" refers to the configurations of interaction among the individuals comprising a social group (family, tribe, neighborhood, clique, or whatever); "culture" refers to the shared understandings of the group embodied in symbols (both linguistic and nonlinguistic) and their range of associated meanings. Behavioral patterns and the symbols and meanings associated with them may change at differential rates, providing the dynamic that keeps human groups in constant flux.

The field of symbolic anthropology does not assign primacy to mental phenomena over behavioral ones, although it recognizes that human beings strive to find meaning in interaction. Still, the obvious fact that participants in interaction do not always share the same understanding of the situation, even though in a broad sense they share the same symbols, points to the complexity of symbolic analysis. . . .

. . . the message of a symbolic approach is that one cannot read simplistically from how to why, from behaviour to meaning. The symbol intervenes, the complex of meanings, multidimensional and ever-changing, that defines the uniqueness of a way of life. [DeMallie 1991:2–3]

Cognitive anthropology describes and interprets cultural forms, examining patterns of shared knowledge, cultural innovation, and transmission over time and space using the methods and theories of the cognitive sciences. Cognitive anthropology is concerned with culturally specific ontologies and epistemologies, what people from different groups know and how that knowledge changes the way they perceive and relate

to the world around them. It focuses on the analysis of native thought processes and formal analyses of systems of belief and worldview, privileging native language studies and terminologies. Cognitive anthropology isolates and analyzes culturally specific concepts, small units of cognition through which human beings make sense of their environment. Contemporary cognitive anthropologists explore how everyday patterns of thought structure broader interpretive frameworks, particularly in regards to religion (Barnard and Spencer 1996:108–111; Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981:422–423; D’Andrade 1995).

Both cognitive and symbolic anthropology seek to explore the culturally constituted worldviews of members of specific societies and cultures, a people’s “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society” (Geertz 1973:127). The concept of worldview has been developed by Robert Redfield, who defines it as “that outlook upon the universe that is characteristic of a people” (1952:30), A. Irving Hallowell (1960, 1963), and Geertz (1973). Worldview is similar to Gregory Bateson’s (1936) term *eidon*, which is applied to a range of subjects extending from general questions of non-Western mentality and science, to native views of the natural and material world and their responses to it, and to terms for particular social domains of native interest (see Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981:422–423; Kearney 1975). Religion, ritual, worldview, and its semantic relative *ethos* are all interrelated concepts that serve to structure and guide our exploration. Next we will examine religion and ritual from anthropological perspectives, detailing exactly how these terms will be employed throughout this study.

2. RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, RITUAL, AND SYMBOL

For an anthropologist, the importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive, conceptions of the world, the self, and the relations between them, on the one hand—its model *of* aspect—and of rooted, no less distinctive “mental” dispositions—its model *for* aspect—on the other. From these cultural functions flow, in turn, its social and psychological ones. – Clifford Geertz (1973:123)

Anthropologists have been interested in religion, ritual, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft since the emergence of the discipline in the nineteenth century. As Bruce Kapferer explains, these concepts:

. . . are at the epistemological centre of anthropology. They embed matters at the heart of the definition of modern anthropology, and the critical issues that they raise are of enduring significance for the discipline. But the questions these phenomena highlight expand beyond mere disciplinary or scholastic interest. They point to matters of deep existential concern in a general quest for an understanding of the human forces engaged in the human construction of lived realities. [Kapferer 2003:1]

Émile Durkheim and Max Weber were perhaps the most important formative theoretical influences on the anthropological study of religion, especially Durkheim’s emphasis on ritual as a form of collective action or performance in which society celebrates itself and its own transcendent power over its individual members (see Barnard and Spencer 1996:482). Social scientists have argued for generations about what is and what is not religion, which areas of culture should be partitioned off as “religious,” and how the term itself is best defined for the purposes of cross-cultural comparison.

Religion has been used as an analytical category for centuries and can be defined in countless ways, all such definitions ultimately amounting to mere partial truths utilized by scholars for various purposes to shed light on various topics. Religion, like the concept

of the supernatural, could be considered an inherently Western notion that emerged with European post-medieval modernity and does not adequately translate into other cultural milieu (see Asad 1993; Barnard and Spencer 1996:482–483; Josephson 2012; Saler 1977, 1987). It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to capture the essence of such a complex concept in a single definition. However, as a general typological term I am forced to rely on the concept and thus must provide some general outlines toward a useful working definition.⁹

According to Conrad Kottak (1999:286), religion is “Beliefs and rituals concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces.” Although Kottak’s definition is concise it is problematic, failing to address the paramount importance of symbolism in human religious expression. Further, the use of the value-laden term “supernatural” is in itself problematic from anthropological perspectives and should be avoided¹⁰ (see Klass 1995:xiii, 6). Kenneth Morrison writes:

. . . it may at once be uncritical and unfortunate to apply western religious categories to the religious conception and practice of Native Americans. The idea of the supernatural, at least as it has emerged in the scholarship

⁹ Many Lakotas and other Native Americans resist using the term religion in reference to their particular systems of religious belief and practice. Indeed, there is no corresponding word in most Native American languages, nor anything close to the Western meaning of religion. Citing its deep connection to and collusion with Christianity, missionization, and settler colonialism, many native peoples prefer the term spirituality, as it is less constricted and does not refer to an organized, hierarchical religion and system of beliefs rooted in Western epistemologies and philosophies. Hence, many Lakotas prefer spirituality to religion or simply refer to the spiritual domain as “a way of life,” highlighting the processual aspects of belief and practice and implying the interconnectedness of the spiritual realm to all other areas of life in American Indian worldviews, cultures, and lifeways (Posthumus 2008-2014). For a comparative account of the introduction and “invention” of religion in Japan, see Josephson (2012). Generally there appears to be an increasing interest in spirituality and a decreasing adherence to organized religion in modern society (see Albanese 1990; Hanegraaff 1996; Jenkins 2004).

¹⁰ Supernatural, or that which cannot be explained with reference to nature, is a socially constructed and historically situated category (Barnard and Spencer 1996:624). Benson Saler (1977) argues persuasively that the concept of supernatural is indeed a Western category. However, many Lakotas, both past and present, use the term, so it is impossible to avoid its occasional use, in the context of indigenous ideas about nature and representations of the natural.

on the religious traditions of the west, seems to distort the study of Native American religions . . . Given a notion of grace from on high, the supernatural also entails a view that limits the cosmic impact of human action. [Morrison 1992:202]

In defining religion I rely largely on Geertz's (1973:90) influential symbolic approach: "a *religion* is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Now let us unpack Geertz's classic definition.

First and foremost religion from anthropological perspectives is a shared, discursive set of public meanings, encoded in symbols, passed down through enculturation and socialization from one generation to the next. Religion is a product of culture. It is a form of symbolic communication and the human construction of meanings and realities. In Geertz's conception of religion a symbol is simply a vehicle for its meaning.¹¹ Sacred symbols synthesize a society's ethos and worldview. Religious ritual, a field that is distinguished from other social practices, can be read, interpreted, and translated as if it were a text. Ritual is a universal category of symbolic behavior and part of the larger universal category of religion. For Geertz, ritual makes a given society's worldview seem uniquely realistic and is more conservative than social organization and other cultural domains, resisting historical change. Ritual is both dynamic and static,

¹¹ I also rely on Sherry Ortner's discussion of cultural symbols in her article "On Key Symbols" (Ortner 1973). Ortner (1973:1340) summarizes her description of key symbols, writing, "These two modes [root metaphors and key scenarios] reflect what I see as the two basic and of course interrelated functions of culture in general: to provide for its members 'orientations,' i.e., cognitive and affective categories; and 'strategies,' i.e., programs for orderly social action in relation to culturally defined goals."

(re)creative, (re)generative, and transformative behavior characterized by sacrifice. Rituals are moments of symbolic cultural formation that open up virtual spaces characterized by Kapferer (2008, 2013) as phantasmagoric or imaginal. Some have questioned the feasibility of defining the analytical construct of ritual at all, considering the vast diversity of the phenomena labeled as ritual (see Handelman 1990; Kapferer 2008).

In examinations of religion and ritual an important distinction is made between the religious or sacred and the secular or profane (Barnard and Spencer 1996:482–483). As Peter van der Veer explains, “ritual refers to the other-worldly, which is removed from historical events, and . . . its form of discourse (singing, dancing, the use of material objects – activities that have no ordinary referential meaning) also distances it from the everyday. The ritual provides an ideology in which this world is denied, or hidden, while the other higher world (of the ancestors) is shown to be more real” (van der Veer in Barnard and Spencer 1996:482). Kapferer (2008:19), adopting the Deleuzian concept of virtuality, sees ritual as part of actuality or the really real, but a slowing down of the chaotic aspects of actuality that engages with the compositional structuring dynamics of life, opening up a phantasmagoric or imaginal space of vast human potentialities. Comparing ritual time to Nietzsche’s notion of the Eternal Return, or time as totality, Kapferer suggests that “ritual aims to re-situate (re-originate, re-birth) its participants within time so that the past is stopped from becoming its future – indeed the past and its effects being overcome through the machinery of rite in which, effectively, a new past is created through the future rather than vice versa” (Kapferer 2013:6; see also Kapferer 2014).

Religion, like culture itself, can be conceptualized as webs of meanings and symbols that humans spin themselves. As Geertz explains, “I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973:5). Religion is a system of shared meanings and symbols within a given cultural system. Symbols are multivocal conveyers and condensations of cultural meaning (attitudes, ideas, beliefs, etc.) and are the foundations of a religious system. All religious symbols encode and evoke a deep, underlying meaning that explains the moods and motivations of a given culture and allows its members to interpret the world around them (Klass 1995:3).

For Geertz, a symbol is “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning’” (Geertz 1973:91). Symbols imbue objects, actions, words, and other things with significances and meanings that they would not otherwise embody, often pertaining to the religious or spiritual dimension of life. DeMallie (1991:3) writes, “the symbols through which the world is objectified are on the whole unconscious givens.” The symbols that humankind manipulates and employs to characterize, describe, and interpret its reality express and shape that reality. Kapferer (2013:9) discusses the constitutive and generative force of symbols in relation to the senses: “The senses have symbolic form and the potential of their experience and meaning are already within them activating such in the subjects towards whom they are addressed. In other words sense, meaning and experience, are not merely functions of subject intentionalities and interpretations.” Geertz notes that symbols shape reality “by inducing in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions . . . which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality

of his experience” (Geertz 1973:95). Two specific dispositions develop in humans in connection with religion: moods and motivations.

Motivations are persistent tendencies to do certain things; they are neither acts nor feelings. Religion causes individuals to be susceptible not only to various motivations but also to certain moods induced by sacred symbols. Moods are totalistic when present and recur with greater or lesser frequency (Geertz 1973:96–97). As Geertz (1973:97) suggests, “motivations are ‘made meaningful’ with reference to the ends toward which they are conceived to conduce, whereas moods are ‘made meaningful’ with reference to the conditions from which they are conceived to spring. We interpret motives in terms of their consummations, but we interpret moods in terms of their sources.” Geertz continues, writing, “the symbols or symbol systems which induce and define dispositions we set off as religious and those which place those dispositions in a cosmic framework are the same symbols” (Geertz 1973:98). Religious symbols help individuals to better comprehend the world, their relationship to it, human interaction with other-than-human persons,¹² and to define human emotions and the human condition.

¹² Concerning the Ojibwe and relational ontologies or categories of being A. Irving Hallowell (1960:21) writes, “in the metaphysics of being found among these Indians, the action of persons provides the major key to their worldview. While in all cultures ‘persons’ comprise one of the major classes of objects to which the self must become oriented, this category of being is by no means limited to *human* beings. In Western culture, as in others, ‘supernatural’ beings are recognized as ‘persons,’ although belonging, at the same time, to an other than human category.” Hallowell (1960:21) perceptively points out that, for the Ojibwe, as well as for many other American Indian tribes, “the concept of ‘person’ is not . . . synonymous with human being but transcends it.” Hallowell’s other-than-human person category fits both historical and contemporary Lakota conceptions of personhood in relation to the religious realm and spirit beings. I use “other-than-human person” and “spirit (being)” interchangeably throughout. Hallowell’s conception of other-than-human persons also matches James Owen Dorsey’s insights on Siouan peoples and ontologies. In 1894 Dorsey (1894:365) wrote, “from an Indian’s point of view, one must avoid speaking of the supernatural as distinguished from the natural. It is safer to divide phenomena as they appear to the Indian mind into the human and the superhuman, as many, if not most, natural phenomena are mysterious to the Indian. Nay, even man himself may become mysterious by fasting, prayer, and vision.” Dorsey’s findings also call into question the problematic dichotomy of natural/supernatural and its relevance in Native American worldviews.

As I mentioned previously some Lakotas are opposed to the use of the word “religion” to describe their unique spirituality, claiming that it is a white, Western, non-Lakota concept. Instead, many Lakotas prefer the term “spirituality” or simply say that “Lakota religion” is really just the “Lakota way of life” and that before the coming of Euro-Americans religion was not sectioned off as a separate, compartmentalized sphere of life but was inseparable from other aspects of Lakota life (Posthumus 2008-2014). In this sense spirituality implies less organization and hierarchy than religion, simply referring to the processual human search for the sacred in the universe. DeMallie and Robert Lavenda (1977:157) note that “*Wakan tanka*, understood as ‘the power of the universe’, [the totality of all that is sacred and incomprehensible in the Lakota universe] was not isolated from the secular world. The sacred-secular dichotomy seems not to apply. Since every object was believed to have a spirit, every object was believed to be *wakan*.” The power concept *wakǰán* in Lakota culture and worldview, which will be discussed in greater detail below, unified all things and therefore could not be teased out of any aspect or domain of life and compartmentalized.

In the 1970s and early 1980s Elizabeth Grobsmith conducted fieldwork among the *Sičháŋǵu* or Brulé Lakota of the Rosebud Reservation, neighbors and relatives of the Oglalas from Pine Ridge. Her observations on religion are insightful and useful for comparative perspectives. Grobsmith claims that the essential inseparability of “religion” from other aspects of Lakota life was fraying among some Brulé people at Rosebud:

Because the old religious traditions are such an essential part of being Lakota, reservation residents continue to cling to elements of the traditional culture and often rely on native explanations for modern events. In this way, even those who are not deeply religious still subscribe to a

system of religious explanation that clearly stands apart from Judeo-Christian ideology. Traditional religion, then, is far more than style and form of ritual, but rather an outlook or a worldview, a system of belief that shapes all activities and events. For some, native ideology penetrates every sphere of life. But for others, religion is becoming an increasingly segmented part of their lives. [Grobsmith 1981:62]

For many Lakotas “religion” was and is what Marcel Mauss labeled a total social phenomenon, an all-inclusive category that is at once religious, mythological, shamanistic, social, morphological, economic, legal, moral, aesthetic, and more (Mauss 1967:36–38, 76–77). Lakota religion as a total social phenomenon defines who the Lakotas are as a people today, reaffirming and reinforcing both individual and ethnic identity.

I believe, along with many of my Lakota friends and adoptive relatives, that the term “religion” must be used with extreme caution, and that its value as a cross-cultural analytic category is dubious. However, in the present academic setting the concept is largely unavoidable. In a similar vein I reiterate Stanley Tambiah’s notion that religion conceived of as a system of beliefs, separate from magico-ritual beliefs and practices and other aspects of life, is most definitely a tendentious Western concept born largely from the Protestant Reformation, which sought to distinguish religion from magic (Tambiah 1990:1–24). Even Geertz’s classic definition of religion as a system of symbols is not wholly adequate, relying on Western conceptions of religion as a rational system of beliefs, rather than focusing on its processual aspects in lived experience and practice. As Tambiah (1990:6) suggests, “from a general anthropological standpoint the distinctive feature of religion lies not in the domain of belief and its ‘rational accounting’ of the workings of the universe, but in a special awareness of the transcendent, and the acts of

symbolic communication that attempt to realize that awareness and live by its promptings.” Tambiah was likely influenced here by Geertz (1973:98), who insists that what is demarcated as religious must be “symbolic of some transcendent truths.” For Geertz (1973:112), the religious perspective “questions the realities of everyday life . . . in terms of what it takes to be wider, nonhypothetical truths.”

For our purposes it will be advantageous to think more generally in terms of the original meaning of religion’s Latin root *religio*.¹³ In Roman times, according to Tambiah (1990:4), *religio* “carried a double meaning: the existence of a power outside to whom man was obligated; and the feeling of *piety* man had toward that power.” As we will see both conceptions are basic elements of Oglala (and more generally Lakota) religion, ritual, and identity. Conceptualizing religion as a total social phenomenon consisting of (1) powerful and evocative symbols laden with deeply rooted cultural meanings; (2) symbolic communicative systems, both linguistic and aesthetic; (3) animistic, personified and animatistic, impersonal other-than-human power(s); (4) an awareness of and attempts to commune with the transcendent; and (5) feelings of obligation and piety towards that power fits Lakota conceptions of spirituality quite accurately and will serve us better than thinking of religion simply in terms of a system of beliefs segregated from other aspects of life.

Both culture and religion are inevitably linked to language. Morrison (1992:201) highlights the importance of language and the spoken word, defining Native American

¹³ Saler urges scholars to be conscientious and scrupulous in explorations of the hazy derivation of the Latin root *religio*. In attempts to trace the development of the ancient term, Saler (1987:396) explains, “we soon discover that the semantic history of *religio* better serves us as a cautionary parable than as an encouraging paradigm.” Saler concludes that “The fact that *religio* could and sometimes did mean different—and differently valued—things testifies to its semantic suppleness” (Saler 1987:398).

religions as “the ways in which language creates, maintains, and shifts whole worlds of meaning.” Gary Witherspoon (1977), building on the work of Gladys Reichard (1944), also focuses on the creative or generative power of language from American Indian religious perspectives, a theme also discussed by Ella Deloria and Joseph Brown.¹⁴ Many American Indian cultures and languages highlight verbal categories, as opposed to nominal categories, and focus on relational processes in practice. In these cultures words do not connote something objectively constituted. Rather, language engenders reality, bringing substance into being (Morrison 1992:201–202). This is the fundamental conclusion of Reichard’s “Prayer: The Compulsive Word” (1944).

Morrison writes:

When the supernatural is re-examined in light of the view that language is powerfully generative—spoken in story and bodied forth in dance—an alternative theory of religious dimensionality emerges. Here the hard separation between the supernatural, natural, and the cultural vanish. In their place, reality becomes multi-dimensional, and microcosm and macrocosm become not the physical as opposed to the metaphysical, but dimensions on a closely related continuum. It seems that Native American cosmologies may be informed by existential principles which highlight the vitality of human expressiveness. These still largely unexplored existential postulates are the concepts Person, Power, and Gift which seem to affect the symbolic character of Native American social, political, economic, and religious life. [Morrison 1992:202–203]

The idea that human expressiveness shapes and alters the cosmos holds true among the Lakotas (Morrison 1992:201–202).

¹⁴ See Brown (2007) and Deloria (in Bushotter 1937:Story 240). Deloria (in Bushotter 1937:Story 240) writes, “This whole matter of ‘speaking audibly’, i.e., once a remark or promise is released into the ether, it is holy and can not be recalled, and is beyond the control of the speaker and now in the hands of the Wak’á, is pretty general, or was, among the older Indians. Retracting or ‘eating’ one’s words, then, was of no avail; ‘But you have said it!’ is the common retort if somebody says, ‘I didn’t mean it!’” Deloria (n.d.:153) also notes that “In olden times, it was believed that a verbal statement, or audible wish for the misfortune of another, was sure to come true.”

Following Morrison, in Native American religious traditions the cosmos is constituted by persons, stressing the ontological similarity of all conscious entities within each cosmological system, united through shared characteristics such as consciousness, breath, life, and the universal power source that underlies all things; in the Lakota case, *wakǎ́ŋ* (sacred, holy, mysterious; morally ambivalent, impersonal power; tradition). Native Americans recognize that personal existence includes many categories that transcend the category of human being, such as natural phenomena, animals, plants, minerals, and cultural artifacts like masks and ceremonial bundles. A personal cosmos focuses on personal knowledge, will, and voice, and a generative language theory emphasizes the effects of personal intentionality, agency, and potentiality, human and otherwise (Morrison 1992:203–204). As Morrison (1992:203) suggests, “If it can be expressed, it exists. If it exists, someone has expressed it.”

In the existential principle of power, nearly universal across Native North America, the notion of “spirits”¹⁵ as transcendent, ontologically superior entities evaporates through ritual identification, symbolic transformation, and embodiment in ritual and ceremonial activity. Morrison writes:

If person is a principle of ontological similarity, power is the principle of differentiation. Persons are powerful in various degrees, but significantly some human beings, particularly those who have ritual knowledge, exercise power equal to, if not superior than, other-than-human persons. For all persons, power is at once knowledge and the ability to apply knowledge to novel situations. Since power itself is ethically neutral, it

¹⁵ In this study I use the terms “other-than-human persons,” following Hallowell (1960), “(the) spirits,” and “spirit beings” interchangeably. Oglalas consistently use the terms spirit(s) and grandfather(s) (*thuŋkášila*) interchangeably in reference to the *wakǎ́ŋ* entities peopling the universe, which are capable of (generating) transformations. The spirits are efficacious in curing sickness, particularly symbolic illness and the social maladies brought to the Lakotas through interaction with Euro-Americans (Powers 1982b:200–201). This usage is consistent with contemporary Oglala usage, reflecting culturally specific ontological understandings.

must always be grounded in intentional activity. Power is therefore dangerous because it can be used to achieve either good or ill. In effect, power is the existential postulate which accounts for those personal decisions which make for both human and cosmic order and disorder. [Morrison 1992:203]

Reciprocity and the principle of the gift reveals the moral processes through which the dangerous neutrality of power (*wakǰáŋ*) can be moderated. Power is always the gift of some compassionate being, usually of the other-than-human category. As Morrison (1992:203) suggests, “the power of both the individual religious specialist and of those collective ceremonial societies extend co-operation micro- and macrocosmically. And, in acting irresponsibly, witches destroy such co-operative social order.” Conceptualizing American Indian religions as systems of competing and cooperating others and as systematic theories of personal and interpersonal agency that apply to humans and other-than-human persons alike suggests that the concept of the supernatural is only one of possibly many dimensional theories (Morrison 1992:203–204).

“If all persons share the same ontological essence, and power to a relative degree,” writes Morrison (1992:204), “then gift dictates that reciprocity is the performed heart of cosmological and social order.” In Native American religious traditions the power of human action, language, and agency produces results. Recognizing this, Morrison (1992:204) states, can lead to “an enlivened humanistic appreciation of religion, a humanism in which people, rather than religious systems, express significance.”

The interconnectedness of the domain of what has been traditionally labeled religion with all other aspects of life in American Indian religious traditions brings to mind the common Lakota ritual phrase and benediction *mitákuye oyás 'iŋ* (all my

relatives, we are all relatives). Kinship is foundational to Lakota culture and society, and it is productive to conceptualize Lakota religion as a system of relations between humans and those entities whom Hallowell (1960) refers to as “other-than-human persons.” Human beings are empowered through their interactions with other-than-human persons in the spiritual realm (Morrison 1992:201). Frequently these other-than-human persons are the symbols that provide the foundation for religious belief and ritual practice. Human kinship among the Lakotas was modeled on the kinship system of the spirits or *Wakǵáŋ Tháŋka*, the Great Mystery, sixteen powerful other-than-human persons who created the earth and determined its workings (Walker 1991:70–81). Lakota religion is an extension and hybrid of the kinship systems of the spirits and of human beings, the two systems being connected in the self, the sacred center of the universe.

For lack of better general terms I begrudgingly use “religion” and “spirituality” interchangeably and hope that my definitions, although not wholly adequate, will be acceptable as analytic categories and means of classification, categorization, comparison, and discussion. One thing is clear: it is very difficult in the Lakota case to draw concrete boundaries between cultural domains involving religion, such as kinship, belief, ritual, identity, etc. Religion is an all-encompassing total social phenomenon. In most cases many of the concepts that could be labeled religious interact continually, are discursive, and not mutually exclusive.

Lee Irwin elaborates on some relevant themes concerning American Indian communal and religious life in his edited volume *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader* (2000). For Irwin, spirituality is more than simply practicing a particular form of religion:

My perception of the interactive spheres of Native communal life is that they have a relatedness through personal relationships that finds common expression in mutual, everyday concerns. Ceremonial activity, prayer, or simply carrying out daily activities like driving a friend to work or struggling for political rights may engage individuals in aspects of “religious” concern. It is that connectedness to *core values and deep beliefs* that I mean by “spirituality”—a pervasive quality of life that develops out of an authentic participation in values and real-life practices meant to connect members of a community with the deepest foundations of personal affirmation and identity. In this sense, spirituality is inseparable from any sphere of activity as long as it really connects with deeply held affirmative values and sources of authentic commitment, empowerment, and genuineness of shared concern. [Irwin 2000:3]

In addition to Geertz’s classic definition of religion and Tambiah’s penetrating insights on the topic Irwin’s ideas concerning American Indian spirituality are also relevant to a discussion of Lakota religion.

In particular, Irwin’s definition draws to mind an aspect of Oglala religion and the “Indian Way” noted by William Powers. Powers writes that the *Lakhól wičhóh’an* (Lakota traditions, Lakota or Indian way of life) “connotes a holistic concept that vividly conjures up the religious and secular mannerisms of the old-time Indian” (Powers 1982a:97). *Lakhól wičhóh’an* as a concept is crucial to understanding Lakota religion, ritual, and identity and will be discussed in greater detail below. Powers explains:

If an Oglala believes in the Indian Way, he becomes aware that he has an obligation that is an integral part of sustaining Indian culture. He will be criticized or acknowledged by members of his society according to his willingness and ability to “help out.” It must be stressed that the Oglala concept of “helping out,” expressed in the verb *okiya* ‘to help’ or the noun *wookiye* ‘help’, is critical to understanding the full meaning of the Indian Way. [Powers 1982a:98]

In the Lakota language the symbol of help or helping is used to express a great number of sacred and secular activities, such as generosity, hospitality, participation, attendance, and assistance. Helping out both actively and passively supports the activities that comprise the *Lakǎól wičhóǎ'ay* and its maintenance and perpetuation. Many Oglalas measure the success of communal and ritual undertakings by the number of people in attendance, so attendance is in itself a form of helping out (Powers 1982a:97–98).

Another Lakota concept is relevant to our discussion here, namely *k'ú ókiya* (to help out by giving), which is closely connected to the Giveaway, a foundational ritual tied to fundamental Lakota cultural values such as generosity and hospitality. Helping out encompasses contributing in terms of money, food, or attendance. I am reminded of the Oglala saying that if a Lakota has enough money to necessitate a bank account he must not have any relatives to help out. The concept of help is often hierarchical in Lakota society in that an individual is first obligated to help out his or her *thítakuye* ([immediate] relatives), then his *thiyóšpaye* (band, extended family), then his community and *oyáte* (people) more generally. Helping out as a symbol and lived reality among Oglalas is closely tied to the concept of dependence. Oglalas depend on each other in many ways, and an alert observer will hear the terms “depend” and “help” used frequently among Lakotas. Helping out and dependence are powerful motivating factors in Oglala life and are foundational to the *Lakǎól wičhóǎ'ay*, frequently overlapping with religion, ritual, and tradition (Powers 1982a:98–100). According to Powers, “It is precisely this dichotomy between the Indian values of cooperation and the non-Indian’s concept of competition that creates anxiety in the traditional Oglala community” (Powers 1982a:100).

In his book *Ordered Universes: Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion* (1995) Morton Klass urges us to adopt an operational definition of religion, concerned mainly with effectiveness in research and analysis and exhibiting a minimum of prior assumptions. He calls for anthropologists to view religion from the perspective of what it actually *is* and *does* in human life (Klass 1995:15–16, 33). Klass writes:

. . . religion encompasses human attempts to explain, interpret, predict, and control phenomena and events and provides an avenue for the manifestations of chance; . . . religion encompasses human emotional responses to the awesomeness of the universe and to the impact of illness, the death of loved ones, and one's own mortality; . . . religion encompasses mechanisms for the release of psychological stress and internal conflict, utilizing inherent tendencies to ritual behavior; . . . religion serves both to symbolize and to express the sense of unity in a society and its sense of separation or distinction from other human groups. . . . religions serve to satisfy our need for explanation; they provide channels for our emotional responses along with our fears and projections; they provide the sense of unity inherent in a cultural system. In short, in the ongoing drama that is any culture, the institution of religion provides meaning and purpose and satisfaction and order to an otherwise chaotic universe. [Klass 1995:15–16]

Klass also defines religion, writing:

. . . a religion constitutes the total set of beliefs, practices, associated symbols, and interactions (among and between humans and between humans and other entities those humans recognize as being capable of such interaction) that are concerned with the following: Explanation, understanding, coherence; relief from psychological stress; release and channeling of emotions; social cohesiveness; sense of effectiveness and ability to cope with death, illness, and misfortune in general; maintenance of a sense of order by continual counteraction of powerlessness, randomness, meaninglessness, chaos. . . . religion, as an institution, is manifested in specific systems of values, beliefs, and practices. . . . Religion in a given society will be that instituted process of interaction among the members of that society—and between them and the universe at large as they conceive it to be constituted—which provides them with

meaning, coherence, direction, unity, easement, and whatever degree of control over events they perceive as possible. [Klass 1995:38]

Klass (1995:79) echoes Durkheim, insisting that religion is the source and expression of community. However, he warns that there is always dissension, conflict, and opposition within every human community, and therefore, conflict is as much a part of religion as community. He writes (Klass 1995:84), “in many societies, religion implies and even promotes as much conflict (or at least separation) as it does community.” Klass’s sentiments in some ways echo those of Anthony Wallace, who maintains that culture (and religion in our case) organizes diversity rather than replicates uniformity (Wallace 1952; 2003:vii; 2009). Religion upholds and is the social structure of a given group of people. It reflects both community and conflict (Klass 1995:84–87).

The insights of Geertz, Tambiah, DeMallie, Morrison, Saler, Irwin, and Klass, as well as the classical theorists, such as Tylor, Frazer, Marx, Freud, Durkheim, Weber, and Evans-Pritchard, have all contributed to the intellectual discourse on the concept of religion within anthropology. All of them and more have influenced the understandings presented herein and my usage of the category as a cross-cultural analytic tool. Culture provides the framework for religion, ethos, and worldview. Ritual and public cultural performances provide the mechanism through which cultural meanings and values are upheld, (re)affirmed, reinforced, (re)created, and (re)generated and social unity is renewed and perpetuated.¹⁶ Through ritual, religion, ethos, and worldview are publically demonstrated, generated, and transmitted from one generation to the next.

¹⁶ The two volumes on ritual by Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg (2006, 2007) are exceptional recent examinations of historical and contemporary ritual theory. In particular, my understanding of ritual has been heavily influenced by Victor Turner (1957, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1975) and Kapferer (1997, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2013).

Rituals are universal to the human experience. They are often prescribed by tradition or modeled on perceptions of the past. Catherine Bell (1997:138–169) characterizes rituals by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacred symbolism, and performance. Rituals are characterized by formalism in that they utilize a limited and rigidly organized set of expressions or a restricted code. Ritual participants are obliged to adopt a formal oratorical style in which the style itself is often more significant than the content, comparable to Jeffrey Shandler’s notion of postvernacular language, which will be compared to Lakota ritual language use below (Bell 1997:139–140; Shandler 2006).

Rituals are characterized by traditionalism in that rituals appeal to tradition and ideally recreate and repeat historical precedents accurately. However, it is often the appeal to history that is more significant than the accurate historical transmission. Rituals are characterized by invariance in that they are carefully choreographed, striving for timeless repetition, although Lakota ritual tends to be more characterized by diversity and innovation, dynamics and statics. Rituals also tend to be governed by rules, imposing norms on the chaos of the universe, human life, and behavior (Bell 1997:145–155).

Sacred symbolism is an important aspect of ritual. Activities appealing to other-than-human persons through the medium of sacred symbols express a belief in the existence of an other-worldly domain and the obligation of a human response to those transcendent powers. For Morrison (1992:202), “ritual performance is at once a duty and a responsibility.” Particular objects become sacred symbols through a process of consecration in which the objects are set apart from the common, secular world, thus creating the sacred or other-worldly realm. Finally, rituals are performed, creating a

theatrical¹⁷ atmosphere or frame around ritual activities and performances that helps participants order the disorder of life and impose a coherent system of categories of meaning onto it (Bell 1997:156–157; see also Hultkrantz 1992; Turner 1974, 1979).

“According to most theories,” explains Jon Mitchell (in Barnard and Spencer 1996:490), “ritual either involves different forms of action from everyday life, or at least different purposes. . . . The difference relates to the meaning attached to the ritual act, which is suggested by the use of symbols.” Ritual action has an important communicative role, is often tied to politics and social structure, and is assumed to have a purpose, a function, and a meaning. Ritual is often connected to notions of tradition and the transcendent, sacred, or other-worldly domain, discursive social constructions forged in the present. The actors and participants in ritual performances are seen as conscious agents and creative innovators in the diachronic reproduction of ritual practice and tradition. In this way some scholars argue that ritual actually becomes part of the political process (Barnard and Spencer 1996:490–492).

The function of ritual is usually explained as either supporting social structure by directly representing it (representation) or by legitimizing social and political authority and power by concealing it (mystification). Those focusing on the integrative functions of ritual take their lead from Durkheim, who argued that the apparent function of ritual is to strengthen the bonds between the believer and “god.” For Durkheim, god is no more than a figurative expression of society itself, so ritual simultaneously serves to attach the individual to society. Ritual strengthens and reaffirms bonds between a higher transcendent power, the society, and the individual. It is a direct representation of society

¹⁷ Kapferer believes we should transcend performative or theatrical approaches to ritual, instead supporting a cinematic approach to ritual influenced by Deleuze (see Kapferer 2013).

to itself and, as such, reveals important things about society. Victor Turner (1969), following Arnold van Gennep (1960), conceived of ritual as divided into three processual phases: separation, liminality, and reintegration. Prolonged periods of liminality lead to a transcendent feeling of social togetherness he labeled *communitas*, characterized by anti-structure, during which ritual participants submit to the authority of the community. Where Durkheim saw ritual as representing social structure, Turner sees it as a process that transcends it (Barnard and Spencer 1996:490–491; see also Olaveson 2001).

Those focusing on ritual as mystification are influenced by Karl Marx. Maurice Bloch (1989, 1992), for instance, sees ritual as a form of ideology that provides an alternative to everyday life. Ritual is highly formalized and so resists change and restricts debate or contestation. Bloch argues that rituals demonstrate the power of the transcendent over the secular. “For Bloch,” writes Mitchell (in Barnard and Spencer 1996:492), “ritual is a dramatic process through which the vitality of everyday life is conquered by the transcendence of death and the eternal.” Bloch adheres to the same tripartite organization of ritual as Turner and van Gennep, but he sees the three phases as inseparable, not privileging the liminal phase. For Bloch, all three phases are part of an overarching process involving humans entering the transcendental and returning to and conquering the secular (Barnard and Spencer 1996:490–493).

In anthropology there has been a recent turn toward practice-oriented approaches to ritual, which focus on the potential differences between interpretations of ritual by different participants in particular situations. The practice approach to ritual hinges on the idea that symbols are multivocal and may be interpreted and read in a variety of ways by different people. Participants define their ritual experiences through the varied ways in

which they interpret symbols. This approach in anthropology has been productively applied to studies of carnival, which see the chaos of the carnival atmosphere and ritual as moments of potential dissent with real political consequences. The carnival is a space where differences between social and ethnic groups are expressed and constructed.

Clearly this approach is heavily influenced by Turner's notion of liminality, which enables the development of *communitas*, characterized by anti-structure and often interpreted as subversive. Mitchell writes:

This approach sees ritual and social structure as part of the same process, mutually informing each other. Ritual does not merely represent social structure, nor conceal it, but acts upon it, as social structure acts upon ritual. Put this way, rituals can be seen as the significant sites of political contest between different social groups. Because they involve symbols, rituals are particularly evocative, but they are also particularly malleable. They can therefore lead to change, as much as they evoke tradition and continuity. [Mitchell in Barnard and Spencer 1996:493].

Ritual is a distinct sphere of human life and behavior within the larger domain of religion or spirituality, which is itself a sphere within the broader domain of culture.

Multivocal sacred symbols, dramatized and embodied in ritual performances, synthesize a given culture's ethos and worldview, publically (re)affirming, reinforcing, and (re)generating individual and ethnic identity and core cultural meanings and values of a group. Through religion, ritual, and sacred symbols a given society is better able to interpret and order its universe. Religion and ritual also inform conceptions and formations of identity and ethnicity, frequently tied to notions of cultural performance. Next we will explore theories of identity, ethnicity, and performance.

3. PERFORMING IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY

Anthropological uses of identity are ambiguous. There are many senses, one of which refers to properties of uniqueness and individuality that distinguish an individual from all others. This sense is referred to as self-identity. Another sense encompasses properties of sameness that unite individuals into groups based on common characteristics and qualities. Based on shared features people may associate themselves or be associated by others with specific groups or categories. This sense is referred to as collective or ethnic identity. Identity may also be applied to groups, so that families, communities, classes, and nations are said to have distinctive identities. The anthropological concern with selfhood exemplified by the works of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and other culture and personality theorists predates the more recent adoption of the term identity. Identity, as it is used today, was brought into general use by the psychoanalytic theorist Erik Erikson (Barnard and Spencer 1996:292; Erikson 1959).

In discussing identity I rely largely on Raymond Fogelson's insightful article with a psychological-anthropological twist, "Perspectives on Native American Identity" (1998). For Fogelson (1998:40), perspectives, or "ways of viewing or lines of vision," can usually be gained by stepping "back in space and time." His perspectives on American Indian identity are both "conceptual and historical." Discussing general considerations of identity Fogelson writes:

One set of meanings refers to an image or set of images of oneself or one's group. The basic notions of identity in these usages involve communication of a sense of oneself or one's group intrapsychically to oneself or projected outwardly to others. Identity in this regard may contain several components. . . . an ideal identity, . . . a feared identity, . . . a "real" identity, . . . and a claimed identity. [Fogelson 1998:41]

Fogelson emphasizes that “identity struggles are more social than individual psychological phenomena. Identities are negotiated through interaction with another person or group . . . identities can change through social interaction” (Fogelson 1998:41–42). Fogelson cites Erikson’s pioneering work:

For Erikson, identity was a processual or historical concept representing the cumulative effects of a series of life cyclical nuclear conflicts. Although the individual changed throughout the life course, identity was held together by threads of continuity. . . . the basic thrust of Erikson’s scheme . . . is relevant to contemporary legal considerations of Native American identity that stress historical continuity. . . . The two conceptions of identity—the communication of self-images and the epigenetic or historical unfolding of identity—are not mutually exclusive. [Fogelson 1998:42–43]

According to Fogelson (1998:40), there are “three primary attributes of Native American identity . . . : blood and descent, relations to land, and sense of community.” For American Indians historically, he (Fogelson 1998:44–45) writes, “the idea of blood quantum as a marker of identity was foreign. For Native Americans identity was primarily associated with kinship. . . . Identity encompassed inner qualities that were made manifest through social action and cultural belief.” Only later did blood quantum become an important attribute of American Indian identity or a means to ascertain degrees of “Indianness,” arising largely for legal purposes (Fogelson 1998:44–47).

Although Europeans and American Indians often had divergent views concerning land, Fogelson explains, “Native Americans certainly had notions of land tenure, land and group boundaries, and right of usage. Moreover, many Native Americans maintained an attachment to land in which their ancestors were buried” (Fogelson 1998:48).

Fogelson (1998:48) concludes that “Native American identity was connected to the land

as a site of origination in narratives and ethnogenesis, as a home area where life was lived, and as the final resting place of mortal remains.” Similar to the case of blood quantum, only later in history did “collective possession of land [become] an important attribute of tribal identity, in terms of both external recognition and sense of self” (Fogelson 1998:50).

Finally, a sense of community is a third defining attribute of American Indian identity. As Fogelson suggests:

To a large extent one is identified as a Native American because one lives in or has close connections to an Indian community. . . . The tribe becomes the site of one’s identity and distinctiveness not only vis-à-vis whites but also with respect to other Native American tribes. Members are felt to be united not only by blood, a common land base, and law, but also by a sense of belonging to a moral community with a shared history and destiny. [Fogelson 1998:52]

Throughout this text references to Lakota identity should be understood in terms of Fogelson’s three defining attributes (blood and descent, relations to land, and sense of community). However, there are two additional attributes of American Indian identity that are crucial to my research. They are “language usage” and “cultural participation and performances,” which Fogelson lists in his secondary or “other attributes of identity” category (Fogelson 1998:40–41). I would also subdivide his “cultural participation and performances” category further in order to specify participation in religious, ceremonial, or ritual performances as an important attribute of Lakota identity that is critical to our purposes here.

Folklore has also contributed to the scholarly discourse on identity. From Richard Bauman we learn that tradition, which we will define below, helps to give a group of

people a collective, shared identity (Bauman 1971:31–32). Bauman writes, “particular people and generations come and go, but the group identity persists and the tradition lives on” (Bauman 1971:33). The king is dead; long live the king. Identity, like so many other anthropological concepts, is discursive by nature, and can be conceived of as continually negotiated through discourse and practice and embroiled in other social and cultural spheres, such as religion, kinship, politics, and economics. This aspect of identity is often referred to as identity politics (see Clifford 2000).

For Elliott Oring, identity may be regarded as “a contingent construction . . . born in interaction and achieved through performance . . . Identity may be fragmented, conflicted, or compartmentalized, . . . and may not cohere according to any single, unifying principle. Margins and boundaries, rather than the centers of social and cultural groupings, may be highlighted as the key sites of identity formation and expression” (Oring 1994a:229). Oring distinguishes among three interrelated concepts that make up identity: individual identity, personal identity, and collective identity. He explains:

By *individual identity*, I refer to that sense of space-time connection with states, thoughts, and actions from the past . . . *Personal identity*, while it depends upon a sense of individual continuity and contributes to it, refers to particular mental dispositions and contents, and not merely to the sense of continuity itself. It is composed from memories, identifications, and repudiations of individuals, ideas, and experiences which come to constitute a perhaps shifting, but nevertheless discernible, configuration. What underlies these configurations can be said to constitute and distinguish a person. . . . Personal identity is shaped from experiences that are unique to the individual as well as from those common to a collection of individuals. . . . *Collective identity* refers to those aspects of personal identity that are derived from experiences and expressions common to a group. It is recognition of this collective aspect of personal identity that produces the deep sense of identification with others—the consciousness of kind . . . The term *collective identity* has meaning only as it refers to an

intersection of personal identities and has no existence apart from the psyches of particular individuals. [Oring 1994:212]

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1994:235) highlights the important role of difference in identity formulation and politics, stating that difference and identity are linked and mutually constitutive.¹⁸ Maintaining difference and boundaries are significant aspects of ethnicity as well. Henry Glassie emphasizes the role of stress in identity formation, writing, “identity is a latent dimension of creative life that is made manifest by stress, in particular during the struggles of minorities within nations or the struggles of nations against imperialist invasion, whether military or economic” (Glassie 1994:240). Performance, difference, stress, and creativity are all aspects of identity, playing important roles in identity formation and politics. It should be clear that many of the definitions discussed herein interact and overlap with one another.

Performance is a central topic in anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and folklore. Throughout this text I rely on a number of scholars’ definitions and conceptions of the term performance, including Milton Singer, Glassie, Dell Hymes, Bauman, Turner, and J. L. Austin. According to Barnard and Spencer (1996:617), the term performative indicates “any utterance which is in some way equivalent to an action: e.g. ‘I name this ship . . .’, ‘I promise you . . .’.” Performance theory was born from speech-act theory, developed by Austin (1962). Austin distinguishes between statements that *assert* things and performative utterances, statements that have no truth-value and actually *do* things or accomplish something. Performative utterances are equated with performing certain kinds of actions, which Austin labels speech acts and later illocutionary acts. An illocutionary

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze (1994) also gives ontological status to difference in his critique of the concept of identity.

act, like a performative act, is a speech act in which the utterance is equivalent to an action, such as ‘I *order* you to go’ or ‘I apologize’ (Barnard and Spencer 1996:609; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hymes 1971).

As Turner (1967, 1969) and others (see Hultkrantz 1992) have pointed out, performance as a process of individual and collective transformation is intimately linked to identity, ethnicity, and, significantly, religion and ritual. Singer (1972:71–74) found “cultural performances” to be a useful unit of observation, broadening the idea of performance to include phenomena usually categorized under the headings of religion and ritual, such as prayers, rites, feasts, festivals, and other acts, effectively blurring the distinction between religion and ritual, on the one hand, and theatrical performance and aesthetics, on the other (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hymes 1971).

Performance is both phenomenal and communicative and may be understood as “the instants during which people create their own lives” (Glassie 1995:401–402). Glassie (1995:402) notes that “performance occurs in time, and within it acts of transmission and communication coincide.” Performance itself, like speech acts, can be emergent and generative, constructing social structure through the act of performance (Bauman 1975; Bauman and Briggs 1990:197). Discussing the ethnography of performance by linguistic anthropologists and folklorists, Bauman writes:

Central to these investigations is a focus on the situated nature of performance as a mode of communicative practice and recognition of the emergent quality of performance. In linguistic anthropology especially, the ethnography of performance has incorporated the close analysis of formal, functional, and intertextual relationships as a vantage point on the calibration in performance of conventional, ‘traditional’ orienting frameworks for the production and interpretation of discourse on the one hand, and the exigent and emergent ‘creative’ qualities of situated

performance on the other. Both qualities are always present, and the task becomes one of determining the relative weight and the dynamics of interplay of the two in particular social and historical circumstances. [Bauman 2001:15822]

Performance is a central aspect of identity and ethnicity and how they are publically embodied and psychosocially constituted.

The term ethnicity is a relatively new one in anthropological theory, only gaining popularity since the 1970s. Fredrik Barth's classic *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (1998), originally published in 1969, sparked interest in anthropological studies of ethnicity and continues to be widely cited today.

Sergey Sokolovskii and Valery Tishkov note that there are three competing approaches to the understanding of ethnicity in contemporary anthropology, which they categorize as primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist:

Roughly speaking, primordialist theories assert that ethnic identification is based on deep, 'primordial' attachments to a group or culture; instrumentalist approaches treat ethnicity as a political instrument exploited by leaders and others in pragmatic pursuit of their own interests; and constructivist approaches emphasize the contingency and fluidity of ethnic identity, treating it as something which is made in specific social and historical contexts, rather than (as in primordialist arguments) treating it as a 'given'. [Sokolovskii and Tishkov in Barnard and Spencer 1996:190]

While all three approaches are insightful and useful, I tend to adhere to the constructivist and instrumentalist approaches, finding them to be the most productive for our present purposes.

Both the instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity shed light on the topic of indigeneity, which we will examine in the next section. Sokolovskii and Tishkov write:

Instrumentalism, with its intellectual roots in sociological functionalism, treated claims to ethnicity as a product of political myths, created and manipulated by cultural elites in their pursuit of advantages and power. The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage. They become symbols and referents for the identification of members of a group, which are called up in order to ease the creation of a political identity. Thus, ethnicity is created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities . . . Sometimes this functionalism acquired a psychological twist, then ethnicity was explained as an effective means of recovering lost ethnic pride . . ., defeating alienation and alleviating emotional stress as a therapy for suffered trauma. The essential feature of these approaches is their common base in utilitarian values. [Sokolovskii and Tishkov in Barnard and Spencer 1996:191]

I rely largely on Barth's constructivist approach and his insights concerning the importance of boundary maintenance mechanisms in the social construction of ethnicity and difference. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1998) Barth treats ethnicity as a continuing ascription that classifies individuals in terms of their most general and inclusive identities. He examines the processes involved in the reproduction of ethnic groups, focusing on the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses. Barth emphasizes three main points. First, that ethnicity is a matter of the social organization of cultural difference. Second, that ethnic identity is a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction. And third, that the cultural features of greatest import are boundary connected, the cultural materials that actors themselves

deploy in their daily lives and behaviors to discursively construct their own identities (Barnard and Spencer 1996:192; Barth 1998:6–13).

In Barth's words:

The main theoretical departure consists of several interconnected parts. First, we give primary emphasis to the fact that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people. We attempt to relate other characteristics of ethnic groups to this primary feature. Second, the essays all apply a generative viewpoint to the analysis: rather than working through a typology of forms of ethnic groups and relations, we attempt to explore the different processes that seem to be involved in generating and maintaining ethnic groups. Third, to observe these processes we shift the focus of investigation from internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance. [Barth 1998:10]

From this perspective ethnicity is a form of social organization maintained by intergroup boundary maintaining mechanisms based not on cultural inventories or observable common cultural characteristics, but rather on the manipulation of identities in interaction and their situational nature. For Barth, social organization is emergent and contested. Like culture, it is characterized by variation and flux. Ethnic groups are culture-bearing units whose critical feature is membership (Barnard and Spencer 1996:192; Barth 1998:6–13).

Barth's perspectives on ethnicity has allowed anthropologists to focus on the situational and contextual character of ethnicity, highlighting its political dimensions. Clifford's insightful chapter "Identity in Mashpee" from his book *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (1988) has also had a formative influence on my theorizing of the concepts of ethnicity and identity. With the

advent of postmodernism in anthropology attention shifted to the negotiation of multiple subjects over group boundaries, identity, time, and space and a focus on the dialectics of objectivities and subjectivities in processual constructions of ethnic identity formation and maintenance (Barnard and Spencer 1996:192).

Sokolovskii and Tishkov believe that integrating the three approaches to ethnicity would be a fruitful direction for future anthropological studies of ethnicity:

The definition of an ethnic community as a group of people whose members share a common name and elements of culture, possess a myth of common origin and common historical memory, who associate themselves with a particular territory and possess a feeling of solidarity, opens further avenues for integration of anthropological, political and psychological knowledge in understanding of ethnic phenomena.
[Sokolovskii and Tishkov in Barnard and Spencer 1996:192]

At any rate, there is a clear connection between the integration of the instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity and the increasingly significant and visible concept of indigeneity, to which we now turn our attention.

4. INDIGENEITY AND DECOLONIZATION

The complex and contested concept of indigeneity, emerging from postcolonial theory, has grown in significance since the postmodern turn in anthropology in the 1980s.

Indigeneity is intimately connected to both identity politics and ethnicity, wrapped up in the politics of authenticity and representation. Its parent term and semantic relative, indigenous, is itself a hotly debated, multivocal, and discursive concept. As Clifford suggests, indigenous should be seen “not as a locus of experience, but as a shifting subjective position not reducible to any essence” (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus 1986:108). In a special issue of *American Anthropologist* dedicated to the topic, Dorothy Hodgson (2002) summarizes the concept of indigeneity under four rubrics: representation, recognition, resources, and rights. The debate over the term indigenous heated up especially after the publication of Adam Kuper’s article “The Return of the Native” (2003), in which Kuper argues against using the word (Barnard 2010).¹⁹

In the past the idea of indigenous peoples referred to relatively isolated, small-scale groups, often hunter-gatherers and minority populations, who were politically marginalized and wished to maintain a distinctive identity in opposition to a surrounding dominant or majority population. There is a palpable tension between notions of modernity and tradition in discourse on indigeneity. Groups that have adapted to modernity and acquired power and wealth, along with the issue of the social construction of the concept of race, problematize and complicate the stereotypical image of indigenous peoples (Barnard 2010; Guenther et al. 2006:24–25). As Alan Barnard explains (2010), “the essence of indigenesness is difficult, at best, to identify.”

¹⁹ For reactions to Kuper’s article, see Asch et al. (2004, 2006).

Kuper (2003) questions both the theoretical soundness and utility of the concept, arguing that classifying some people as indigenous and others as non-indigenous is problematic. Kuper challenges the notion of indigenesness as being “essentialist”²⁰ and relying “on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision” (Kuper 2003:395). According to Kuper, indigenous is simply a new word for primitive²¹ (Barnard 2010). Barnard (2006, 2010) argues that definitions of indigeneity are not theoretically sound for modern anthropologists but that the concept is largely unavoidable. The status of being indigenous is often preferred by those whom anthropologists work with and for and sympathize with politically, a status that enables such peoples to achieve their political goals.

A crucial element of conceptions of indigeneity is land. There is a definite spatial or site specificity, a connection to land and place, in debates over indigeneity. As Patrick Wolfe explains, indigeneity “refers to a field of discourse. Indigenous peoples’ self-ascription has an address: their colonisers, who respond to it. Thus it is not a matter of making choices in a competition between rival contents or ontologies, or even between positive and negative evaluations . . . Rather, the field of indigeneity encompasses the competition itself, which is inseparable from the politics of territorial expropriation” (Guenther et al. 2006:26). Indigeneity is a political tool utilized in native claims to prior ownership of land and in processes of refuting colonial claims generally (Kidwell and Velie 2005:21–39).

²⁰ Kay Warren and Jean Jackson speak of indigenous movements largely in terms of “strategic essentialism” (Jackson and Warren 2005). See also Guenther et al. (2006:24–25).

²¹ For more on Kuper’s critique of indigeneity and the social construction of the primitive, see Kuper (1988, 2005).

Lakota indigeneity is interesting in terms of land. For nineteenth-century Lakotas “Lakota land” or “Lakota country” was wherever the buffalo roamed. When asked by treaty commissioners in 1865 if the Lakotas would consent to live on the Missouri River, the Minneconjou chief One Horn answered, “When the buffalo come close to the river, we come close to it. When the buffaloes go off, we go off after them” (Proceedings of a Board of Commissioners to Negotiate a Treaty or Treaties with the Hostile Indians of the Upper Missouri 1865:34). As the buffalo tended to congregate in the Black Hills, especially during the winter months, the Lakotas also congregated there, and the Black Hills came to be the center of Lakota country (Standing Bear 2006a:17–18, 30; Standing Bear 2006b:43–44). As Black Elk’s close friend Standing Bear of Manderson, South Dakota, explained (DeMallie 1984:163–164), “I heard Sitting Bull say that the Black Hills was just like a food pack and therefore the Indians should stick to it. At that time I just wondered about what he had said and I knew what he meant after thinking it over because I knew that the Black Hills were full of fish, animals, and lots of water, and I just felt that we Indians should stick to it.” The Lakotas are still fighting for their right to the Black Hills today, which was guaranteed to them through the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. This fight for the sacred Black Hills is a significant aspect of contemporary Lakota indigeneity.

Tania Li (2007:1; 2010) points out that indigeneity, like identity and ethnicity, is relational, acquiring its meaning not through essential properties of its own, but through interaction and relation to what it is not. Indigeneity is a relational, legal concept, useful for political persuasion, and is contingent historically and situationally (Guenther et al. 2006:17). Sidsel Saugestad (2001:43) suggests a precise, polythetic, and relational

definition of indigeneity, citing four main criteria: first-come, non-dominance, cultural difference, and self-ascription. Saugestad, like Li, emphasizes the relational or dialectical and processual aspects of indigeneity through a productive analogy with ethnicity, particularly the constructivist approach exemplified in the work of Barth (1998). From Saugestad's perspective, the aspects that most define indigenesness are relations of dominance of one majority group over a minority population, relations of different groups to the state, and the inherent political marginalization that occurs through those relations (Barnard 2010). Dilip Gaonkar (2001) represents indigeneity and indigenous activism in terms of creative adaptations to alternative modernities.

Indigeneity is about difference and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Increasingly, especially since the 1960s, the "Other" has embraced his otherness and now seeks to reinforce and maintain it in terms of ethnic boundary maintenance. Trond Thuen writes, "indigenous peoples' strivings aim at emphasising their distinctiveness vis-à-vis mainstream society, and stress the right to some level of self-government and to a specific territory that represents the people's materialised linking of past, present and future" (Guenther et al. 2006:25). Identity and culture, and their representation, are priority issues among many indigenous groups (Guenther et al. 2006:18). Mathias Guenther notes:

'Indigenous' is a term applied to people – and by the people to themselves – who are engaged in an often desperate struggle for political rights, for land, for a place and space within a modern nation's economy and society. Identity and self-representation are vital elements of the political platform of such peoples. Politics . . . is all about identity, among various ethnic groups, with claims – after generations of oppression . . . – to rights, land and competing claims to 'first people' status and standing. [Guenther et al. 2006:17]

For many the idea of oppositional identity is intrinsic to the concept of indigeneity. “Although often proclaiming a localism free of any larger ideology,” writes Dorothy Noyes (2009:242), “in practice traditionalism takes a political tinge in opposition to the perceived prevailing ethos.” In this way, according to Noyes (2009:242), oppositional identity and tradition act as regulatory mechanisms with “liberating valence in many decolonizing, indigenous, and post-Soviet societies subjected to disruptive modernizing regimes and the stigma of backwardness.” Many Oglalas have clearly developed an oppositional identity opposed to white, Western, modern America and the off-reservation world. As DeMallie explains, “For the Lakotas of Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock reservations—to name the largest and most populous—to be Lakota, “Sioux,” or more generally to be ikčewičaša, “common men,” that is, Indians (not whites), is an unwavering source of pride and strength” (DeMallie 1991:4). “During historic times,” DeMallie (1991:9) continues, “there can be little doubt that the ikčewičaša came increasingly to be defined in opposition to the wašičun [whites]; that which was Indian was non-white.”

It is likely that Lakota identity and tradition have been conceived of in terms of opposition to whites since the time of first contact. Lakota indigeneity is a boundary defining and maintaining mechanism that differentiates “us” from “them.”²² Lakota indigeneity, like Lakota culture and religion, is framed in terms of interaction and relationships. As Barth (1998) argues, ethnicity and collective identity are not as much about the cultural material bounded by ethnic group boundaries, but about the relation to

²² This type of differentiation appears to be a universal human tendency. See Berreby (2005, 2008).

what they are not. Many Lakotas identify and differentiate themselves in terms of what they are not. Lakota culture and ethnicity are frequently defined in terms of opposition to modern white or Western culture, civilization, and materialism, as symbolized by the upsidedown American flags prominent at certain events and among certain Lakotas. This seems to have always been the case and only recently has this phenomenon been labeled “indigeneity.” Maintaining consistency with Lakota cultural values in opposition to those of the rest of mainstream America is just one of many ways in which contemporary Lakotas embody and enact indigeneity.

The classic American Indian Movement (AIM) logo is another, more general example of pan-Native American indigeneity and a clear expression of oppositional identity. AIM, known widely as a militant political movement, appropriated the two-finger peace sign from Western American culture and inverted and repurposed its meaning in the process, illustrating the multivocality of cultural symbols (see Figure 2). From the AIM perspective the AIM logo represents not only the head of a native person, the two fingers being feathers, but also militant resistance to settler colonialism, racism, and inequality, or, in other words, decolonization.



Figure 2: American Indian Movement (AIM)

Indigeneity particularly deals with (oppositional) identity, ethnicity, difference, land, human rights, and politics, as evidenced by Shane Greene’s literary image of “politicized layers of indigeneity” (Greene 2009:9). In his book *Customizing Indigeneity: Paths to a Visionary Politics in Peru* Greene (2009:11) finds the “unilinear path invoked by classical modernization and the social evolutionary theory on which it was predicated” to be problematic. After explaining three alternative paths to classical modernization theory and its drive towards heterogeneity, he writes, “Indigeneity in such accounts becomes an almost automatic synonym for difference, mythic culture, and locality. The relevant dialectical counterparts—the implied sameness, the factual history, and the emergent globality of modernity—seem to constantly hover in the background” (Greene 2009:12).

Instead of retreading old paths Greene starts from the assumption that indigeneity is not an expression of difference or a representation of an opposite or other, but rather, that it is “in reality a synonym for sameness, for history, and for the global. . . . Subjected to European colonization, lamented through post-World War II modernization, indigeneity is now revitalized through multiculturalization”²³ (Greene 2009:13). Greene (2004) and others (Brown 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) note that “indigeneity increasingly takes on incorporated forms, morphing into ethnic firms that both internalize and contest today’s neoliberal market values” (Greene 2009:13), so that frequently today ethnicity is akin to a corporation and culture to intellectual property. Greene urges us to consider indigeneity not only in geopolitical space, but also in terms of historical time, not as something that precedes modernity but as something that derives from and is a constituent element of it. Indigeneity, thoroughly abstract and globally modern, has existed since European coloniality began (Greene 2009:14–15).

The emergence of indigeneity coincided with and in opposition to the emergence of the global capitalist system and colonialism. Indigeneity is a form of decolonization. Colonialism, the establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory, is a set of unequal power relationships between a colonial power and the colony and between the colonists and indigenous populations. Colonialism is cultural and economic exploitation and domination that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years as a

²³ Clifford (2012) also points to this emergent phenomenon, describing how local agency is moving into the spaces neoliberalism and multiculturalism are creating. He discusses how changing indigenous contexts are being articulated and used in the complex, expanding public spheres of indigenous renewal and activism, and how heritage renewal and performance have been central features of these new, emergent forms of localism and connectivity.

result of post-Renaissance practices of imperialism. European post-Renaissance colonial expansion was coterminous with the development of a modern capitalist system of economic exchange. Colonialism, as well as oppositional responses to it, must be understood as uneven hybrid processes rather than all-or-nothing “impacts” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007:40–44; Barnard and Spencer 1996:111–114; Li 2007).

Part of indigeneity is recognizing the fundamental differences (and similarities) between native and non-native perspectives and worldviews and insisting that the native voice be heard and represented in history, politics, and modern life. Indigeneity is an important aspect of tribal sovereignty (see Kidwell and Velie 2005:61–82), not just a reflection of perceived cultural pasts. It is a product of the present and inherently modern. Contemporary indigenous activists engage in sometimes ironic arenas²⁴ of indigenous politics and strategic practices of self-representation with the nation-state and others (Greene 2009:16). Greene writes:

The point—or, rather, one alternative vision to a vision of alternative modernities—is that indigeneity doesn’t merely “creatively adapt” (Gaonkar, 2001) to the space-time of the modern, global, capitalist world in order to fragment it into pieces of localized generic difference. Indigeneity is what keeps the modern, global, capitalist world going! It is a form of generically modern difference constructed on the model—and in the mirror—of generically modern sameness. It doesn’t emerge as an alternative path to modernity but as a path that begins and ends with modernity. One might even go so far as to say . . . that indigeneity has always been modern. [Greene 2009:15]

²⁴ Greene (2009:16) asks an important question in this regard: “How exactly does one engage with the complexity of indigeneity in its various ideological and practical forms, including its more ironic and essentializing expressions, while also pursuing a politics of scholarly ‘engagement’ with actually existing indigenous activists?”

In a similar vein, today indigeneity is frequently employed both consciously and unconsciously as a powerful decolonizing strategy by indigenous peoples throughout the world.

Decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms, including dismantling the hidden aspects of institutional and cultural forces that maintain colonialist power, remaining even after political independence is achieved. Decolonization, like colonialism, is a complex and continuing process rather than something achieved automatically at the moment of independence (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007:56–59; Wilson 2005). Li (2007) argues that indigeneity is a countermovement in opposition to capitalism. Clearly indigeneity in this sense is a decolonizing strategy: an attempt to protect land, labor, and the life-sustaining environment from commodification in a capitalist system.

In theories of modernity and modernization ethnicity was treated as a remnant of the pre-industrial social order, gradually declining in significance. Part of the development of Native American indigeneity, not to mention an important connection between conceptions of ethnicity and indigeneity, lies in the assimilationist policies of the United States federal government throughout the late-nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century. It was believed that ethnicity would be overcome by the advance of progress, civilization, and national integration and that the Indian would cease to exist; cease to be distinct from white Americans comprising the dominant society (see Hoxie 1984). Oppositional identity, which falls under the general heading of indigeneity, developed as a decolonizing strategy and form of resistance to assimilation,

missionization, capitalism, and settler-colonialism throughout that same period (Barnard and Spencer 1996:191).

The Lakotas actively engage in a number of decolonizing strategies. They fight for their land rights and natural resources in the political arena, as evidenced by the recent protests of the development of the Keystone XL pipeline through reservation lands (Flegg 2014; Rosebud Sioux Tribe Hosting Spirit Camp to Oppose Keystone XL Pipeline 2014). They fight for their physical and psychological health and wellbeing through intense protests in White Clay, Nebraska over the sale of alcohol to Indian peoples just across the reservation border (Ray 2013; Ross 2013).

Cultural, linguistic, and religious revitalizations are also decolonizing strategies. In post-colonial societies in which alternatives exist, such as the English language and Christianity, it has been suggested that the perpetuation of or a return to indigenous languages and religious traditions can restructure attitudes to the local and to indigenous cultures, highlighting the essential connections between language, religion, and culture. Decolonizing processes advocating a return to indigenous language use and religious practice have involved both a social program to democratize culture and a program of cultural recuperation and reevaluation (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007:56–59).

There are numerous projects underway to maintain and perpetuate the Lakota language, notable among them is Red Cloud Indian School's and Indiana University's Lakota Language Project, the first comprehensive K-12 Lakota language curriculum ever developed. Of particular interest here, however, is the notion that the perpetuation, maintenance, and participation in Lakota religious and ritual life is a powerful contemporary decolonizing strategy. The assimilation and missionization of non-

European peoples was an important feature of European expansion intimately tied to colonialism. Religions are perennially tied to particular political regimes. Oppositional identity or indigeneity grew out of the contact zone in which native peoples and cultures clashed with non-native peoples and cultures.

Religion, ritual, and tradition play important and informative roles in Oglala expressions of indigeneity and decolonizing strategies. Frequently today the juxtaposition between Lakota and non-Lakota or white is symbolized by Lakota tradition as opposed to Christianity. DeMallie notes that:

As the concept of “traditionalism” becomes more and more firmly ensconced as a symbol in contemporary Lakota culture, so does the definition of that concept in religious and diffusively philosophical terms become increasingly clear. Equally clear is the extent to which this revitalized religious traditionalism serves to identify what it is to be Lakota in the white man’s world. Reverence for the universe and participation in Indian ceremonies are diagnostic of being Indian. The non-Indian world stands for the disharmony and poverty of contemporary reservation life and people turn to religious tradition for salvation. [DeMallie 1991:18]

This oppositional identity and the consequent turn against Christianity that was coterminous with the revitalization of Lakota culture and religion in the early 1970s can be seen as a clear decolonizing strategy, opposing and resisting modern American culture and the materialism and religion of the colonizers (Barnard and Spencer 1996:483–484; Posthumus 2008-2014).

As the Oglala artist and author Arthur Amiotte explains:

Well, that [the turn away from Christianity] was something that started in the seventies. My interpretation of it is that people of my generation and

people like me were returning back to the reservation as teachers, as professionals, and didn't feel any obligation or social conscience to [be Christian]. I was very anti-Christian. I had researched and read enough to know what Christianity had done to Indian people, and I thought there was nothing wrong with rejecting Christianity in favor of tradition. And I even got so adamant at one time that I didn't celebrate Christmas, because even though people still did it in the community, and they grew up going to midnight mass and all that . . . and anyway, I proceeded to convert my mother, my auntie, and my grandma. [Posthumus 2008-2014]

This process, which I have labeled “reversion,” from reversed conversion, reveals the interconnections between indigeneity, oppositional identity, and decolonization. Some Lakotas actively appropriate methods and ideas gleaned from Christianity and repurpose them for their own uses, turning them into powerful tools for Lakota retraditionalization²⁵ (Barnard and Spencer 1996:483–484).

As Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie explain:

Missionaries wanted to convert Indians to Christianity, but Indians wanted schools so they could learn to better cope with white society. The federal government saw Christianity as a means to accomplish a policy of assimilating Indians into American society, whereas Indian communities often subverted churches into centers for community activities that reinforced markers of identity such as language (preaching and hymns in Native languages), community feasts, and stickball games in the southeast. [Kidwell and Velie 2005:54]

Lakota religion is both a conscious and an unconscious decolonizing strategy employed by contemporary Lakotas to combat racism and (neo)colonialism in the modern world.

The religious and magico-ritual spheres provide safe places where Lakotas can embody

²⁵ Hymes (1975) argues that “traditionalization” is a basic cultural process through which individuals select valued and significant aspects of the past for continued cultural attention and custodianship into the future. Retraditionalization, then, can be thought of as a return to and continuation of the active process of traditionalization.

and enact their Indianness. Lakota indigeneity and decolonization have been gaining momentum since the cultural and religious revitalization period beginning in the late 1960s, the Civil and Native Rights movements, and the rise to prominence (and notoriety) of the American Indian Movement (AIM). In Part Two we will step back in time and examine the fundamental concepts of religious belief, conceptions of the human soul, disease theory, and categories of magico-medico-ritual²⁶ practitioners from nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives.

²⁶ The religious domain bleeds into and crosscuts all other aspects of Lakota culture and society. This is especially evident and significant in the realm of native disease theory, health, wellness, sickness, medicine, and treatment, which is underpinned, informed by, and inseparable from religious belief and philosophy.

PART TWO: ASPECTS OF PRE- AND EARLY RESERVATION PERIOD OGLALA LAKOTA BELIEF AND RITUAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Part Two examines aspects of historical Oglala Lakota religious belief and magico-medico-ritual practice dating from the prereservation period to the early twentieth century. We will examine conceptions of the human soul, the semantic evolution and multiplicity of the term “medicine,” and nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory. Lastly, we will explore the categories and functions of nineteenth-century religious practitioners and discuss Oglala Dream Societies.

In the following chapters I attempt to create an interpretive cultural context or baseline for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lakota religion consisting of key religious symbols and concepts based on collective statements by various Oglala people. Occasionally I draw from other non-Oglala Lakota sources for a comparative perspective. As Geertz (1973:112) points out, “It is . . . the imbuing of a certain specific complex of symbols—of the metaphysic they formulate and the style of life they recommend—with a persuasive authority which, from an analytic point of view, is the essence of religious action.” For Geertz (1973:125), the analysis of the system of meanings embodied in symbols that constitute a religion is the first stage of the anthropological study of religion. The following chapters will serve as that analysis.

The central religious concept and symbol of late nineteenth-century religion was other-than-human, instrumental power (*wakǰáŋ*), often glossed as “medicine,” which underlay all things in both the seen and the unseen realms and manifested itself in various ways as mysterious potency. The power concept or *wakǰáŋ* is a key to understanding the cultural systems and religious beliefs and practices of the Lakotas and all Siouan peoples

of the Great Plains. It is the basic, underlying, core principle and symbol of Lakota religion that integrates the Lakota universe. It is the animating force that flows through all things in both the seen and unseen worlds. Everything in the universe, whether animate or inanimate, is imbued with and unified through *wakǰ́án* power or energy (DeMallie 1984:80–81; Walker 1991:68–80). The following discussion serves as a review of the power concept or *wakǰ́án*, from both native and nonnative perspectives, relying as much as possible on primary documents, statements from Lakota people themselves, and historical sources from the pre- and early reservation period (roughly to 1934; see DeMallie 2009:187).

The power concept is crucial, complicated, elusive, and oftentimes semantically opaque. At base, from nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives *wakǰ́án* was “anything that was hard to understand” (Good Seat in Walker 1991:70). The Oglala holy man George Sword explained the concept to Walker, saying:

Wakan means very many things. The Lakota understands what it means from the things that are considered *wakan*; yet sometimes its meaning must be explained to him. It is something that is hard to understand. . . . Now anything that thus acquires *ton* [spiritual essence, potency] is *wakan*, because it is the power of the spirit or quality that has been put into it. . . . anything may be *wakan* if a *wakan* spirit goes into it. . . . Every object in the world has a spirit and that spirit is *wakan*. Thus the spirit of the tree or things of that kind, while not like the spirit of man, are also *wakan*.
[Walker 1917:152]

Significantly, *wakǰ́án* was often understood and classified in terms of its phenomenological manifestations in context or in relation to human beings.

Crucial to understanding the concept is recognizing that what Lakotas refer to singularly as *wakǰ́án* is best understood analytically as two separate but interrelated

senses: (1) *wakǰáŋ* as an impersonal, animatistic, general, abstract, universal, other-than-human force; and (2) *wakǰáŋ* as personalized, personified, animistic, specific, concrete, other-than-human persons or spirit beings. Richard Carter, who conducted fieldwork among the Lower Brulé Lakota at Lower Brulé Reservation from 1962 to 1964, writes:

In general, the religious beliefs of the Dakota can be classified as both animistic and animatistic; i.e., the Dakota believe in both personalized supernatural beings and in impersonal supernatural power. Both of these types of belief are apparent in Teton shamanism. The supernatural power possessed by a shaman is simply an impersonal, egoless something, which the shaman can manipulate and use as he wishes. The source of that power, however, is a supernatural being or spirit, with a mind and ego of its own, and subject to some very human whims and ideas. The most difficult thing to comprehend about this dichotomy—between the animistic being and the animatistic power—is the fact that, to a Dakota, they are really not distinct. Both of these are simply manifestations of the same thing; namely, that aspect of the universe to which the Dakota applies the term wakaⁿ. [Carter 1966:38]

Carter’s insights help us distinguish between and understand the two senses of *wakǰáŋ*. The *wakǰáŋ* beings or spirits are the source of impersonal, morally ambiguous *wakǰáŋ* power in relation to human beings. Like electricity, which is semantically and symbolically analogous to *wakǰáŋ*,²⁷ *wakǰáŋ* potency requires a conduit: it must be manifested, personified, contained, or channeled in some way. Lakota shamanism is based on personal encounters and relationship with other-than-human persons. This interaction with *wakǰáŋ* power is dangerous to the practitioner. Through concrete acts

²⁷ Interestingly, the Lakota words for “electricity” and “lightning” are built from the stem *wakǰáŋ*: in both cases, the word is *wakǰáŋgli*, from *wakǰáŋ* (sacred, incomprehensible) and *glí* (to arrive at home). Both *wakǰáŋ* and electricity are forms of power that flow and are transferrable and transmutable. In contemporary doctoring ceremonies the process through which spirits attend to and treat patients is often described phenomenologically as a feeling of electricity flowing through the afflicted parts of the human body (Posthumus 2008-2014).

carried out by humans wielding *wakǰáŋ* energy that energy obtains a moral quality as either good or bad, social or antisocial, working toward the good or detriment of the people. The power wielded by a religious practitioner originates through the intervention of some spirit being, who is a manifestation or reflection of (or perhaps a portal to) *wakǰáŋ* energy, the animatistic spiritual force animating and unifying the universe.

For nineteenth-century Lakotas *wakǰáŋ* indicated the potential ability and power to transform, marking a phenomenon, person, or thing as *tǰókeča* (different, strange, weird). *Wakǰáŋ* was a semantic category that identified and distinguished ordinary, everyday realities from what might be termed the transcendent, extraordinary, or incomprehensible aspects of life and the universe. *Wakǰáŋ* as incomprehensible and beyond the scope of human understanding stems from an important categorical attribute of other-than-human power and potency in relation to humans and manifested in concrete acts: transformation. Transmutation, the act or state of changing or altering form, and the potential and ability to transform is a significant Lakota religious concept and a defining feature of *wakǰáŋ*.

Aaron McGaffey Beede discusses the significance of transformation among the Northern Lakotas. He explains, “With the Western Sioux Indians ‘miracle’ is life-transformation-process (not life-process)” (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology). An important indicator of transformation among nineteenth-century Lakotas was the category *tǰókeča* (difference). “‘Taku tokeca’ [something different or strange] and ‘taku winihan’ [something causing fear or excitement], and many other expressions are applied to something that is wonderful, and to some extent arousing fear also, perhaps;”²⁸ writes

²⁸ The connection between what was considered *wakǰáŋ* and fear was a common one.

Beede (1912:Western Sioux Cosmology), “but the word ‘wakan’ connoted a life-transformation-process always, as Indians understand. And Great Spirit (Wakan-tanká), whatever the origin of the term, is, to them, the Being Who is the Master of, or Lord of, or Source of, or Totality of the total life-transformation-process in the entire world or species or groups.” In healing songs the term *thókeča* is frequently used to index the power of the practitioner and the patient’s transformation from illness to wellness (Densmore 2001:275–277).

The potential or ability to transform is perhaps best captured by the Lakota term *thúŋ* (emitted or manifested [experienced] spiritual essence or potency). As Walker’s interlocutors explain (1991:95), “All the God persons have *ton*. The *ton* is the power to do supernatural things.” William Powers also weighs in on the religious significance of transformation:

To the Oglalas, the totality of natural and cultural phenomena are capable of undergoing transformations which require that behavior toward these phenomena be altered, or somewhat modified. The causes of these transformations and the Oglala explanation for concomitant changes in behavior are subsumed under the concept of *taku wakan* ‘sacred thing(s)’. The phenomena which are regarded as *taku wakan* may be temporarily or permanently transformed. Those which are permanently transformed are regarded collectively as *Wakantanka* . . . [Powers 1982b:45]

Summarizing Walker, Powers states (1982b:52), “Energy has two aspects: visible and invisible. The potential to transform visible energy into invisible energy, and the reverse, is called *tun*. The *tun* of every invisible aspect is its visible aspect. The transformation from visible to invisible, and the reverse is called *wakan*, as is the resultant state. Invisible aspects are to be feared.” Powers writes (1982b:56), “Insofar as

taku wakan ‘sacred things’ and the potentiality for transforming natural and cultural phenomena into *wakan* status were reflected in the entire Oglala universe, it is understandable that religion was widely diffused throughout all aspects of Oglala social organization.”

Conceptualizing *wakǰáŋ* semantically as a continuum is intuitive and useful for our purposes. Prominent usages include other-than-human, holy, sacred, consecrated, special, potent, power(ful), magical, mysterious, incomprehensible, transcendent, different, and potentiality, particularly in terms of generation and transformation. *Wakǰáŋ* is also semantically linked to Lakota tradition (*Lakǰól wičhóǰ’áŋ*) itself. These are the conventional understandings of *wakǰáŋ* that remain pervasive today among natives and nonnatives alike. *Wakǰáŋ* is the embodiment and ideal of all things that are other-than-human, incomprehensible, different, and powerful, making them holy, sacred, special, and utterly set apart from everyday aspects of the human experience.

On an abstract level *wakǰáŋ* refers to an inexplicable, sacred, or mysterious power or energy that flows through all things and unites all life forms. For Sword and others of his generation from the pre- and early reservation period the essence of *wakǰáŋ* was its incomprehensibility; that “no man can understand it” (Walker 1991:98). It is truly different, set apart, and other-than- or non-human in that it is above and beyond the understanding of human beings. Repeatedly in the literature we are confronted with this fundamental sense of *wakǰáŋ*; that it is, as fur trader Edwin Thompson Denig, who lived on the upper Missouri River for over twenty years beginning in 1833, wrote, “beyond their power or knowledge” (Denig 2000:94).

Following Loretta Fowler I define a generation as “a cohort whose shared experiences significantly distinguish them from people in other age groups” (Fowler 1987:19). Fowler (1987:244) argues that “the nature and direction of change . . . are due in large part to contrasts in the generations’ interpretations of culture and history and to their efforts to act upon, resolve, or ignore contested meanings,” a theory she labels “cohort analysis,” based on both ethnohistory and fieldwork. According to Fowler, cohort analysis “refines the abstractions, the common-denominator approach. And it gives new and additional insights into how and why a particular way of life changes . . . [It] demonstrates the usefulness of going beyond the identification of new ideas or social forms that are introduced . . . to consider how innovations are received by and affect different cohorts” (Fowler 1987:244–245).

Cohort analysis is particularly important to understanding traditional Lakota religious belief and ritual practice. Stephen Feraca, who conducted fieldwork among the Oglalas at Pine Ridge and the *Sičhánǵus* (Brulés) at Rosebud in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1990s, notes the importance of conceptions of “the generations” in the reckoning and transmission of Lakota tradition:

In the context of the twentieth century, understanding what is traditional in Lakota religion can only be achieved with attention to each succeeding (or preceding) generation of “old-timers.” The Lakotas rationalize their beliefs and rites in terms of what they think is proper in the view of the aged, whether or not the successively younger people are themselves truly aware of what transpired earlier. In this respect I have often been greatly impressed at the ease with which many Lakotas are able to make generational leaps backward, even to previous centuries, to justify what they perceive to be a traditional aspect of a given religious ceremony. [Feraca 1998:xii]

Clearly what is deemed proper in the eyes of elders is an important aspect of what is generally deemed traditional.

Wakǰ́án is often referred to in English simply as “mystery” (Curtis 1908:59; Fletcher 1884a, 1884b). DeMallie and Lavenda compare the awe-inspiring, other-than-human aspects of the animatistic sense of *wakǰ́án* to the German theologian Rudolf Otto’s concept of “the ‘numinous,’ that *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which is the emotional, ineffable basis for religion.” They write, “The religious grounding of Siouan power concepts lies not in a pantheon of gods,²⁹ or in beliefs about control, but in the emotional quality of the holy that is man’s response to the manifestation of power. . . . The numinous is apprehensible nonrationality; it is not comprehensible through the discussion of rational attributes” (DeMallie and Lavenda 1977:161–162).

Phenomenological experiences of manifestations of *wakǰ́án* in relation to human beings and disclosed through human consciousness are the foundation of Lakota religious life.

Little Wound, chief of the *Khiyáksa* band of the Oglalas, further explicates the power concept or *wakǰ́án*. His words give us a sense of the various core attributes associated with *wakǰ́án*, namely mystery, incomprehensibility, transcendence, tradition, age, wisdom, power, dangerousness [*wókhókípǰ́he*], the ability to speak, and knowledge of the *wakǰ́án*, among other things. Again, it is clear that *wakǰ́án* was most identifiable through its manifestations and qualitative attributes; through concrete, worldly examples or acts of mysterious power, efficacy, or difference.³⁰ Little Wound says:

²⁹ In the animistic sense of *wakǰ́án* there was a “pantheon” of personalized, named other-than-human persons or spirit beings, but the level of organization and hierarchy of those beings is a matter of much debate.

³⁰ Frances Densmore glosses *wakǰ́án* as mysterious and writes that “several old Indians” explained to her that “An ordinary man has natural ways of doing things. Occasionally there is a man who has a gift for doing extraordinary things, and he is called *wakǰ́án*. Although this is a supernatural gift, he can use it only

When anything is hard to understand, it is *wakan* because mankind does not know what it is. Anything that is used in the ceremony and songs to the *Wakanpi* [spirits]³¹ is *wakan* because it should not be used for anything else. Little children are *wakan* because they do not speak. Crazy people are *wakan* because the *Wakanpi* are in them. Anything that is very old is *wakan* because no one knows when it was made. Anyone with great power is *wakan* because the *Wakanpi* helps them. Anything that is very dangerous is *wakan* because *Iya* [the Cannibal, Giant Eater, chief malevolent spirit] helps it. Anything that is poison or anything that intoxicates is *wakan* because the Sky helps it.

The songs and the ceremonies of the Oglalas are *wakan* because they belong to the *Wakanpi*. A very old man or a very old woman is *wakan* because they know many things. But an old man is not like a *wakan* man. If he has learned the *wakan* things, then he is a *wakan* man. The spirit [*naǵi*] of every man is *wakan* and the ghost [*niyá*] is *wakan*. [Walker 1991:69–70]

Fritz Detwiler (1992:237) states that the metaphysical assumption that intentional sacred power or *wakǵáŋ* permeates all life and reality grounds the Oglala worldview. *Wakǵáŋ* power was expressed in a variety of ways as it interacted with human beings. Again, relationship, kinship, unity, and connectedness are central to Lakota religious thought and worldview, as interaction and interrelationships are crucial to understanding the concept of *wakǵáŋ* and its manifestations. As DeMallie explains:

For the Sioux, all forms of being were related; the universe was characterized by its unity. . . . Of all forms of life, humans were the least powerful, and so for the Sioux the important distinction was between that which was human and everything else. The universe was fundamentally incomprehensible; it could not be fully known or controlled, but humans venerated it and dared to manipulate it to the best of their limited capacity.

by effort and study. . . . We use the words *taku wakan* [‘mysterious things’] for anything which we can see for ourselves has mysterious power” (Densmore 2001:85 n 2).

³¹ The suffix *-pi* indicates animate plurality.

This incomprehensible power was called wakan . . . [DeMallie 2001:806]³²

Wakǰán was ultimately incomprehensible and dangerous to wield. DeMallie and Lavenda (1977:153) state that *wakǰán* “was to be neither fully known nor controlled. Man stood in awe and fear of it, venerated it, and dared to use it to the best of his limited capability. Man stood, not outside of nature, but as part of it.” The inherent power of the *wakǰán*, coupled with its incomprehensible, uncontrollable, and dangerous nature, logically led to the awe, fear, respect, and reverence Lakotas felt towards and associated with it.

James Owen Dorsey (1894:433), quoting the missionary Stephen Riggs, writes, “All life is Wakan. So also is everything which exhibits power, whether in action, as the winds and drifting clouds, or in passive endurance, as the boulder by the wayside. . . . In the mind of a Dakota . . . this word Wah-kon . . . covers the whole field of their fear and worship. Many things also that are neither feared nor worshiped, but are simply wonderful, come under this designation.” The power and utter incomprehensibility of *wakǰán* frequently evoked *kǰókípǰa* (fear) and *iníhaŋ* (awe), which naturally led to the *ohóla* (respect) and *yuónihaŋ* (honor) paid to other-than-human persons (see Bushotter 1937:Story 3). For all these reasons *wakǰán* was considered extremely *wókǰókípǰe* (dangerous).

³² DeMallie (1991:147) elaborates on Lakota relational ontologies, writing, “Because what is *wakan* constitutes the very ground of being, it is the basis for important interrelationships among life forms. All applications of knowledge are based on perceived relationships, and effective action is bound up in an intimate, causal way with the very structure and energies of a universe understood as *wakan*.” See also Dorsey (1894:365, 433–434).

Feraca concurs that belief in *wakháŋ* and a sense of fear and respect towards all that was *wakháŋ* were foundational aspects of traditional Lakota religion. He writes, “Although religious practices are always changing . . . traditional religion nevertheless retains its fundamental qualities, governed by the concept of supernatural power. The belief in such power, from whatever source it may be derived, exists in itself and apart from any particular observance or activity” (Feraca 1998:xi). Feraca claims he never witnessed any Lakota deny the power concept, and I can attest to that claim in the early 2010s. The power concept is still deeply embedded in the Oglala psyche and, as Feraca (1998:xii) suggests, even “Those who remain aloof from traditional religion share with those who participate in any of its many manifestations a combination of fear and respect. This combination, it can be assumed, existed aboriginally. For the Lakotas the concepts of fear and respect are, in a religious sense, virtually indistinguishable.”³³

Having briefly explored the power concept *wakháŋ* we will now move on to an examination of some additional essential concepts of pre- and early reservation period Lakota religion, the abstract concepts that provide the foundations for Lakota cosmology, ontology, mythology, religious belief, ritual practice, and religious symbolism (Walker 1991:xix). According to Sword (in Walker 1991:80), “These things must all be understood before one can understand the old customs and ceremonies of the Lakotas.” The following summary serves as a critical reading of the James R. Walker material³⁴

³³ Some contemporary Oglalas disagree with this last statement. For them, fear is a reaction to the unknown and the powerful, and respect is a reaction to fear (Posthumus 2008-2014). It seems that both fear and respect or honor are natural reactions to power, chaos, the incomprehensible, and the dangerous, but from different perspectives. Clearly there is a close semantic interrelationship between fear and respect from Lakota perspectives.

³⁴ The James R. Walker material (1917, 1982, 1991, 2006), collected at Pine Ridge between 1896 and 1914, provides a significant and controversial foundational corpus of early ethnographic data on nineteenth-century Lakota culture, society, religion, ritual, and myth. As DeMallie (in Walker 1991:43) suggests, “His works have both strengths and weaknesses. In the end his total contribution may be judged

relating to religion and ritual (Walker 1917, 1991), comparing it with other historical sources and Oglala religious belief and ritual practice at Pine Ridge today. Walker, the Pine Ridge Agency physician from 1896 to 1914 (Walker 1991:7, 33, 73), collected a vast and valuable corpus of material relating to nineteenth-century Lakota culture, myth, religion, ritual, and society. In order to understand nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory and the practice of ritual specialists we must first understand conceptions of the human soul, which serves as our point of departure here.

as the single most significant one to the recording of nineteenth-century Lakota religion. Yet his work must be understood within the limitations of its time.” For discussion and critical commentary on the importance and validity of the Walker corpus, see Deloria (1937); DeMallie (in Walker 1991:xxxi–45); Clifford (in Clifford and Marcus 1986:15–17); Bucko (1998:101–111); and Miller (in Braun 2013:23–42).

2. NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA CONCEPTIONS OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Nineteenth-century Lakota conceptions of “soul”³⁵ are extremely complex. As Beede explains, among the Northern Lakotas there was an:

. . . old Indian belief that the “soul” or “mind” is not in the body, as many or all whitepeople believe, but is around the body as the heavens and the “all-animated space” is around the earth---though connected with the earth as the “soul” is with the body.³⁶ That with some Indians more than with others this “soul” which is around the body, at times, may expand so as to reach regions far away and sense the things there, both the physical things on the earth and also things in the “world invisible” which is around the *terra firma*. That in this “world invisible” around the physical earth there are almost countless spheres of movement of living persons of some sort (not at all emphasizing departed spirits, if including them); these spheres generally harmonizing in their movements, though sometimes in conflict . . . [Beede 1912]

From nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives the human *tháwáčhiŋ* (mind) and *wičhánaŋi* (soul) are all around human beings and may journey far away from the body (*tháŋčhán*).³⁷ However, the mind and soul need the body as much as the body needs the mind and soul. They are interconnected (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology).

Early twentieth-century Oglalas generally believed in the existence of three or four souls, two of which were given to human beings at birth by *Táku Škaŋškán* or *Škán*

³⁵ I have chosen to use the general term “soul” here rather than spirit or ghost, which are also found in the literature. Soul may be generally defined as the spirit, moral aspect, or non-material or non-corporeal part of a human being. Souls may survive the death of the physical body (see Barnard and Spencer 1996:623).

³⁶ According to Beede’s Northern Lakota interlocutors, alcohol and other intoxicants “deadened or killed the free working of the Spirit, for realizing what is in abdito (occult)” (Beede 1912). Beede’s interlocutors seem to connect the soul closely to the breath. Beede quotes Sitting Bull as saying that “The ‘soul’ of a whiteman is so odored with whiskey that it will have to hang-around here on earth for hundreds of years before the winds and storms will so purify it that the people in the other life can endure the smell of it there, and let it come in” (Beede 1912).

³⁷ During sleep, paralysis, or sickness the mind and soul may wander to other planes of existence or to the spirit world. This explains many beliefs concerning the Lakota dream experience and disease theory.

(Sky, the Moving Spirit)³⁸ (Walker 1917:161). These souls are the *niyá* or *waníya* (life, breath),³⁹ *naǵí* or *wanáǵi* (spirit, soul), *naǵíla* (spirit-like, soul-like), and *sičúŋ* or *wašičúŋ* (imparted other-than-human potency; in the sense of the “given *šičúŋ*”) (see Figure 3).⁴⁰

They functioned in a variety of ways. As Oglala artist, author, and educator Arthur Amiotte (1982:27) explains, “Lakota wise men tell that ‘All things in the world are sacred. All things in the world in their order of creation were given four spiritual counterparts besides the gross,’ or physical form [*tháŋčháŋ* ‘body’] which is the most obvious.” The four souls of human beings comprise the *Wakháŋla* (*Wakháŋ*-like) division of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*, the totality of all *wakháŋ* potency or mystery in the universe (see Figure 4). As Walker (1917:86) explains, “The *Wakanlapi* are immaterial Gods that abide or have abided in material things. While there are four kinds there are many of each kind. But all of each kind should be considered as only one when considering them as Gods.”

³⁸ *Škání* is variously referred to as *Táku Škaŋškání*, *Škaŋškání*, *Naǵí Tháŋka/Wanáǵi Tháŋka* (Great Spirit), and *Wóniya Tháŋka* (Walker 1917:161; Walker 1991:35, 86, 186–187). According to Beede, the Northern Lakotas venerated a “deity” called *Wóniya* above all others, often equating it to *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*. *Wóniya* is described as the totality of all life force in the universe and compared to a guiding light for human beings to aspire to. In fact, the major aim in life was to tune one’s mind and soul to *Wóniya* in order to live in harmony with all being (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology). It is likely that *Wóniya* as described by Beede is the very same *Wóniya Tháŋka* identified by Walker’s interlocutors.

³⁹ Many of Walker’s interlocutors refer to the *niyá* as ‘ghost’. Throughout the following discussion if the English term ghost is used it should be understood as referring to the *niyá*.

⁴⁰ Some Lakotas did not consider the *naǵíla* as part of the conglomerate *human* soul. I am still exploring this discrepancy. The addition of the prefix *wa-* appears to have little semantic effect on these concepts. Many Lakota authorities use the terms *niyá/waníya*, *naǵí/wanáǵi*, and *šičúŋ/wašičúŋ* basically interchangeably (Walker 1917:153–154; Walker 1991:94, 106). I have yet to encounter the form *wanáǵíla*, but it is likely that it would also fall under the same semantic umbrella as its counterpart *naǵíla*. The addition of the prefix *wa-* is an indefinite object marker that gives verbs a more general or abstract meaning.

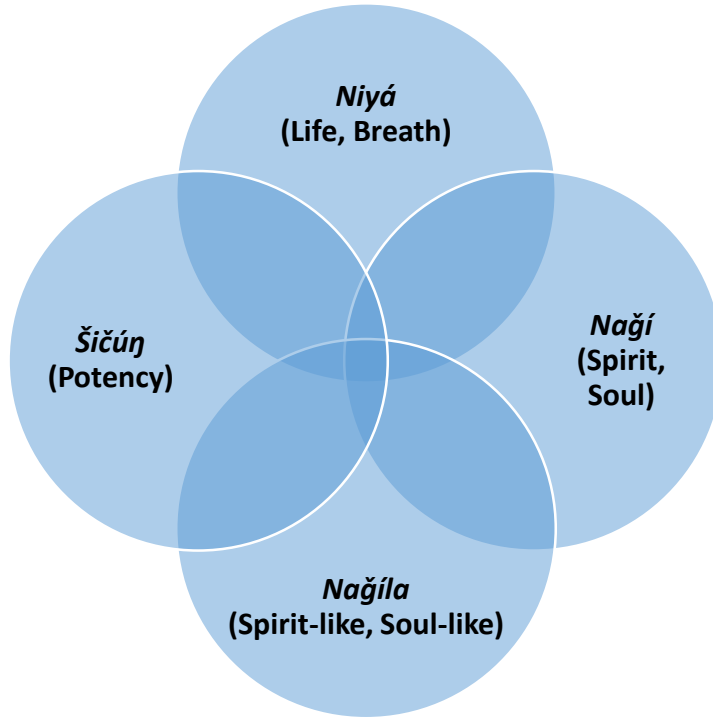


Figure 3: The Four Aspects of the Lakota Soul

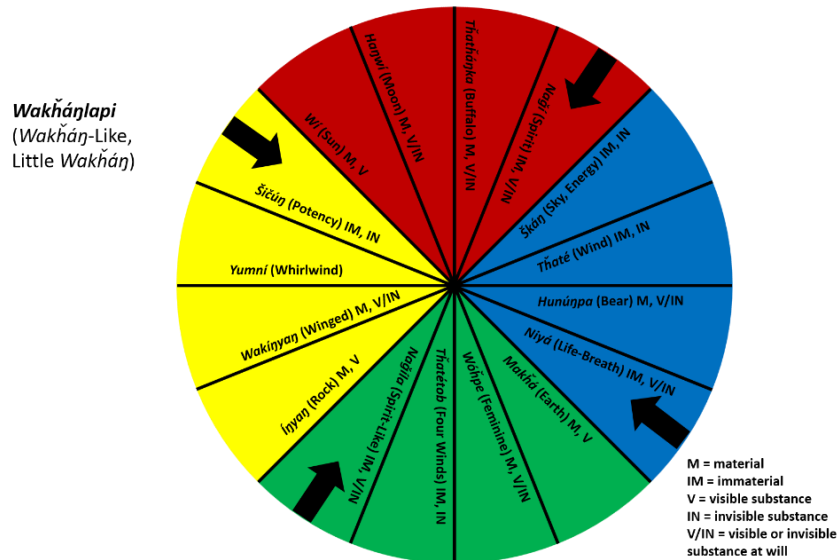


Figure 4: The Sixteen Manifestations of Wakháŋ Thánka (Great Mysterious)

The four souls comprising the *Wakǰánla* subdivision of *Wakǰán Thánka* or *Tóbtob kin* (the Four Times Four) fall under the *Táku Wakǰán* (Something *Wakǰán*) subdivision and are collectively referred to as *Wakǰánlapi* (*Wakǰán*-likes). *Niyá* (Life, Breath, Ghost) is the *Wakǰánla* associate of the Great Spirit *Škán* (Energy); *Naǰí* (Spirit, Soul) is the *Wakǰánla* associate of the Chief *Wakǰán Wi* (Sun); *Naǰíla* (Spirit-like, Soul-like) is the *Wakǰánla* associate of the Creator *Wakǰán Makǰá* (Earth); and *Šičúŋ* (Potency of a *wakǰán*) is the *Wakǰánla* associate of the Executive *Wakǰán Ínyan* (Rock) (see Walker (1917:79–81)). This provides further evidence that these four essences or potencies provide the connection between the *wakǰán* other-than-human persons and human beings; indeed, they are literally the *wakǰán* within humans, linking them to the divine.

However, there was no stringent or systematized dogma concerning conceptions of soul. Opinions differed among religious practitioners and thinkers, reflecting the inherent individuality and diversity of nineteenth-century Lakota religion and ritual. Some maintained that *naǰíla* was wholly other-than-human, positing three essential human souls that literally and figuratively connected human beings to the underlying, immortal force that flows through the universe and unites all life and being; namely, *wakǰán*. As Finger (Walker 1991:35) expresses it, “The spirit [*naǰí*], the ghost [*niyá*], and the familiar of man [*šičúŋ*] are not born with him but are given to him at the time of his birth. They are *Wakan* and therefore will never die.”

The following lengthy quote by the Oglala Good Seat provides us with a starting point for our discussion of nineteenth-century Lakota conceptions of human souls.

Unpacking it will structure the rest of this section and the subsequent analysis. Good Seat explains to Walker that:

In old times, the Indians did not know of a Great Spirit. There are two kinds of spirits. *Wanagi*, that is the spirit (*nagi*) that has once been in a man. *Nagi* (a spirit) has never been in a man. When *wanagi* is in a man, it is *woniya* (the life). When a man dies, his *woniya* is then *wanagi*. When a man is alive, he has his *woniya* (breath of life) and his *nagi* (spirit). His *nagi* is not a part of himself.⁴¹ His *nagi* cares for him and warns him of danger and helps him out of difficulties. When he dies, it goes with his *wanagi* to the spirit world (*wanagi makece*). The spirit world is far beyond the pines.

There is no *Nagi Tanka* [‘Great Spirit’]. How the spirits live in the spirit land and what they do, that is *Wakan Tanka*. The *nagi* are in the world all the time. They do things and talk to men. Then they are *wakan*. The *wica nagi* (the spirit of a man) may come back to the world to see its people.

When a man dies, his *wanagi* leaves his body. It stays near it for a short time. It is well to please it while it lingers near the body. If it is not pleased, it may do some harm to someone. After a time, it goes on the journey to the spirit world. Its *nagi* goes with it to show it the way. It is happy if it has company.⁴² If another *wica nagi* goes with it, it is better. It is happy if it can take the *wamaka nagi* (animal spirit) of his horse and his dog. It is happy if it can take *wo nagi* (spirit of food) with it. His gun and food. . . .

A spirit is like a shadow. It is nothing. There are other beings. But they are not spirits. They belong to the world. They are *wakan*. They have power over men and things. They are *wo wakan* (belong to the mysterious).⁴³ They are *taku wakan* (things mysterious). . . .

Anything that moves or does anything has a spirit. Men give the spirits things to get their help or they give them things to keep them from doing them harm. If the spirits would stay away from men, then the men would care nothing for them, only for the spirits of their friends. The spirits often do things against each other. The strongest or the cunningest spirit wins. [Walker 1991:70–72]

⁴¹ This belief that the souls are not part of the physical body of human beings, but rather are outside of it yet connected to it, is echoed by Beede’s Northern Lakota interlocutors.

⁴² Often Lakota ghosts are lonely rather than malevolent. They desire companionship and the company of their friends and relatives from their human, earthly existence. Ghosts are considered malevolent or threatening because they have been known to coax the living into joining them in the spirit world.

⁴³ I have also heard this word (*wówakħay*) used to designate indwelling spirits.

It is clear from Good Seat's words that everything in the Lakota universe had a soul of some kind. These souls had differential power, abilities, and functions. Next we will unpack and analyze Good Seat's words, defining and differentiating the various concepts for historical conceptions of human souls.

2.1 *Niyá*, *Waníya*, and *Wóniya* (Life, Breath)

The term *niyá* is derived from the intransitive verb *ní* (to live)⁴⁴ and the causative suffix -*ya* (to cause, to make). As Sword explains, "A man's *ni* is his life. It is the same as his breath. It gives him his strength. All that is inside a man's body it keeps clean. If it is weak it cannot clean the inside of the body. If it goes away from a man he is dead" (Walker 1991:83). *Niyá* is commonly translated as "breath" (Densmore 2001:67–68). According to Sword, *niyá* "is the ghost or spirit which is given to a man at birth and is that which causes the *Ni*" (Walker 1917:156). The *niyá*, which is also encountered as an intransitive verb meaning "to breathe" and as a causative verb meaning "to cause someone to live," gives life to an organism and allows for the continuation of life movement (Amiotte 1982:27). Amiotte (1982:28) adds that "if a person's *Niya* leaves his body, probably accompanied by the second soul or *Nagi*, and reenters the spirit world, the body is quite without motion and the *Niya* must be retrieved and reintegrated with the body."

The concepts *niyá* and *waníya* are semantically interwoven. The distinction may involve the difference between human and other-than-human and/or definite and indefinite. According to Walker's interlocutors, "*Waniya* is a spirit of a man or woman. It

⁴⁴ We will examine this very significant term in greater detail in the section on Lakota disease theory.

is that which makes him live and it leaves him when he dies. It begins when one is born but it continues after one is dead. They go somewhere after death of the body, but they may come back” (Walker 1991:106). In an interview in March 1914 Finger likened the *niyá* to smoke and explained to Walker that stars are *waníya*, which are the ghosts of human beings (Walker 1917:154–156). According to Finger (Walker 1917:154), “*Skan* takes from the stars a ghost and gives it to each babe at the time of its birth and when the babe dies the ghost returns to the stars. . . . A ghost is *Wakan*, but it is not *Wakan Tanka*.” If we take Finger at his word then we have isolated the origin of the *niyá* or ghost: the stars.

Finger and Sword quite consistently use the terms *ní*, *niyá*, and *waníya* to refer to a human being’s “ghost,” which seems erroneous based on the common contemporary usage of the term *wanáǵi* for ghost (Walker 1991:83–84). It is likely that the confusion stems from Walker’s translations of abstract Lakota religious concepts and semantic drift since the early 1900s. Sword discusses “the spirits of mankind and the ghosts of mankind (*niyapi*)” (Walker 1991:99), using the form *niyápi* for the English ghosts. It is very likely, however, that the Lakota classification of souls and spirits is far too complex and nuanced to categorize using only a handful of trivial English equivalents, such as soul, spirit, ghost, demon, etc.

Walker writes:

The *Niya* is an immaterial god whose substance is visible when It so wills. A *niya* is imparted by *Skan* to each of mankind at birth and abides with the person like a shadow until death, when it lingers with the spirit until the latter goes before *Skan* for judgment. Then it appears to testify regarding the conduct of the spirit and upon its testimony the spirit is adjudged. When *Skan* has given judgment, the ghost returns whence it came and is

no more. Its functions during the life of the person are to cause vitality, to forewarn of good and evil, and to give the power to influence others. When it departs from the body, this is death, though it may depart and return again if the spirit has not left the body. [Walker 1917:86–87]

According to Walker, death occurs only when both the *niyá* and *naǵí* abandon the body. Oglala interpreter Thomas Tyon corroborates some of the details of Walker’s account, explaining that “*Woniya Tanka, Skanskan*, who is the *Wanagi Tanka* . . . gives the breath of life and the spirit to every child that is born alive and he judges the spirit upon the testimony given by the ghost after death” (Walker 1917:161).

The *mniwátu* (water spirits) are constantly at war with the *niyá* or ghost. The *mniwátu* are material beings whose substance or essence is visible, except when they are too small to be seen. They take the form of maggots and cause things to rot.⁴⁵ The *mniwátu*, who always seek to enter the bodies of humans to cause sickness, lurk in the waters and may be the archetype for the idea that foreign substances and projectiles lodged in the body result in sickness.⁴⁶ If the *mniwátu* prevail against the *niyá* the ghost leaves the body and the individual dies. But, according to Walker (1917:89), the *mniwátu* “may be exorcised in a vitalizing lodge by a Shaman or a medicineman.” The *Inípi* (Sweat Lodge) ceremony strengthens the *niyá* (ghost), and, according to Sword, causes “a

⁴⁵ According to Wilmer “Stampede” Mesteth, a contemporary Oglala religious leader, *mniwátu* or *mniwátukala* are microscopic creatures that are too small to be seen. They can be ingested through water and cause sickness. For this reason, nineteenth-century Lakotas strained their water with deer hides, cheesecloth, and by other means (Posthumus 2008-2014). *Mniwátuka* are clearly similar to what Beede’s interlocutors refer to as *táku ní úŋ čhikčhíčk’ana* or little living things or persons. Mesteth distinguishes *mniwátu* from *wiwíla*, which he describes as “elf-like.” *Wiwíla* are the guardians of the springs and apparently are not considered evil or malevolent. They are frightening to human beings, however.

⁴⁶ Frequently, the referents of religio-mythical and magico-ritual symbols cluster around opposite semantic poles, a phenomenon discussed by Turner (1969:52–53). At one pole the referents are to social and moral facts, at the other, to physiological and organic facts. These symbols, explains Turner (1969:52), “unite the organic with the sociomoral order, proclaiming their ultimate religious unity, over and above conflicts between and within these orders.”

man's *ni* to put out of his body all that makes him tired, or all that causes disease, or all that causes him to think wrong" (Walker 1991:83–84). As Amiotte (1982:27–28) explains, from a contemporary perspective, "ritual cleansing in the sweat lodge is thought not only good for expelling toxic matter, the *miniwatutkala*, through the pores, but also for strengthening and purifying the *Niya* through ritualized union with the spirit world."

The closely related term *wóniya* is a noun meaning spirit, life, breath, or life-breath. Again, we are faced with the myriad of definitional problems when semantic meanings in Lakota bleed together with other related terms and when the English translations and equivalents are far too simplistic and lack the depth of the Lakota classification system. Clearly the stem is *ní* (to live), from which *niyá* (life, breath; ghost; literally, 'to cause life') is formed.

As Good Seat points out, there is a connection between *wóniya* and the concepts we will examine in the next section, namely *naǵí* and *wanáǵi*. He explains, "*Wanagi* . . . is the spirit (*nagi*) that has once been in a man. *Nagi* (a spirit) has never been in a man.⁴⁷ When *wanagi* is in a man, it is *woniya* (the life). When a man dies, his *woniya* is then *wanagi*. When a man is alive, he has his *woniya* (breath of life) and his *nagi* (spirit)." Good Seat's words may appear confusing at first, but we must remember that the *niyá* and the *naǵí* are separate parts of a whole that unite to comprise the soul of a human being, composed of three or four aspects, depending on one's perspective. When a human being is alive he is associated with both the breath of life or human life (*wóniya*, *niyá*, *waníya*, basically *ní*), as well as the *naǵí* (spirit). When a human being dies the *niyá* or

⁴⁷ Good Seat's opinion may be idiosyncratic. Red Cloud, for instance, referred to his own spirit as *naǵí* (see Walker 1991:140). Also, the Ghost-Keeping Ceremony may be alternately referred to as either *Wanáǵi Yuhápi* or *Naǵí Yuhápi* (Walker 1991:165).

wóniya leaves the body and the *naǵí* accompanies the *niyá* to the spirit world (Walker 1991:94).

Beede's Northern Lakota interlocutors provide some useful commentary and comparative data on the concept of *wóniya*. Beede claims that the Western Sioux thought of *wóniya* as nearly identical to *Wakǵáŋ Tháŋka*. *Wóniya* was believed to have no origin and to be fundamental in all things, including other-than-human persons. Beede defines *wóniya* as 'spirit' in a sense that was outside and beyond human beings, transcending human understanding. All power in the universe, whether manifested in human or other-than-human forms, flows from *wóniya*. "Spirit (Woniya)," explains Beede (1912:Western Sioux Cosmology), "is the author and source of all 'force and energy' in all things, or rather persons, for the entire world, to them, consisted of persons." *Wóniya* was conceived of as both feminine and masculine and not in any sense as a Creator figure (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology).

The spiritual goal that dominated and directed Lakota life was to piously and pitifully approach and become attuned to *wóniya*, gaining the correct attitude toward and understanding of this transcendent conception of other-than-human life and power. According to Beede, *wóniya* is often compared to a light guiding the life or spirit (*niyá*) of humans. Human beings sought knowledge of and relationship with *wóniya* so that their minds, bodies, and spirits would have loving kindness (*wačháŋkiyapi*). Interestingly, Christian missionaries decided to translate the idea of the Christian Holy Spirit as *Wóniya* or *Wóniya Wakǵáŋ*. Clearly there were similarities between Lakota conceptions of *Wóniya* and Christian conceptions of the Holy Spirit, and nineteenth-century Lakotas had

no trouble understanding the concept of the triune Trinity, three deities that are actually one and the same (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology).

Amiotte provides a valuable contemporary perspective on the concept of *niyá*, equating it with the physiological functioning of the body, the life-breath that keeps an organism operative and alive. Associated with the mouth, nose, and human respiratory system in general, the proper functioning of the *niyá* is required to sustain the human organism, maintaining breath and life and sustaining and perpetuating individual life movement. Without a properly functioning *niyá* the other aspects of the soul will not maintain their association with a particular human body (Posthumus 2008-2014). Next we will examine the interrelated concepts *naǵí* and *wanáǵi*.

2.2 *Naǵí* and *Wanáǵi* (Spirit, Soul)

Translating the term *naǵí* as ‘spirit’ is necessary but problematic and confusing in that the *naǵí* is akin to the stereotyped notion of ghosts in Western culture.⁴⁸ But in terms of the Lakota classification of souls it is best to gloss *niyá* as life, breath, or ghost and *naǵí* as spirit. There is little semantic difference of import between ghost and spirit in English, exacerbating the difficulties of our analysis. All creatures or beings have a *naǵí* and all can communicate in the language of the spirits that each creature learns in the spirit or dream world (*uṅmá wičhóni* ‘other life’). There appear to be two major senses of *naǵí* (human [*wičhánaǵi*] and other-than-human). There are two major other-than-human *naǵí* categories (animate and inanimate) and a variety of types, such as spirit beings, animal

⁴⁸ The term *naǵítǰuṅ* (to be haunted; to manifest a ghost or spirit as a spiritual act; a spirit of a dead person that haunts a place; literally, ‘to produce ghosts’) adds to the semantic confusion and overlap of Western conceptions of ghosts with the Lakota term *naǵí* (Colhoff 1948:Letter 5).

spirits (*wamákhánaǵi*), plant spirits, and the spirits of inanimate things like smokes and foods (*wónaǵi* [the spirit of food]). A *naǵi* may be good (benevolent) or bad (malevolent) (Amiotte 1982:29–30; Beede 1912; Walker 1991:71).

Naǵi is defined as the spirit and also as the shadow of anything (Colhoff 1948:Letter 5). According to Good Seat, “A spirit is like a shadow. It is nothing” (Walker 1991:71). Little Wound describes *naǵi* as “the *Wakan* of the shadows” (Walker 1917:179). The term *naǵi* figures prominently in Lakota conceptions of an afterlife or afterworld, as in the sentence *naǵi iyáya* (he/she has gone to the spirit world). According to Walker, the *wanáǵi thámákhóche* (spirit world) is in the regions beyond the pines, far to the north, but this is contradicted by other accounts claiming that souls get to the spirit world by walking south on the north-to-south spirit trail (*wanáǵi tháčhánku*), the Lakota name for the Milky Way (Lynd 1889:155–156; Standing Bear 2006b:194; Walker 1991:136). Perhaps Walker’s confusion is based on a statement by the Oglala Red Rabbit, who claims that *Wazíya*, the mythical wizard of the north, adjudged the spirits of deceased humans as they “pass by his tipi when they travel to the spirit world” (Walker 1991:126). Perhaps what Red Rabbit meant was that the spirits of the dead *begin* their journey toward the south along the Milky Way in the north, the land of the pines and home to *Wazíya*.

According to Sword, “The *nagi* of an animate thing is its spirit and of an inanimate thing that grows from the ground is its smoke. This is the potency of anything. . . . There are many kinds of spirits (*nagipi*). All the spirits of one kind are the same as one spirit” (Walker 1991:98). As Good Seat explains, a human being’s “*nagi* is not a part of himself. His *nagi* cares for him and warns him of danger and helps him out of

difficulties. When he dies, it goes with his *wanagi* to the spirit world (*wanagi makoce*). The spirit world is far beyond the pines. . . . The *nagi* are in the world all the time. They do things and talk to men. Then they are *wakan*. The *wica nagi* (the spirit of a man) may come back to the world to see its people” (Walker 1991:71).

Amiotte provides a contemporary perspective on the *naǵí*, which he describes as much more personal and individualistic than the *niyá*, comparable to the ego, self-awareness, or self-consciousness. The *naǵí* is mobile and capricious. It retains the idiosyncrasies and personality of its worldly, human host, and, as Amiotte (1982:29) notes, the *naǵí* “is much like a mirror image of the person’s form, at once ephemeral when seen, transparent, and capable of easy transition to and from the spirit world.” If the *naǵí* leaves the body a state of soul loss or disequilibrium results. “If by chance the *Nagi* should leave and the *Niya* remain,” explains Amiotte (1982:29), “the body would continue to function, but in a state of coma or in semiconsciousness. In such a state the person may appear to others as strange in his or her actions and attitudes.” Often the contemporary absence of the *naǵí* may be cause for sickness or insanity, and the role of the ritual specialist is to make contact with the errant *naǵí* and coax it to reunite with the body. Additionally, some believe that a specific *naǵí* may be reincarnated in a new body, something that is said often of twins and religious practitioners (Amiotte 1982:29–30).

There appears to be little semantic distinction between *naǵí* and the related term *wanáǵi*, similar to what we have discovered concerning *niyá/waníya*. Good Seat insists that a *wanáǵi* is the *naǵí* (spirit) that has once been bounded in a human being. So perhaps the distinction is between human and other-than-human; that a *wanáǵi* is a human *naǵí* as opposed to an other-than-human *naǵí*. We may infer that the distinction

lies in the difference between definite and indefinite as indicated by the prefix *wa-*, an indefinite object marker. *Naǵí* is a definite spirit associated with a particular person and body, while *wanáǵi* is an indefinite, unknown spirit no longer associated (physically, at least) with a particular person and body. Sword defines and explains this important prefix, saying, “The word *wa* means that something or someone is something or does something” (Walker 1991:96).

Richard Two Dogs, an influential contemporary Oglala ritual practitioner, explained to me that *naǵí* is the type of spirit that all things have. It may refer to one’s own spirit or to a specific spirit. *Wanáǵi*, on the other hand, is a spirit in a more general, abstract, or unknown sense. The important distinction appears to be between definite and indefinite and the fact that only a human spirit would be considered or referred to as *wanáǵi*, meaning a spirit that was once contained in or associated with a particular human body that is no longer associated with that body and now exists external from and unassociated with its original vessel (Posthumus 2008-2014). “When a man dies,” explains Good Seat:

. . . his *wanagi* leaves his body. It stays near it for a short time. It is well to please it while it lingers near the body. If it is not pleased, it may do some harm to someone. After a time, it goes on the journey to the spirit world. Its *nagi* goes with it to show it the way. It is happy if it has company. If another *wica nagi* goes with it, it is better. It is happy if it can take the *wamaka nagi* (animal spirit) of his horse and his dog. It is happy if it can take *wo nagi* (spirit of food) with it. His gun and food. [Walker 1991:71]

Perhaps Good Seat actually equates the *wanáǵi* with the *wóniya* and hence, for him, the *wanáǵi* is the same as the *niyá*, which is guided to the spirit world by the *naǵí*. Walker’s interlocutors explained to him that “*Wanagi* is the name of ghosts. They are like shadows.

They cannot be felt but they can be seen and heard” (Walker 1991:106). Clearly the terms *naǵí* and *wanáǵi* are closely linked.

Among both historical and contemporary Lakotas there is a prevalent and sincere belief in *wanáǵipi*, spirits of the dead or the souls of humans separated from the body, commonly referred to as ghosts. Historically, Lakotas believed that ghosts had the power to make themselves visible (*thañíyyan*) to the living and could transmute or take the outer form of anything, human or other-than-human. However, they were not considered to consist of physical matter that could be touched or felt. Ghosts produced eerie, melancholy, and macabre sounds that were audible to the living, such as whistling and moaning, and were capable of communicating with the living through language, gestures, or sign language (Denig 2000:100).

As Walker’s interlocutors explain, “When one dies his spirit stays at the place where he dies for a short time, sometimes many days. But if the tipi in which he died is moved or taken down, then the spirit goes away. It may come back to another place. It sometimes comes back and foretells things which will occur. It is most likely to talk to a shaman. But it may talk to one of its kinspeople” (Walker 1991:106). Denig (2000:100) writes, “many will affirm that they have actually seen these apparitions and heard their whistlings and moanings. They are much afraid of these appearances, and under no consideration will go alone near a burial place after dark.”

Ghosts were believed to cause small misfortunes and sickness by shooting foreign objects or projectiles into the living. For instance, the expression *wanáǵi ktépi* refers to a sickness consisting of the distortion of the face to one side or a stroke, commonly referred to as Bell’s Palsy (Walker 1991:164–165). Bell’s Palsy was believed to be caused by the

sudden turning of one's head resulting from unsuspectingly catching a glimpse of a ghost. Because of these convictions feasts, prayers, and offerings were made to ghosts to appease them and keep them from disrupting life movement by causing future misfortune and sickness⁴⁹ (Denig 2000:100). According to Tyon:

Dead people exist among the tipis, the people believe; and on that account everyone is always afraid of the night. That is why the members of each household really believe these things and when they eat they always give food to the ghosts. They do it in this way. They take a little bit of food and spill it out near the fire. They say this as they do it. "Ghosts, say for me 'I will live long,'" they say. The ghosts accept it, they think. If they don't do this, the ghosts take offense, they say. [Walker 1991:164]

This belief is similar to various rituals performed in the Ghost-Keeping Ceremony (*Wanáǵi Yuhápi*) and is the origin of the contemporary custom of offering a "spirit plate" to the "ghosts" or spirits before meals, consisting of small portions of each food item being served. Ghosts were generally considered to be malevolent and dangerous to the living. They existed on a different plane or level of existence and were considered a different class of persons. If the proper mourning customs were not observed ghosts could become offended and cause sickness or death, disrupting life movement. The belief that *wanáǵipi* (spirits; commonly glossed as "ghosts") lingered near the body for a period of time was still a common belief in the 1960s and 1970s. It is connected to the idea that belief in the spirits engenders a basic system of social control. At least historically, however, the Lakotas did not believe in reincarnation, per se. Ghosts did not always cause mischief out of anger or hatred, however. Frequently, ghosts were believed to be

⁴⁹ Commenting on how the Sioux seemed to be unconcerned about an afterlife, Lynd (1889:156) writes, "they appear to be looking solely to temporal blessings."

motivated by love, affection, or kinship. They were simply lonely and wished for their loved ones and relatives to join them in the spirit world .

For instance, frequently suicides are attributed to spirits “haunting” their living relatives and convincing them to join them in death. A contemporary Lakota practitioner was confronted by his ancestors during the ordeal of the Vision Quest in the early 1970s. On the final day of his fast when he was at his weakest physically and his mind and spirit were open to communications from the spirit world⁵⁰ he was approached by his ancestors, elder Lakotas dressed in the customary style of the nineteenth century. He instinctively recognized them as his relatives, who commenced pleading with him to come join them in the spirit world. He was literally on the precipice of death, having had no food or water throughout the entire ordeal. In his retelling years later he exclaimed with emotion, “Oh, how badly I wanted to join them!” And he likely would have, succumbing to death, had it not been for his mentor’s timely arrival to take him off the hill and begin his transition back into the world of the living (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Ghost stories are a common genre of oral tradition among the Lakotas, and ghosts figure into a number of Lakota words for various place names, natural phenomena, and cultural institutions and concepts. For instance, the Milky Way is referred to as

⁵⁰ If we conceive of the *naǵi* as the ego or self, this phase of the Vision Quest, common in other ceremonies as well, may be thought of as the period in which the self is transcended or the line between conscious and unconscious blurred, during which the *naǵi* crosses the threshold into the spirit realm, enabling communication between the living and the dead and human and other-than-human spirits. A contemporary Lakota religious leader, describing the effects of fasting and the latter phases of the Sun Dance, explained that initially you look within and critically examine yourself, but that the ultimate goal is to transcend ego or self, letting go of physical suffering in an induced catharsis. He described this phase as the transition from “the red day to the blue day,” signifying spiritual transformations that occur through ritual performance. In effect, the spirits of the dancers, and Vision-Quest participants, are in the spirit realm (*uymá wičhóni* ‘other life’, ‘other world’), which is one reason why the common people and onlookers at Sun Dances are not permitted to communicate with the dancers (Posthumus 2008-2014; see also Kapferer 1979).

wanáġithāčhanġku (ghost's road), the spirit world or afterworld is referred to as *wanáġithāmakħoče* (ghost's land or country), and a common euphemism for death is *wanáġi oómani káġa* (to make the spirit journey). The Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights are referred to as *wanáġi thāwáčhipi*, literally, 'the dance of the spirits/ghosts'. As previously mentioned, the Lakota term *wanáġi* has come to be conventionally glossed as 'ghost', but in the classification presented here the interrelated terms *niyá* and *waníya* are translated as 'ghost', while the terms *naġí* and *wanáġi* are translated as 'spirit'. Our next concept, *naġíla*, thankfully is not encumbered by the same definitional confusion as *naġí* and *wanáġi*, but it is doubtful whether or not the *naġíla* was considered part of the human soul or simply an aspect of other-than-human realities.

2.3 *Naġíla* (Other-Than-Human Spirit, Spirit-like, Soul-like, Little Spirit)

At base, we may define the third aspect of Lakota conceptions of the soul, *naġíla*, as other-than-human spirit, the spirit-like or little spirit of other-than-human persons and things, or "the immaterial self of irrational [read other-than-human] things" (Walker 1991:51, 73, 94). As Walker (1991:73) explains, "The old Lakotas also believed that each thing except the *Wakan* and mankind had something like a spirit. This something they called a *nagila* (spiritish). These *nagipila* (spirits-ish) were *wakanpila* (*wakans-ish*)."⁵¹ In this sense, the *naġíla* are similar to the general category *Wakħánlapi*, in which the four entities comprising the Lakota soul are classified.

The linguistic distinction between *naġí* and *naġíla* lies in the diminutive suffix -*la*. Again, Sword provides us with invaluable linguistic data, explaining that "The word

⁵¹ Again, it is unclear whether or not the *naġíla* should be considered part of the human soul. The authorities differ on this point, which I plan to explore in greater detail in a future project.

la means a little like, but not exactly alike” (Walker 1991:97). So, according to Sword, *naǵila* means “something almost *naǵi*,” “something a little like *naǵi*,” or “something a little but not entirely *naǵi*.” Although the linguistic and semantic distinction between *naǵi* and *naǵila* appears slight, the functions and qualities of the two terms are distinct.

According to Walker:

The *Nagiya* [*sic*] is an immaterial God whose substance may at will be seen in any form it chooses to appear. As separate individuals they are the immaterial selves of material things other than mankind. A *nagiya* [*sic*] is imparted by *Skan* to each thing at its beginning, remains with it until it ceases to be, and then returns whence it came. It can be with the thing and separate from it at the same time, as for instance, when it is with the thing it may at the same time have been given in the endowment of a spirit and taken to the spirit world. It may possess any other thing; for instance, the *nagiya* [*sic*] of the wolf may possess a tree, when the tree will have the nature of a wolf; or, it may possess one of mankind, for example, the *nagiya* [*sic*] of a bear may possess a man when the man will have the nature of a bear. By proper ceremony, its potency can be imparted to inanimate things, as, the potency of the *nagiya* [*sic*] of a poison herb may be imparted to powdered clay, or, the potency of a medicinal thing may be imparted to one of mankind. A thing may be caused by its *nagiya* [*sic*] to speak or act in a supernatural manner and to communicate with mankind. [Walker 1917:87]

Sword equates the *naǵila* with another central Lakota religious concept, *thún̄* (power to do *wakǵán̄* things). He explains, “*Nagila* is the same as the *ton* of anything other than *Tob̄tob̄ Kin*. Each thing, animate or inanimate, other than *Tob̄tob̄ Kin* has a *nagi* or a *nagila*” (Walker 1991:98). So, according to Sword, *naǵila* is the same as the *thún̄* or power to do *wakǵán̄* things and cause transformations of any other being or object besides the sixteen manifestations of *Wakǵán̄ Thán̄ka*, referred to as *Tóbtob̄ Kin̄* (The Four-Times-Four) by Lakota religious practitioners.

As with *naǵípi* (spirits) in general, *naǵílapi* (other-than-human spirits) may be benevolent or malevolent; they may sustain and perpetuate life movement through strengthening the *ní* and *niyá* or they may disrupt and terminate life movement through weakening and afflicting the *ní* and *niyá*. Malevolent *naǵílapi*, the spirits of “noxious things,” are classed with the *Wakǵáŋ Šiča* (Evil *Wakǵáŋ*) and referred to as *naǵíla šiča* (evil other-than-human spirit) (Walker 1917:89; Walker 1991:94).

Amiotte’s contemporary perspective on the concept *naǵíla* is informative. According to Amiotte, the *naǵíla* is the essence of *Táku Škaŋškáŋ* (The Moving Deity) in all things, comparable to the instinctual or evolutionary impulses and drives universal to human beings. “Less personal and more magnonomous than the other souls,” explains Amiotte (1982:32), “the *Nagila* is responsible for wholeness—much like the web or sacred cord that binds and holds together all components. It is a bit of the divine essence—the mysterious force that makes all things and beings relatives to each other and to their common ancestor.” For Amiotte, it is the *naǵíla* that is the foundation for the relatedness of all beings expressed in the common Lakota ritual prayer and benediction, *mitákuye oyás’iŋ* (all my relatives/we are all related).⁵²

The *naǵíla* appears to be the essence or potency, the spiritual representation, of various things without actually being or being present in the things it represents. The *naǵíla* is akin to the underlying spiritual form, shadow, or essence of all things, yet it remains separate, in the domain of the sacred or other-than-human. For Sword, *naǵíla* is

⁵² Amiotte sees Lakota conceptions of soul as the foundation for the Lakota dream experience and relational ethos and ontology of Lakota culture. “Realizing, then, that one is more than mere physical being,” explains Amiotte (1982:32), “the possibility for interaction, transaction, and intercourse within other dimensions of time, place, and being is what the dream experience is to the Lakota: an alternative avenue to knowing.”

equivalent to the *niyá* (ghost) of animals and the smoke, steam, or underlying immaterial essence of inanimate objects, suggesting that animals (and perhaps all other-than-human persons) lack a *niyá* and that the *niyá* is an exclusively human entity.⁵³ In Sword's words, "*Nagilapi* are the *niyapi* of animals and the smoke of inanimate things. . . . The *nagi* of an animate thing is its spirit and of an inanimate thing that grows from the ground is its smoke. This is the potency of anything" (Walker 1991:98). If Walker and his interpreters understood Sword correctly in equating the human *niyá* to the other-than-human *naǵi(la)* the connection is clear: human life-breath (*niyá*) shares common features with and is semantically and symbolically analogous to the *naǵila* of inanimate objects in the form of smoke or steam. According to Sword, "the spirit of anything is released in the smoke of it. So *wosnapi* (offering to a spirit or to God) may be made by burning the thing with a ceremony making it an offering" (Walker 1991:77).

A *naǵi* (spirit) may be endowed with a *naǵila* (spirit-like) through the proper ritual channels. Offerings (*wóšnapi*) to a spirit may be made in three ways, according to Sword: "It may be abandoned in the name of the one to whom it is offered, or it may be given to one whose hands are painted red to show that they are sacred. Or it may be burned in the name of one to whom the offering is made" (Walker 1991:77). When someone offers something to a specific spirit in one of these three ways the *naǵila* (spirit-like) of the thing becomes the possession of the spirit and is taken to the spirit world and

⁵³ There appears to be a distinct connection between the physical or material properties of a person, other-than-human person, or object and its metaphysical or immaterial essence (*naǵi* and *naǵila*). Bad Heart Bull explains that the sacred Sun Dance pole must be cottonwood because the *naǵila* (spirit-like) of the cottonwood is not dense when it is dry. In consecrating the sacred tree the *naǵila* of the cottonwood is endowed with great potency, so that the *naǵila* of the tree will bring disaster upon or disrupt the life movement of anyone who profanes or desecrates it by treating it as any other ordinary tree. Through the ritual chopping of the tree from the four directions, however, the *naǵila* of the sacred cottonwood is subdued and made subservient to the people (Walker 1917:103, 106; Walker 1991:183).

enjoyed there. This is why possessions are abandoned, given away, or destroyed as part of the mourning process for deceased relatives. “If the deceased has killed an enemy and taken his scalp,” explains Walker (1917:86), “he has thereby gained control of the spirit of the enemy whose spirit cannot enter on the spirit trail until the one who controls it does so and even then it must serve the controlling spirit to the end of the trail.”

A *naǵila* can also be imparted into a *šičúŋ* (ceremonial bundle). As Walker (1917:88) explains, “A Fetish [*wašičuŋ*] whose *sicun* is a *nagila*, or spirit-like, is potent only to remedy wounds or diseases, or to impose disorders on mankind. Such a Fetish is called *piyaha*, or a medicine bag. The contents of a medicine bag may be either the material, the spirit-like of which is the potency, or material to which potency has been imparted.” The Lakota concept *šičúŋ* is extremely complex, comprised of two major senses: (1) the *šičúŋ* as a ceremonial bag or bundle, which we will refer to as the “derived *šičúŋ*”; and (2) the *šičúŋ* that is part of the soul of human beings, which we will refer to as the “given *šičúŋ*” and examine in the next section.

2.4 “Given *Šičúŋ*” and *Wašičuŋ* (Spirit Guardian, Imparted Potency of a *Wakǵáŋ*)

There are two common and interrelated meanings concerning *šičúŋpi* (*šičúŋs*): one view involves a *šičúŋ* as a physical object that has been infused with *tǵúŋ* and hence has the power to do *wakǵáŋ* things. This sense we might refer to as the “derived *šičúŋ*,” which we will examine in a later section. The other view likens the *šičúŋ* to a personal spirit guardian, which Walker (1991:93) refers to as “the familiar,” given by *Škáŋ* to each human individual at birth. This sense we might refer to as the “given *šičúŋ*,” which is commonly referred to as the “familiar,” “tutelary,” “guardian spirit,” or “spirit guardian.”

The given *šičúŋ* is reckoned as one of the four human souls. Now let us examine the concept of the given *šičúŋ* as it pertains to human beings.

Walker and his Oglala interlocutors define *šičúŋ* in a number of ways, including “guardian,” “potency,” “intellect,” and “guardian spirit” (Walker 1991:51, 72–73, 94):

The Lakota concept of *sicun* is very complex. That of the *sicun* pertaining to mankind is that it is an influence that forewarns of danger, admonishes for right against wrong, and controls others of mankind. According to their doctrine, one may acquire other *sicunpi* (*sicuns*). Their concepts relative to acquired *sicuns* are that such *sicuns* are the potencies of the *Wakan* or of a *Wakanla* imparted to inanimate substance. The spirit, the ghost and the guardian are not *wakan*.⁵⁴ But because no man can understand them, the old Lakotas call them *wakanla* (*wakan-ish*; the Lakota *la* is equivalent to the English *ish* in that it makes adjectives of nouns meaning of the nature of or a diminutive of). [Walker 1991:72–73]

Buechel, based on his reading of Walker, defines *šičúŋ* as “That in a man or thing which is spirit or spirit-like and guards him from birth against evil spirits.⁵⁵ Thereafter he may derive other *sicunpi* through the *tuŋ* of other beings, esp. animals.”

In the early nineteenth century fur trader Pierre-Antoine Tabeau wrote of a Brulé Lakota “soothsayer,” or one who practices divination, whose “familiar spirit,” likely a reference to his *šičúŋ* or *wašičuŋ*, accurately informed him of the return of a successful war party (Tabeau 1939:187). Tabeau (1939:190) also discussed the concept of a “guardian angel . . . whose power and protection work every day supposed miracles that affirm and strengthen the superstition” of the Indians of the upper Missouri River. An

⁵⁴ Why Walker says this is a mystery, because his contention here is disputed by a number of Oglalas. Finger, for instance, insists that the spirit [*naǵi*], ghost [*niyá*], and guardian [*šičúŋ*] are in fact *wakháŋ*, having no birth or death (Walker 1917:156).

⁵⁵ This is interesting in connection with the pervasive belief that *šičúŋpi* can be either benevolent or malevolent.

individual's *šičúŋ* often made him capable of miraculous and mysterious feats and even capable of predicting future events.

According to Walker:

The *Sicun* is an immaterial God whose substance is never visible. It is the potency of mankind and the emitted potency of the Gods. Considered relative to mankind It is many, but apart from mankind It is one. *Skan* imparts a *sicun* to each of mankind at birth. It remains with the person until death, when it returns whence it came. Its functions are to enable its possessor to do those things which the beasts cannot do and to give courage and fortitude. It may be pleased or displeased with its possessor and may be operative or inoperative according to its pleasure. It may be invoked by ceremony or prayer, but it cannot be imparted to any other person or thing. Most of the Gods can emit their potencies and when so emitted their potencies become *sicunpi*. Such a *sicun* can be imparted to material things by a proper ceremony correctly performed by a Shaman. [Walker 1917:87]

Finger describes the *šičúŋ* as the *thúŋ* of a *wakháŋ* given to an individual by *Škáj* at birth. It remains with the body during life to guard it from danger and help it in a *wakháŋ* or mysterious manner (Walker 1917:156). Sword provides a detailed description of the concept *šičúŋ*. Importantly, he notes that every human has one (given) *šičúŋ*, but that humans may also acquire other (derived) *šičúŋpi* throughout their lives:

The word *Sicun* is from the sacred language of the shamans. It signifies the spirit of a man. This spirit is given to him at birth to guard him against the evil spirits and at death it conducts him to the land of the spirits, but does not go there itself. In the course of his life a man may choose other *Sicun*. He may choose as many as he wishes but such *Sicun* do not accompany him after death; if he has led an evil life no *Sicun* will accompany him. . . . the *Sicun* that a man receives at birth is never found in anything but his body. This *Sicun* is like one's shadow. [Walker 1917:158]

In Sword's account we are again faced with the inadequacy of the English translations of Lakota religious concepts. In particular, the term "spirit" is problematic and could be used as a general gloss for any of the four aspects of the Lakota soul. Sword's words also indicate a clear sense of *šičúŋ* as embodied power, requiring a container or conduit.

The same issues emerge in the Oglala One Star's 1897 explanation of *šičúŋ*. As he explains, "A *Sicun* is like a spirit. It is the *ton-ton sni*, that is, it is immortal and cannot die. A Lakota may have many *Sicunpi*, but he always has one. It is *Wakan*, that is, it is like *Wakan Tanka*. It may be the spirit of anything. . . . A *Sicun* is a man's spirit. A man's real spirit [*naǵi*] is different from his *Sicun* spirit" (Walker 1917:158–159). Despite the semantic ambiguity of "spirit," One Star's account reveals the important connection between the concept of *thúŋthúŋšni* (immaterial, noncorporeal, lacking physical properties) and *šičúŋ*. In the myth called "The Feast of *Tháté* (Wind)," as told by Little Wound, we discover the origin of the formless nature of *wašičuŋpi*. Little Wound explains that at the feast of the Wind *Okáǵa* (South Wind) asked the *Wašičuŋ* "what they most desired and they said they wished to be invisible. They were made invisible, but Iktomi [the Trickster] deprived them of form or shape so that when they wished to communicate with others they had to steal the form of something else" (Walker 1917:180). *Thúŋthúŋšni* distinguishes Lakota other-than-human persons. Things belonging to that category are immortal.

Amiotte (1982:30) describes the *šičúŋ* as the "manifestation of spiritlike principle" and as an individual's personal power, reflected in one's distinctive abilities, gifts, and talents. According to Amiotte, the *šičúŋ* is a special power that all things have that can be added to, expanded, and utilized to help others and oneself and to sustain and

perpetuate life movement. When the *naǵi* of an individual leaves the body and travels to the other realm (*uŋmá wičhóni* ‘other life’), for instance in a vision or dream, it may be offered a portion of the partable *šičúŋ* or potency of an other-than-human person, along with the prescribed prayers, songs, and rituals required for its activation and utilization on earth. It is these *šičúŋpi* that are contained in *wašičúŋ* or sacred bundles, rocks, and animal parts; used in rituals and doctoring; and renewed in the Vision Quest. In this way, similar to beliefs concerning *thúŋ*, some individuals possess more *šičúŋpi* than others, and some *šičúŋpi* are inherently more powerful and potent than others (Amiotte 1982:30–32).

A *šičúŋ* (the potency of a *wakǵáŋ* other-than-human person) encountered in a dream or vision often took the form of a human or animal, because the *šičúŋ* itself is immaterial by nature, requiring a form, container, or conduit in order to manifest and interact with human beings on a phenomenological level. As the Oglala Seven Rabbits explains, “*Wasicunpi* may be seen in visions. They may be anything. They are the guardian spirits of the Lakotas” (Walker 1991:118). In some cases the term *wašičúŋ* was used generally to refer to spirit beings or other-than-human persons (Walker 1991:125). According to some interpretations these *šičúŋpi* were conceived of as dissociated spirits who were adjudged by *Škáŋ* as unworthy to go on the spirit trail after the death of the body. These spirits wandered over the world and were classed with the *Wakǵáŋ Šičá* (Malevolent *Wakǵáŋ*) (Walker 1917:86–88).

The *šičúŋ*, along with the other aspects of the human soul, was generally believed to live on after death and travel across a river, sometimes on a log, to a spirit world (usually referred to in Lakota as *wanáǵiyata* or *naǵiyata*), commonly believed to be in

either the north, beyond the pines, or, more commonly, the south (Standing Bear 2006b:197–198; Walker 1991:125). However, there was no systematized set of beliefs concerning an afterlife or afterworld. Denig (2000:104–105) writes, “Everything referring to a future state is not made the subject of their conversations, and each man’s opinions differ.” The world of the living or the here-and-now; securing future (temporal) good fortune, goodness, health, strength, purity, fertility, food, and success in it; and sustaining and perpetuating life movement were the central, driving concerns of Lakota life, not any codified beliefs in an afterworld. According to Finger, when the body (*thañčháŋ*) dies, “The spirit [*naǵí*] goes to the spirit world, the ghost [*niyá*] goes to where *Skan* got it, and the *sicun* returns to the *Wakan* it belongs to”⁵⁶ (Walker 1917:156).

2.5 Conclusions

Perhaps due to the pronounced individualistic aspect of Lakota ceremonialism noted by Feraca (1998:20), among others, accounts differ concerning the various other-than-human persons who constitute the Lakota religious landscape and their functions. Much of the inherent individualism and diversity in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lakota religion and ritual derived from the Vision Quest and was embodied in the implements, regalia, and techniques of religious practitioners.

Walker seems to use most of the terms for the human soul basically interchangeably to mean ‘spirit’, ‘potency’, or ‘immaterial self’. Perhaps all these terms

⁵⁶ In this sense each human being from birth is associated and identified with a particular other-than-human person or spirit being. It is unclear whether or not the acquired or derived *šičúŋ* tended to also be the spirit being given by *Škáŋ* to an individual at birth, effectively obtaining a physical manifestation of one’s spirit guardian in the form of a ceremonial bundle (*wašičuŋ*). In that case the human practitioner would have modeled his behavior on the *wakháŋ* beings: as *Škáŋ* bestowed an individual with a particular tutelary spirit at birth, so a practitioner bestowed an individual with a particular tutelary spirit. In any case apparently individuals were capable of acquiring multiple *šičúŋpi* throughout their lives.

can be basically glossed in English as ‘spirit’ or ‘potency’. The important distinction seems to be evident in the beliefs concerning the structure and content of each term and what each was responsible for structurally, how each functioned, and how each aspect interacted with human beings and the natural world. The following quote from Walker (1917:89) illustrates this point: *Gnaškínyan* (Crazy Buffalo) “may possess a person and if he controls the spirit [*naǵí*], the person is insane; or, if he controls the ghost [*niyá*], the person is paralyzed. He may be exorcised by the incense of sage and sweetgrass and can be controlled by the Fetish [*wašíčuŋ*] of a Shaman.”

Unpacking this passage teases out a number of significant issues, although surely Walker was interpreting his experiences and the words of his native interlocutors from his own Western cultural perspective. First of all, incensing with sage, sweetgrass, and other culturally significant herbs was akin in many ways to the Western concept of banishment or exorcism. Much Lakota ritual is concerned with purity and purification, and hence expelling or driving out evil or malevolent influences or potencies responsible for sickness, bad luck, and death are central concerns. A holy man’s *wašíčuŋ* (ceremonial bundle) was also used to exorcise evil spirits in doctoring. Second, the spirit or *naǵí* seems to be responsible for the mental faculties or psychological functioning of the mind and personality. If one’s *naǵí* is disturbed or “possessed” then he is considered insane (*witkó*) or not well mentally. The ghost or *niyá* (life, breath), on the other hand, appears to be responsible for the physical or biological faculties or the functioning and animation of the physical human body as an organic whole. As the source and cause of *ní* (life), if the *niyá* is disturbed or “possessed” by an evil spirit then the person is paralyzed or physically incapacitated in some way, incapable of locomotion.

The important semantic distinction concerns the functions and roles of the various terms. The English glosses of the terms are not at all adequate and cannot begin to describe the complexity and nuances of the Lakota spirit world. In modern English we simply lack the detailed terms required to capture the complexity and intricacies of the traditional Lakota classification of other-than-human persons. In English we use a set of generic terms (ghost, spirit, angel, demon, devil, phantom, apparition, soul, etc.), most of which have very little semantic difference. Some are considered good or bad, having to do with or relying on predominantly humans or other-than-human persons, some are considered to be more or less real, but most are considered bad, malevolent, or scary (except for the human “soul” from Judeo-Christian perspectives). Early Euro-Americans encountering the Lakotas glossed all Lakota spirit terms with the same few words, but the native system of classification was much more complex, logical, and nuanced. Each Lakota term was a symbol and a bundle of stored and coded information describing numerous details associated with each term or other-than-human category. The important distinctions differentiating Lakota spirit beings may be understood in terms of the following binary oppositions: human vs. other-than-human, benevolent vs. malevolent, material vs. immaterial, visible vs. invisible, and bounded/associated/embodied vs. unbounded/dissociated/disembodied. As we will see some of these distinctions are also relevant to a classification of nineteenth-century religious practitioners.

The inherent problems associated with translating and analyzing nineteenth-century Lakota conceptions of the human soul are formidable. However, it is encouraging when interpretations appear to work and are consistent, maintaining some semblance of

internal logic. To conclude this section the following lengthy quote by the Oglala No Flesh corroborates much of our discussion above. In 1899 No Flesh explained that:

The *Wakan* [šičúŋ] is like a spirit [naǵi]. The spirit lives forever. When a man dies, his friends should give gifts to his spirit. The spirit was not his life. His life was his ghost [niyá]. His ghost is his breath. When a man dies, his spirit stays near for a time: the like-a-spirit [naǵíla] of the gifts is pleasing to it. It takes them to the spirit land. The good spirit goes to the spirit world. The bad spirit does not go there. No man knows where the spirit world is. It is at the other end of the spirit way. The ancient people said it was beyond the pines. The pines are at the edge of the world. It is beyond the path of the winds. There is no cold or hunger or work in the spirit world. The spirit stays in the spirit world. It can come to the world. It can talk to mankind. A *wakan* man can talk with a spirit. A spirit can talk with its friends. If a spirit talks to one, that one is in danger. One who hears a spirit should ask his *Wakan* [šičúŋ] to help him. He should make gifts to the *Wakan*. He should ask a *wakan* man to help him. He should do as the *wakan* man bids him. [Walker 1991:116–117]

We have already discussed the concept of the given šičúŋ, but in the next section we will examine its counterpart, the “derived šičúŋ.”

3. “(DERIVED) *ŠIČŮD*,” *WAŠIČUD*, AND *WÓPHIYE* (CEREMONIAL BAG OR BUNDLE INFUSED WITH *WAKĤÁD* POTENCY)

In Lakota society religious practitioners wielded and controlled access to the power of *Wakĥán Tháŋka* (Great Mystery), speaking for and representing the other-than-human persons of the universe. Through the proper rituals, prayers, and songs religious practitioners could infuse a person or inanimate object with *thúŋ* (endowed mystical power or quality; power to do miraculous things; essence; potency; potentiality) or *thúŋwáŋ* (potency), rendering them powerful. Common objects infused with *thúŋ* or *thúŋwáŋ* included weapons, charms or “fetishes,”⁵⁷ and ceremonial paints. But the most important category of such objects were personal ceremonial or “medicine” bags or bundles, usually owned and carried by men in battle, and variously referred to as *šičúŋ*, *wašičuŋ*, or *wóphiye*⁵⁸ (DeMallie and Lavenda 1977:157; Walker 1991:231, 234). It is to these concepts that we turn our attention to next.

The following lengthy quote from Walker is perhaps the best discussion of the concept *šičúŋ*. Walker notes that a “given *šičúŋ*,” the spirit guardian of a human:

. . . may be invoked by ceremony or prayer, but it cannot be imparted to any other person or thing. Most of the Gods can emit their potencies and when so emitted their potencies become *sicunpi*. Such a *sicun* can be imparted to material things by a proper ceremony correctly performed by a Shaman.⁵⁹

A *sicun* so imparted must be clothed by proper wrappings about the material It pervades. The wrappings may be in the form of a pouch, bag, bundle, or any receptacle that will cover and hide the material. The

⁵⁷ A fetish is an object treated with reverence and awe believed to have great other-than-human potency and power. It is often believed to be the habitation or embodiment of an other-than-human person.

⁵⁸ In referring to a *wašičuŋ* as a “medicine” bag or bundle it must be understood that the term medicine in this sense refers to *wakĥán* potency, not herbal medicines, which would be contained in an *ožuha pĥéžúta* (literally, ‘medicine bag’). Walker (1991:37, 79–80), Sword, and others adamantly maintained this distinction.

⁵⁹ Perhaps this is the distinction between a given and a derived *šičúŋ*: a given *šičúŋ* cannot be imparted to anything else, whereas a derived *šičúŋ* can be. A derived *šičúŋ* is itself imparted from an other-than-human person.

wrapping, the material, and the *sicun*, all together make a *wasicun*. A *sicun* is operative only when It is a part of a *wasicun*. The Oglala concept of a *wasicun* is most nearly expressed in English by the word Fetish, and this word will be so used hereinafter. While a Fetish may be operative independent of the source of its potency It must be treated with the veneration due to the God that emits its *Sicun*, for in all Its properties It is as that God.⁶⁰ Thus, while the *sicun* ranks lowest among the Gods, a Fetish may have the potency of any God, except that of *Skan*, the Great Spirit, and of the Sun, the Chief of the Gods. A Fetish whose *sicun* is a *nagila*, or spirit-like, is potent only to remedy wounds or diseases, or to impose disorders on mankind. Such a Fetish is called *piyaha*,⁶¹ or a medicine bag. The contents of a medicine bag may be either the material, the spirit-like of which is the potency, or material to which potency has been imparted.

Any Oglala who is eligible for conducting a ceremony may choose and have a Shaman prepare for him a Fetish whose potency is commensurable with the ceremonies he may perform. As only Shamans should undertake to conduct ceremonies that pertain to the Superior Gods, so should they only choose Fetishes having the higher potencies. If the potency of any God abides in anything that thing should be the material enclosed in the wrapping of the Fetish pertaining to that God.⁶² As the potency of the Sun abides in fire and cannot be imparted to any other thing and as fire cannot be clothed with wrappings, a Fetish having the potency of the Sun cannot be prepared. As the Great Spirit is the source of all power, a Fetish having His potency is not permissible to mankind. The functions of a Fetish are to serve Its possessor with Its supernatural powers which are effective when properly invoked. When preparing a Fetish, the Shaman devises a formula which must be repeated to invoke Its powers. [Walker 1917:87–88]

The *šičúŋ*—referred to as *wašičúŋ* once it has been encased in a container of some kind—was arguably the most prized and sacred possession of a Lakota male. Walker

⁶⁰ According to Fletcher (1884c:290 n 3), “It is significant that in the Dakota, Omaha, as well as other tongues, the stones used in sacred ceremonies, the down, red ochre, etc., are classed as animate substances, being thus raised by their importance in religious rites out of the inanimate gender to the animate, thereby indicating an interesting step towards anthropomorphism.” This is certainly applicable to a *wašičúŋ* or *wóphiye*.

⁶¹ This term may be an invention by Walker. It clearly should be *waphíyaha* (*waphíya* + *ožúha* or *há*), indicating the skin or outer casing of a ceremonial bundle. The term is rather redundant. Walker uses it again in a translation of Sword’s words, referring to the medicine bag as a “container for renewing” (*phiyáha*) (Walker 1917:88).

⁶² Again, we see the tendency for ritual symbols to unite disparate elements, the referents clustering around opposite semantic poles. In this case the *wašičúŋ* or *wóphiye* symbolically fuses biological or organic associations and facts with social, mythological, and religious ones. Further, each spirit being comprising *Wakháŋ Tháŋka* is associated with a particular color and cardinal direction.

defines the derived *šičúŋ* as “a ceremonial bundle regarded as a fetish” (Walker 1991:49). It was considered divine, characterized by potentiality, and capable of (producing) transformations. A *wašičuŋ* was a personal and physical manifestation of *wakḥáŋ* power gifted from the spirits and ritually sealed and infused with power to protect individuals from future danger and hardship, to give advice, strength, power, and luck in all endeavors, to sustain and perpetuate life movement, and to guide an individual to the spirit world after death.

Religious practitioners oversaw the process of acquiring *šičúŋpi* for the common people. In 1897 the Oglala One Star discussed the complex concept of *šičúŋ* with Walker: “It is *Wakan*, that is, it is like *Wakan Tanka*. It may be the spirit of anything. A Shaman puts the spirit in a *sicun*. The Bear taught the shamans how to do this. A Lakota should know the songs and if he sings them his *sicun* will do as he wishes” (Walker 1917:158–159). As Sword explains:

A shaman should direct a person in the choice of his *Sicun*. When the Lakota chooses a *Sicun* such is the *Ton* of a *Wakan* or it may be the *Ton* of anything. When one chooses a *Sicun* he should give a feast and have a shaman to conduct the ceremony, for no one can have the knowledge necessary to conduct his own ceremony unless he has learned it in a vision. One’s *Sicun* may be in any object as in a weapon or even in things to gamble with or in a medicine. [Walker 1917:158]

The casing or container of a *wašičuŋ*, usually a bag or wrapping made of animal hide, is referred to as *wóphiye*.

In 1905 Sword, Bad Wound, No Flesh, and Tyon explained to Walker (1991:95–96) that “A shaman must impart a *ton* with the right ceremony done in the right manner. . . . When a shaman imparts a *ton* to anything the thing is made a *sicun*. A *sicun* is like the

God.” Once something is infused with *tǎ́ŋ* or *tǎ́ŋwáŋ* it is capable of or has the power to do *wakǎ́ŋ* things. Once a shaman has imparted *tǎ́ŋ* into an object, and it is thus a *šičúŋ*, then, according to Walker’s interlocutors, “A shaman must put the container on a *sicun* and this makes it a *wasicun*. . . . A God may tell anyone in a vision how to make a *wasicun*. This is the way the medicine men learn how to make their medicines” (Walker 1991:96). Careful, meticulous, and rule-governed ritual performance was essential to properly securing a derived *šičúŋ*. As Sword explains, “The term *Wasicun* is applied to any object used as a *Sicun* or it may represent anything which is *Wakan*. If a ceremony by which one gets a *Wasicun* is performed in the most acceptable manner that *Wasicun* will be the same in essence as the *Wakan* thing it represents. . . . Then that *Sicun* must do as it is directed to do by the one who chooses it; but the chooser must know the songs that belong to it” (Walker 1917:158). Once a *šičúŋ* is secured and invoked properly it must do the bidding of its keeper, a common cross-cultural theme in shamanistic practice.

In his treatment of the sick a religious practitioner utilized his personal ceremonial bundle, containing the *šičúŋ* (spiritual essence) of his “familiar” or spirit guardian and attained usually through the Vision Quest. A man’s ceremonial bundle was often referred to simply as his “medicine,” a term that has become largely synonymous with *wakǎ́ŋ*. A ceremonial bag might contain sacred tobacco and other consecrated paraphernalia and was often made of the intact skin of a bird or animal from a vision encounter and decorated with down and symbolic designs⁶³ (Deloria n.d.:24–25). According to

⁶³ Again, the distinction between a ceremonial bag and a medicine bag is crucial. According to Sword, “A Shaman’s *Wakan* bag is his *Sicun* and all *Sicun* are considered *Wakan*. A doctor’s medicine is his *Sicun* and the implements used by a shaman in any ceremony are the *Sicun* of that shaman. Implements that are in such *Sicun* will not be appropriate in a ceremony. A person may lend his *Sicun* to another” (Walker 1917:158). The crucial distinctions are between *pǎ́žúta* ([herbal] medicine) and *wakǎ́ŋ* (mystery, power; [mystico-spiritual] medicine), on the one hand, and *pǎ́žúta wičháša* (medicine man, herbalist) and *wičháša wakǎ́ŋ* (holy man, shaman), on the other. But if we conceive of medicine broadly as anything used to treat

Walker's (1991:105) interlocutors, "The medicine sack was *wakan*. It could be prepared by a shaman only. Its colors were *wakan* and so were its decorations. But the medicines were what the person had been instructed how to use in his vision." These sacred charms or collections of sanctified, vision-inspired objects—sometimes referred to in the literature as "fetishes" or "amulets"—are called *wašičuŋ* (sacred bundles) in Lakota. The *thúŋ* (power to do supernatural things) and *šičúŋ* (spiritual potency or essence) of specific other-than-human persons was imparted to sacred bundles (Walker 1991:91–95). For instance, during the *Huŋká* (Making of Relatives) Ceremony the presiding religious practitioner gave a consecrated sacred bundle to the *Huŋká* candidate, saying, "My grandson, I have made a charm. I will give it to you. If you will listen to its *ton*, it will be this way with you. This is the Bear's charm. He told me how to make it" (Walker 1991:231).

Each *wašičuŋ* came with its own specific ritual formulae, prayers, and songs, and, if invoked properly, the *šičúŋ* within the bundle would do the holy man's bidding⁶⁴ (Walker 1991:91–95). Without repeating the formulae and prayers and singing the correct songs in the proper, prescribed manner the bundle would be ineffective and its owner inefficacious. Worse yet, breaches of ritual prescriptions, proscriptions, and taboos associated with sacred bundles were believed to bring disaster upon the practitioner and his family, disrupting life movement. Walker recalls the instructions he received concerning his Buffalo ceremonial bundle: "its potency could be made effective only by

or cure sickness, and if we conceptualize sickness in terms of both physiology and psychology, then the general term medicine may be applied to a broad range of phenomena. We will develop this insight in more detail later.

⁶⁴ Today, when an individual receives a "medicine," bag or bundle, it is usually accompanied by a specific ritual song but no longer requires specific prayers or incantations (Posthumus 2008-2014).

my repeating the formula that was taught to me; and . . . if I failed to give to my *sicun* the reverential care due it, its potency would bring upon me disaster of some kind” (Walker 1991:49).

A Yankton man named Standing Bull told Deloria that:

. . . the old medicine men used medicine bundles . . . made according to a dream or some vision from which they learned how to use them, as a means of localizing the Power. But they derived their power directly from the unseen powers, not from tangible things.⁶⁵ The pebbles were material, distinctly so, and they came and went at will, were even taken up and passed around, one of my stories says; but they again became volatile, as it were, and vanished into thin air when their tasks were done, or when they were offended.⁶⁶ [Deloria n.d.:21]

As Deloria’s Santee Sioux interlocutor Starr Frazier explains, among the Santees, “each owner of a bundle, and each custodian of certain medicines, kept the bundle at home in some holy place; and such a place was consecrated by the presence, so that all inmates of such a tipi, containing a medicine bundle, had to conduct themselves after a plan” (Deloria n.d.:9). This reverence reflected the belief that the bundle was symbolically and mystically equated with the spirit it represented. A warrior might attach his sacred bundle, if he had one, to his *wahúkĥeza* (war standard, lance, spear) (Deloria n.d.:16). A ceremonial bundle consecrated specifically for war is called a *wóthawe*.

A sacred bundle was imbued with *wakháŋ* power and symbolic of a particular other-than-human person. Walker’s (1991:95) Oglala interlocutors equate such bundles

⁶⁵ The distinction between the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, *thúŋthunyan* and *thúŋthunšniyan* is significant.

⁶⁶ Standing Bull is referring to *yuwípi* stones or *thunkáŋ*. See Densmore (2001:205–211, 244–247); Dorsey (1894:447–449); and Walker (1991:60–61, 72, 112, 153–155). The belief that other-than-human persons, very much like human beings, could be offended was pervasive among nineteenth-century Lakotas.

with the spirit being it symbolized, explaining, “It is a God. . . . The *wasicun* is like the God whose power it has.” A *wašičuŋ* may be benevolent or malevolent, a reflection of the other-than-human person it symbolizes and embodies. Therefore a practitioner’s *wašičuŋ* was feared as well as respected (Walker 1991:187). According to Sword, “An evil man cannot secure a good *Sicun*, but may secure an evil one” (Walker 1917:158).

In 1901 Sword explained that a *wašičuŋ*:

. . . does not have medicines in it. It has a mystery in it and this mystery makes the bag very potent. It has all the potency of the mystery. The holy man invokes his ceremonial bundle or bag. It may be like a bag or it may be like a bundle. Or it may be anything that is revealed to him in a vision. This bag is prepared with much ceremony by other holy men and the thing in it is made holy by ceremony. It may represent the Bear or the Buffalo, or the *wakan* of the sky, or anything. Then it is like a part of himself. It is like his ghost only it has more power than a man’s ghost has.

The holy man prays to his ceremonial bag. He must know the song that belongs to it and the right words to say in praying to it. Then when he sings this song and says these words, the bag will do as he bids. It is not the bag which does this but that which is in the bag. This is called *sicun* in Lakota. The bag is called *wasicun*. A holy man does not give medicine to the sick unless he is a medicine man also. If he is a medicine man, he may give medicines and invoke his ceremonial bag also, and the bag will compel the medicine to do as he wishes it.⁶⁷ [Walker 1991:92]

The significance of ceremonial bundles cannot be overestimated: they were literally bundles or complexes of ritual and historical knowledge and power, serving as a form of religious and magico-ritual social control. Sacred bundles contained ritual implements and paraphernalia, as well as mythology and deeply rooted religious symbolism transmitted orally and through practice as the specific rituals and beliefs associated with a particular bundle were taught, performed, and passed down from old to

⁶⁷ Later Sword clarifies that “When the holy man treats the sick, he performs a ceremony and invokes his ceremonial bag and the familiar (*sicun*) in it does what he asks it to do” (Walker 1991:93).

young. Particular bundles were associated with certain families or rituals. Customarily bundles were ritually and physically renewed annually or at regular intervals and either passed on to the next generation or buried with their owners.

Occasionally a practitioner ritually unwrapped his sacred bundle in the presence of the people, if it was a bundle of collective significance and not a personal bundle. He would invite the people to a grand feast, ceremoniously and reverently unwrap the bundle, publicly display its contents, and repeat the teachings associated with the bundle so the people might learn them (Deloria n.d.:52). The Buffalo Calf Pipe, the most sacred religious object and symbol among the Lakotas, has been only infrequently unwrapped in the presence of the people since the early reservation period, due to a number of issues, not least of which was the persecution of Lakota religion and religious leaders by government officials and Indian agents and the ban on traditional religion beginning in 1882.⁶⁸

In the 1830s Catlin recognized the significance of the concept of the “mystery” bag, writing (1973:1:36), “it may be said to be the key to Indian life and Indian character.” Denig (2000:101) writes that “Faith in amulets and charms” was general and widespread among the Lakotas and other tribes of the upper Missouri River in the mid-nineteenth century:

Although the Great Spirit is all powerful, yet His will is uncertain; He is invisible and only manifests His power in extraordinary circumstances. The want of a tangible medium is felt, therefore, through which they can offer their prayers to all ghosts, lesser influences of evil, which overrule their ordinary occupations. Each Indian selects some object for this purpose and calls it his medicine, which is invested with a sacred character

⁶⁸ For more information on the Buffalo Calf Pipe, see Looking Horse (in DeMallie and Parks 1987:67–73), Riegert (1975), Smith (1964, 1970, 1994), and Thomas (1941).

by the care with which it is guarded and the prayers, invocations, etc., made through it as a medium. [Denig 2000:101]

The *šičún* is usually inspired by a dream or vision or memorializing some important incident or event. It could be constructed of nearly anything prescribed in a vision, including animal or bird skins, wood, stone, beads, drawings, images, effigies, bullets, or arrowheads. As Denig (2000:101) notes, potentiality was an important symbol in the construction of a sacred bundle: “anything resembling animate, inanimate, or imaginative creation, is selected according to the superstitious fancy of the individual.” Discussing the symbolism applied to ceremonial bundles, One Star explains:

A medicineman knows the songs of his medicines and they are his *Sicun*. The *Sicun* that has the power of the spirit should be colored. Red is the color of the sun; blue, the color of the moving spirit; green the color of the spirit of the earth; and yellow is the color of the spirit of the rock. These colors are also for other spirits. Blue is the color of the wind; red is the color of all spirits. The colors are the same for the friends of the Great Spirits. Black is the color of the bad spirits. A man who paints red is pleasing to the spirits. [Walker 1917:159]

Denig underscores the importance of creative energy or power and its connection to life or breath (*ní*) in the symbolic constitution of an individual’s *šičún* and the role of the sacred bundle as an intermediary between the human and the other-than-human realms. As an extended side note I will discuss a significant, prominent, and likely very ancient Lakota religious concept or category, namely, the intermediary in religious and magico-ritual contexts and discourse.⁶⁹ The concept of the intermediary as a mediating

⁶⁹ The Lakota religious concept of the intermediary allowed certain Jesuit priests in the 1960s and 1970s to make symbolic identifications between the Pipe and Christ, an interpretation referred to broadly as Fulfillment Theology. See Steinmetz (1990) and Stoltzman (1995).

hinge between binary oppositions is intrinsically tied to the all-important concept of kinship, and likely originated to some degree around conceptions of the Four Winds or Four Directions, one of the most ancient, significant, and prominent Lakota religious symbols. The Four Winds were perhaps the original intermediaries between human and other-than-human persons: they carried the propitiatory incense (potency in the form of smoke) of the pipe, sweetgrass, sage, cedar, and other ritually significant herbs, along with the voiced prayers of the people, to the spirits. Walker writes that the ritual appellation of the Four Winds was the “sacred brothers,” a reference to both Lakota myth and kinship in which the Four Winds were conceived of as brothers who created the four cardinal directions and hence the world (Walker 1917:133; Walker 2006).

Apparently the concept of the intermediary was in many ways born from the traditional virtue of humility and piety: Lakota people dared not approach *Wakháŋ* *Thánka* or *Wí* (Sun) directly except in cases of extreme need or danger. In most cases the most powerful spirits of Lakota religious belief were approached or propitiated only through the medium of intermediaries, often in the form of lesser spirits or culturally established *akíçhita* (messengers, soldiers) of the high spirits (Dorsey 1894:373). This point is illustrated by Walker’s description of a practitioner greeting the *áŋpao* (red aurora or morning star), forerunner of the sun, at the commencement of the Buffalo Sing Ceremony. He addresses the morning star as a friend, saying (Walker 1917:144), “*Anpeo*,⁷⁰ I am your friend. I have prepared the red paint you like best. I have mixed it with marrow fat. Tell this to *Wí* that He may be pleased. Give your potency to this paint.”

⁷⁰ This term is perhaps another Walker invention. In Santee, the form is *áŋpao*. In Lakota, it is *áŋpó*.

Only after this first propitiation and offering does the practitioner address *Wí* directly as Grandfather.

In the mid-nineteenth century Denig wrote:

Great evil or great good is evaded or invoked from the Great Spirit through great apparent mediums, as the Sun and Thunder. Smaller evils and smaller benefits are averted or sought through the medium of charms which though not intrinsically of any virtue, yet benefits are the consequences attending on their prayers through them, their character being rendered sacred by constant care, and the importance of their position as mediums of worship. [Denig 2000:104]

Denig argues that all religious symbols and objects were actually considered to be merely reflections of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka* and not propitiated in their own right.

In 1889 James W. Lynd wrote of the Eastern Sioux:

Frequently the devout Dakota will make images of bark or stone, and, after painting them in various ways and putting sacred down upon them, will fall down in worship before them, praying that all danger may be averted from him and his. It must not be understood, however, that the Dakota is an idolater. It is not the *image* that he worships, any more than it is the *cross* which is worshipped by Catholics, but the *spiritual essence* which is represented by that image, and which is supposed to be ever near it. The essentially physical cast of the Indian mind (if I may be allowed the expression) requires some outward and tangible representation of things spiritual, before he can comprehend them. The God must be present, by image or in person, ere he can offer up his devotions. [Lynd 1889:154]

Fletcher concurs, observing in 1881-1882 that the Oglalas did not appear to actually worship the:

. . . objects which are set up or mentioned by him in his ceremonies. The earth, the four winds, the sun, moon and stars, the stones, the water, the

various animals, are all exponents of a mysterious life and power encompassing the Indian and filling him with vague apprehension and desire to propitiate and induce to friendly relations. The latter is attempted not so much through the ideas of sacrifice as through more or less ceremonial appeals. More faith is put in ritual and a careful observance of forms than in any act of self-denial in its moral sense, as we understand it. The claim of relationship is used to strengthen the appeal, since the tie of kindred among the Indians is one which cannot be ignored or disregarded, the terms grandfather and grandmother being most general and implying dependence, respect and the recognition of authority. [Fletcher 1884b:276 n 1]

Fletcher highlights a number of significant themes in the quote above: (1) she outlines a variety of core Lakota religious symbols; (2) she discusses how the *wakǵáŋ* or “mysterious life and power” filled the Lakotas with a sense of apprehension and a desire to propitiate the spirits; (3) she recognizes the crucial link between *ní* (life) and *wakǵáŋ* (sacred power or potentiality); (4) she draws a connection between kinship and religion, realizing that kinship terms (grandfather and grandmother) are always associated with sets of culturally established behavioral patterns for interaction; and (5) she underscores the centrality of performing ritual acts in the exact manner in which they are prescribed.

Fletcher (1884b:276 n 1) concludes that Oglala religious and magico-ritual objects and paraphernalia cannot accurately be called “objects of worship, or symbols; they appear to be more like media of communication with the permeating occult force which is vaguely and fearfully apprehended. As a consequence, the Indian stands abreast with nature. . . . He appeals to it, but does not worship it.” Fletcher’s “occult force” is clearly the *wakǵáŋ*. In the sense that ritual objects represent other-than-human persons and are used as intermediaries between humans and spirits, akin to antennae for connecting with or tapping into the underlying *wakǵáŋ* spiritual force animating the universe, power is believed to reside in objects themselves. They are more than mere

symbols. Objects are symbolic of the other-than-human persons they represent and from whom they receive their potency through the proper ritual channels. They are also symbolic of the relationship between those spirit powers and humans.

The concept of worship in the Western, Christian sense does not really apply to pre- and early reservation period Lakota belief and ritual. It is a later development and a Christian influence that is prevalent today but not likely an aboriginal religious category. Many early ethnographers attempted to characterize American Indian religion in Christian terms familiar to them such as worship, but these concepts simply do not fit the data. As Walker (1917:56) suggests, “The Oglala did not worship their deities and their ceremonials were not devotional. They considered their Gods as merely superhuman, whose aid could be invoked, or who could be pleased so that they would grant favors, or who could be displeased so that they would punish.”

Undoubtedly many contemporary Lakotas perceive their religious practices as a form of worship, based on Christian religious conceptions, discourse, and categories, praising a deity in the same way one might praise the Christian God in a Catholic or Episcopal religious service. But clearly nineteenth-century Lakotas did not understand their religious and magico-ritual doings as worship. Rather, it was more in the form of appeals, apologies, and propitiations, usually directed at named, specific other-than-human persons for the purpose of gaining favor and power or deflecting disfavor; for sustaining and perpetuating life movement and averting its disruption and termination. Nineteenth-century Lakota religion and ritual were obligatory, practiced to avert disaster, not to praise or worship for the sake of praise or worship.

Sword claims that the *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* was considered and therefore treated “as a god”⁷¹ (Walker 1991:80, 95); as being imbued with the same qualitative *wakḥáŋ* potency or *thúŋ* as the other-than-human person from whence it came, and hence considered as equal to that being. Apparently this interpretation was general among nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lakotas, possibly part of the supposed secret knowledge of the shamans unknown to the common people. In any case a contemporary Oglala practitioner explained to me that today a *wóphiye* is revered and conceived of as a representation of a spirit being, not the spirit being itself (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Many examples of the pervasive intermediary model are evident in Lakota religious belief and ritual practice on various levels. For instance, as previously mentioned, White Buffalo Woman came to the Lakota people as an intermediary between *Wakḥáŋ Tháŋka* and humankind.⁷² She gave the Sacred Pipe to the people, which serves as an intermediary as well, the smoke of the pipe being the intermediary between the people and the spirits, carrying their prayers to the other-than-human realm. An individual’s *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* was conceived of as an intermediary through which a person could pray to and communicate with the spirits (Denig 2000:102–103). Religious practitioners, particularly *wičháša wakḥáŋ* (holy men), could be thought of as earthly, human intermediaries between the common people and the *wakḥáŋ* beings of the universe, communicating with them and interpreting their messages for the people. As

⁷¹ Here Walker means a spirit or something *wakḥáŋ*.

⁷² Perhaps White Buffalo Woman originally provided the model of not only the intermediary but also the method by which religious knowledge is passed on and practitioners trained, namely, the master-apprentice model. According to Edward Curtis (1908:56–60), White Buffalo Woman instructed *Thátháŋka Nážiŋ* (Standing Buffalo) on both the Sacred Pipe and the ceremonies, who then passed that knowledge down to the next generation. In any case whether the original model was provided by the symbol of the Four Winds or White Buffalo Woman, the religious concept of the intermediary is ancient, significant, and pervasive.

Sword, Bad Wound, No Flesh, and Tyon told Walker, “A *wicasa wakan* (holy man or shaman) represents *Wakan Tanka* and speaks for him” (Walker 1991:94).

Elaborating on the theme of religious leaders as intermediaries Wallace (2003:21) suggests, “as God is to the prophet, so (almost) is the prophet to his followers. . . . he is regarded as an uncanny person, of unquestionable authority in one or more spheres of leadership, sanctioned by the supernatural.” In Weber’s terms practitioners had an undeniable charisma, moral ascendancy, and fascinating personal power attributed to other-than-human sources and validated by successful performance. In other words practitioners exuded *wakḥáŋ* potency and could be considered deities on earth; actual earthly manifestations of other-than-human power in the same sense that a *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* was revered as a medium and wellspring of *wakḥáŋ*. There seems to be little significant difference between reverencing (fearing and respecting) someone or something as a representation or manifestation of spiritual power or as the actual power itself (see also Walker 1991:94, 111). It is a circular argument.

Clearly the social structure or patterns of secular interaction between common people and religious leaders is the same as that between other-than-human persons and humans in general: the spirits are the model of and model for the relationship between themselves and humans and between practitioners and common people on earth. These qualities are ascribed by individuals and groups and are therefore qualities of the relationship between social groups. Wallace (2003:25) makes a useful and relevant analytic distinction between secular action (“the manipulation of human relationships”) and religious action (“the manipulation of relationships between human and supernatural beings”). The concept of the intermediary applies to both conceptions of the *wašičuŋ* and

religious practitioners, in that they were the intermediaries between humans and the other-than-human persons in the universe. This connection will be developed in greater detail in the section on nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists. Getting back to the topic at hand, we must finish examining the core concepts of pre- and early reservation period Lakota religion, returning to the topic of *šičúŋ*.

Nicollet provides two early definitions of the term *wašičuŋ*: “Spirit of the second order, subordinate, envoy, angel of *Wakan* [*sacred*]”⁷³ (Bray and Bray 1976:266) and “true correspondent to *Manida* [*Manitou*], spirit. They are in the air, in the waters, in the woods, etc” (Bray and Bray 1976:268). Accompanied by the appropriate ceremony the *šičúŋ*, along with some tobacco and perhaps a lock of hair of a deceased relative, was wrapped in several layers of hide or cloth and placed in a sack or pouch that was painted and decorated according to one’s vision (Denig 2000:101, 104).

Catlin (1973:1:36) describes the ceremonial bag as an individual’s “supernatural charm or guardian, to which he looks for the preservation of his life, in battle or in other danger; at which times it would be considered ominous of bad luck and an ill fate to be without it.” It was considered a priceless gift from *Wakǎ́ŋ Tǎ́ŋka* and carried for good luck, power in battle, and was buried with an individual at death to guide him to the spirit world (Catlin 1973:1:37). Catlin explains:

. . . every Indian . . . carries his medicine-bag in some form or other, to which he pays the greatest homage, and to which he looks for safety and protection through life . . . it would seem in some instances, as if he actually worshipped it. Feasts are often made, and dogs and horses sacrificed, to a man’s medicine; and days, and even weeks, of fasting and

⁷³ In this sense the difference between a spirit and *šičúŋ* is similar to that between *tǎ́ŋ* and *tǎ́ŋwáŋ*, as explained to me by Richard Two Dogs.

penance of various kinds are often suffered, to appease his medicine, which he imagines he has in some way offended. [Catlin 1973:1:36]

Denig explains further:

This sack is never opened in the presence of anyone unless the Indian falls sick, when he has it taken out and placed at his head. Ordinarily this object is taken out in secret, and prayers and invocations made through it as a medium to the spirits he wishes to propitiate. They are aware that the object has no intrinsic power, but its virtue lies in their faith of their ceremonies, as exhibited through this charm as a visible medium to the supernatural. [Denig 2000:101]

An individual would consider his personal “medicine” (read *wakǰáŋ* power) to be strong and good as long as he was successful and not hounded by misfortune and sickness, or as long as life movement proceeded relatively unabated. If the effectiveness or power of one’s *wašičuŋ* was believed to be decreasing or failing it could be renewed through the Vision Quest or other rituals. Otherwise a failing sacred bundle could be abandoned and another one secured and used as a replacement (Denig 2000:101–102). Efficacy was the tangible proof of other-than-human *wakǰáŋ* power and potency. When an individual died his *wašičuŋ* was customarily buried with him or placed next to him on a burial scaffold (Denig 2000:104).

Fletcher references a *wašičuŋ*, or personal “medicine” (bundle), among the Hunkpapa Lakotas in 1894. She writes of a “personal pack” in which was stored a “man’s best clothing, pipe and tobacco bag, the ornaments he wears on his head, and the animal skin which is the religious symbol of his vision. The articles contained in this pack were said to be worn on such occasions as ‘when many people come together, to dance and pray and hold up the pipes’” (Fletcher 1884a:273). Those articles were likely used on

special ceremonial occasions when an individual formally and ritually presents himself to the people and other-than-human persons, a concept referred to in Lakota as *ša'íc'iya*.

The *wašičuŋ*, in this case, explains Fletcher, is the “skin of the animal of the kind seen in a vision, and which is the visible form of the answer to the religious appeal made to the supernatural powers, is always counted as one of the most, if not the most, sacred, of personal articles. It is only worn upon occasions of solemnity or great danger, as in war, or cases of necessity, as when searching for game in time of scarcity” (Fletcher 1884a:273 n 18).

The following lengthy quote from Sword in 1896 illustrates the distinctions referenced above, as well as other significant beliefs pertaining to the *wašičuŋ* and aspects of Oglala ceremonialism generally:

Wicasa wakan (holy man, or shaman) is made by other shamans by ceremony and teaching that which a shaman should know. He is made holy by the ceremony so that he can communicate with *Wakan Tanka*, and the ceremony also prepares his outfit and gives to it supernatural powers. This outfit may be anything that has a spirit imparted to it so that it will have all the powers of the spirit and all that are used to cover and keep it in. This outfit is his *wasicun* (ceremonial implement) and it is very holy, and should be considered as a God.⁷⁴ It must be prayed [over] for its power. . . .

There are many diseases that only a shaman can cure. He does this with his *wasicun* and not with medicines.

The common people of the Lakotas call that which is the wrapping of a *wasicun*, *wopiye*. Most of the interpreters interpret this *wopiye* as

⁷⁴ Denig differs with Sword on this point. “They do not believe in the virtue of the material of which they are made,” Denig writes, “nor do they ascribe to them an immaterial spirit, but the mind by viewing them has a resting point, a something to address in form, not for great protection and aid, but for daily favors, and averting of smaller evils” (Denig 2000:103). Denig highlights the common Lakota religious category of the intermediary in connection to beliefs concerning *wašičuŋ*, claiming they are conceived of and valued on account of their intermediary status as a channel between other-than-human and human persons. On these grounds he denies that the upper Missouri River tribes were classical idolaters.

medicine bag.⁷⁵ That is wrong, for the word neither means a bag nor medicine. It means a thing to do good with. A good interpretation would be that it is the thing of power.

Ozuha pejuta is a medicine bag. *Ozuha* means a bag, and *pejuta* means a medicine. *Ozuha pejuta* means simply a bag to keep medicines in. It is the same as any other bag, and it has no more power than a bag to keep corn in.

Often when a shaman is performing a ceremony with his *wasicun* the interpreters say he is a medicine man making medicine. This is very foolish. It is the same as if when the minister is giving communion it was said he is a physician making medicine for the communicants. [Walker 1991:79–80]

For Sword, the important characteristics of a *wašičuŋ* are that it has *wakḥán* powers, it has the essence (*thúŋ*) of an other-than-human person imparted to it and therefore has the powers and abilities of that particular spirit, it must be prayed over to invoke its power, it is holy and mysterious, and it is considered and revered as a deity.

Walker translates *wašičuŋ* generally as ‘ceremonial implement’ or ‘fetish’. He writes (1991:224), “A shaman’s fetish is a material that has a supernatural potency imparted to it and the bag or wrappings about it. By proper invocation, the potency of the fetish may be exercised as the shaman wills. The fetish has been called a medicine bag, which is a misnomer as it has nothing to do with medicines.” Catlin (1973:1:36) also recognized the distinction, noting that a *wašičuŋ* rarely contains “drugs or medicines” and is “religiously closed and sealed, and seldom, if ever, to be opened.” The fact that a ceremonial bundle contained no herbal medicines, differentiating it from a medicine bundle, is a distinction that will take on greater significance in our discussion of practitioner categories.

⁷⁵ Among contemporary Oglalas the semantic distinction between the *wóphiye* as the outer casing or wrapping of a ceremonial bundle and the *wašičuŋ* as the entire bundle, including its contents and potency, has blurred. Today these two concepts are largely synonymous.

In 1905 Sword, Bad Wound, No Flesh, and Tyon explained to Walker that:

A shaman must always have his *wasicun* and must always use it in a ceremony. It is a God. . . . The *wasicun* is like the God whose power it has. . . . If one dances the Sun Dance to become a shaman he must understand all these things. . . . A shaman has his songs and his formulae. He has a song and formula for each God. Other shamans may have different songs and formulae for the same Gods. . . . These songs and formulae are in the speech of the shamans. . . . When a shaman prays, he first sings his song or he repeats his formula and then he tells the God what he wishes. . . . Then he tells the people what the God wishes. . . . Maybe he will pray to his *wasicun* and tell it what he wishes. . . . He must pray to his *wasicun* in the same manner as he prays to a God. [Walker 1991:95]

Some *šičúŋ* are more potent and powerful than others, considered to be directly correlated to their source *tšúŋ*. Walker's interlocutors insist that:

The *ton* of *Skan* is the most powerful and it can be imparted only by very wise shamans and with a great deal of ceremony. No one but a very wise shaman should have a *sicun* with the *ton* of *Skan*. . . . Anyone may invoke his *wasicun* by repeating the correct formula or singing the right song. . . . When one invokes his *wasicun*, it will do as he wishes. . . . A *wasicun* can do only what the God can do. . . . A more powerful *wasicun* will prevail against a less powerful. [Walker 1991:95–96]

Šičúŋpi are personified in the sense that they are derived from particular other-than-human persons, such as the various powers that comprise *Wakháŋ Tšáŋka*, animal spirits, and the spirits [*naǵílapi*] of various plants and herbs. They are like microcosmic symbolic representations or manifestations of individual spirits, some being more potent and powerful than others, based on the *tšúŋ* imparted to a derived *šičúŋ* at the time of its conception and consecration. There is differential or hierarchical qualitative power from

one bundle to the next, mirroring and correlated to the power of the other-than-human person the bundle represents and embodies.

The idea that various other-than-human persons, *thúŋ*, *šičúŋ*, and *wašičuŋ* wield differential amounts of power to act (or potentiality to produce transformations) is reiterated by Sword (in Walker 1991:90): “Some pipes are considered much more efficacious than others and an ancient pipe is held in peculiar veneration.” This fits well with the general conception among Oglalas that what is the most traditional, authentic, and powerful is ancient and contiguous with cultural perceptions of the past (see DeMallie 1991; Feraca 1998:xi–xii). Evidently this also holds true for individuals. As Sword (in Walker 1991:80) explains, “The oldest or wisest shamans are the most respected. A shaman should conduct the larger ceremonies, but anyone may perform the smaller.”

Although the semantic distinction between *wašičuŋ* and *wóphiye* has apparently dissolved over time, it appears to have been general knowledge among Sword and other Lakotas of his generation. Red Cloud, Meat, and No Flesh discussed the *wóphiye* with Walker, divulging some significant data and shedding additional light on the topic:

The medicine bag of the Lakota is called *wopiye*. It is *wakan*. The shaman makes it *wakan*. *Skanskan* taught the Lakotas about the *wopiye*. It is the place where good is. It should not be handled in a disrespectful way. If it is not kept as it should be, the *sicun* will bring disaster.

Wopiyepi should be given in the *Wacipi Wakan*. They should be made of something dreamed of. Medicine may be kept in them. *Wasicunpi* should remain in them.

A man can give his medicine bag to another. He can not give his medicines away. When the bag is given, the *sicunpi* go out of it. A medicine bag is not good for anyone except the one who has dreamed.

A medicine bag may be very large or it may be very small or it may be of any size to suit the one who has it. It must be like the dream.

Gnaska and *Gicila* fly from a medicine bag. Two-Faces flies from a medicine bag. *Can Oti* flies from a medicine bag.⁷⁶ A woman can have a medicine bag. [Walker 1991:117]

Red Cloud, Meat, and No Flesh's discussion of ceremonial bundles brings to light a number of important themes: (1) the mythical character or deity *Škaŋškáŋ* (Sky; the Moving Spirit; a shortened form of *Táku Škaŋškáŋ*) originally taught the Lakotas about *wóphiye*; (2) religious practitioners imbue *wóphiye* with *wakháŋ* power, energy, or potency (by transmitting *thúŋ* into them); (3) *wóphiye* are given or consecrated at the *Wačhípi Wakháŋ* (Mystery Dance), which seems to have functioned as an initiation ceremony or transition rite for religious practitioners, at which they received some of their powers and demonstrated their *wakháŋ* abilities;⁷⁷ (4) dreams and visions determine all the details of *wóphiye*, from their size and shape to their designs, symbols, and contents, and they are only powerful and useful to the individual who received the dream or vision; (5) evil or malevolent *wakháŋ* beings are repelled by *wóphiye* as "the place where good is," evidently similar to the way in which evil spirits are repelled by sage; and (6) both men and women can possess and use *wóphiye*. For a visual representation of the relationship between the concepts *wakháŋ*, *thúŋ*, *šičúŋ*, *wašičúŋ*, and *wóphiye*, see Figure 5.

⁷⁶ These are all malevolent *wakháŋ* beings who seek to do harm to humankind and disrupt life movement. See Walker (1991:94).

⁷⁷ It is puzzling that Black Elk (in Brown 1989) does not include the *Wačhípi Wakháŋ* among his seven rites of the Oglalas.

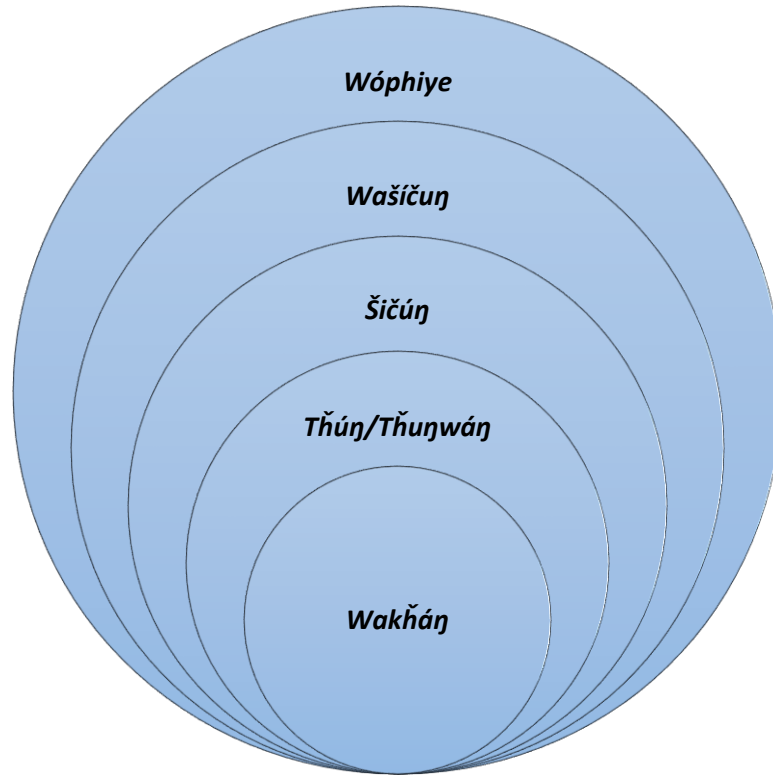


Figure 5: Composition of a Ceremonial Bundle

The image or representation of one's *šičúŋ* could be used to consecrate objects and imbue them with power. This is particularly relevant to *wótháwe* (war medicine), consecrated weapons and other objects stored in bundles designed to protect warriors in battle, give them special powers and abilities pertaining to war, or empower them to perform brave deeds in battle. Among the Eastern Sioux a young man around the age of puberty fasted under the guidance of an elder and established *zuyá wakháŋ* (sacred war leader), who prepared the *wótháwe*, usually consisting of consecrated armor, a lance, arrow, and bundle of paint, and presented it to the young man (Lynd 1889:161–162). As Deloria (n.d.:153) explains, “A wót‘awe was a war-bundle. Different holy men made them, each according to his own formula, none of which were alike. Each was based on

the dream and revelation of the individual holy man. Some were more potent than others. So those who could make very potent bundles were in constant demand.”

Catlin seems to confuse the concepts of the sacred bundle and the *wóthawe*: “every male in the tribe carries this, his supernatural charm or guardian, to which he looks for the preservation of his life, in battle or in other danger; at which times it would be considered ominous of bad luck and an ill fate to be without it”⁷⁸ (Catlin 1973:1:36). As we have seen misunderstandings of this type are pervasive in the literature, posing formidable analytic complications for scholars (see Figure 6). In some cases these confusions have been perpetuated in the literature and accepted as fact by some contemporary Lakotas who read the historical and ethnographic literature. Catlin discusses the significance of the Vision Quest in terms of a young man “making or ‘forming his medicine’” (Catlin 1973:1:36). After securing a vision of a particular other-than-human person the seeker procures the whole skin of the animal who visited him in his vision. He preserves the skin whole and consecrates and decorates it with symbols from his vision. From that point on, writes Catlin (1973:1:37, emphasis in original), a man “carries it with him through life, for ‘good luck’ (as he calls it); as his strength in battle—and in death his guardian *Spirit*, that is buried with him, and which is to conduct him safe to the beautiful hunting grounds, which he contemplates in the world to come.”

⁷⁸ Broadly, a *wóthawe* would be categorized under the general heading of sacred bundle. But as we have seen it is important to distinguish between medicine, ceremonial, and war bundles, as each are distinct in terms of function, purpose, and potency. The terms medicine and sacred or ceremonial are often used conventionally to gloss any type of personal bundle, and at Pine Ridge today the *wóthawe* has become largely synonymous with the sacred bundle or *wašičuŋ*. However, it has lost some of its specific associations with warfare, its general protective and good-fortune-producing potency rising to prominence as the significant distinguishing factors of a *wóthawe*.

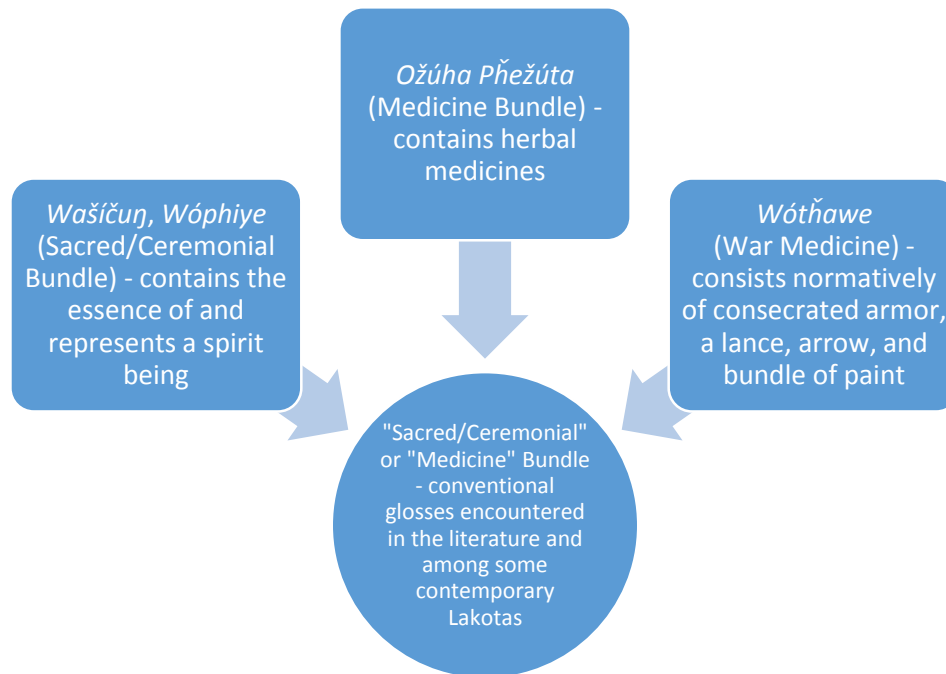


Figure 6: Semantic Blending of Personal Bundle Types

“The value of the medicine-bag to the Indian is beyond all price;” explains Catlin (1973:1:37), “for to sell it, or give it away, would subject him to such signal disgrace in his tribe, that he could never rise above it; and again, his superstition would stand in the way of any such disposition of it, for he considers it the gift of the Great Spirit.” During his travels Catlin often made attempts to purchase personal bundles, but no one he encountered was willing to part with their personal “medicine” for any price.

In the 1830s Catlin describes an important ceremonial process he called “smoking the shield,” in which a young man digs a hole and makes a fire in the earth, stretching a rawhide over it with pegs lodged in the ground. The man and his close friends and relatives sing and dance around the skin as it contracts with the heat, “and solicit the Great Spirit to instil [*sic*] into it the power to protect him harmless against his enemies” (Catlin 1973:1:241). As the young man and his comrades sing, dance, and pray over the

hardening shield the physical processes of creation and transformation merge with the magico-ritual process of consecration, strengthening the shield both physically and metaphysically in order to protect the young man from arrows and even bullets in battle. The distinction between physical and spiritual reality blurs and ultimately dissolves in the process. “When it is cooled and cut into the shape that he desires,” Catlin explains, “it is often painted with his *medicine* or *totem* upon it, the figure of an eagle, an owl, a buffalo or other animal, as the case may be, which he trusts will guard and protect him from harm” (Catlin 1973:1:241, emphasis in original). Often men were buried with their sanctified weapons and regalia. Alternatively, when a middle-aged man gave up the warpath or was forced to because of the transition to reservation life and consequent dissolution of intertribal warfare he would abandon his shield on a high mountaintop, leaving it to the spirits and elements from which it came (Standing Bear 2006b:68).

To summarize and illustrate the interconnectedness of the various concepts discussed above I will provide the following lengthy quote from Walker’s autobiographical sketch pertaining to his initiation into the Buffalo Medicine society and the creation and consecration of his own ceremonial bundle, which he kept until his death on December 11, 1926 (Walker 1991:40–43). Walker describes in detail the ritual consecration of the Buffalo *wašičuŋ* he received upon his initiation as a Buffalo shaman in the late 1800s. At that time, Walker contends (1991:47), “no other than a full-blooded Oglala had ever been ordained as a holy man. At this time there were but five holy men among the Oglalas and three of these were very old. The progress of civilization had

extinguished the belief in their traditions and for some years none had sought to be ordained by them.”⁷⁹

Little Wound, American Horse, and Lone Star decided to tell Walker of the ceremonies of the Oglalas if he would “provide a feast.” The feast consisted of “a beef, ten pounds of coffee, a box of crackers, and one hundred pounds of flour” (Walker 1991:68). Walker writes:

Short Bull chose for me as my patron the Buffalo God. Then, that I might give to my patron due reverence and comprehend communications from the Gods, a *sicun*, that is, a ceremonial bundle regarded as a fetish, was ceremonially prepared for me in this manner: Short Bull chose the material, which consisted of a soft-tanned fawn skin as the container, the tusk of a bear, the claw of an eagle, the rattle of a rattlesnake, a wisp of human hair, and a wisp of sweetgrass. The holy men consecrated the container by each invoking the potency of his *sicun* to make the container sacred. Then I was required to smear a little of my blood on each of the things to be enclosed in the container.⁸⁰ When this was done I was

⁷⁹ The early reservation period to the beginning of the self-determination period represents the nadir of participation in traditional Lakota religion and ritual. During that time Lakota religion was becoming moribund as many Lakotas turned away from traditional religion, embraced Christianity, and in some cases denied their Indian heritage and identity. This was the result of the convergence of many historical forces, not least of which were the horrors of colonial domination and subjugation and the harrowing boarding-school experience. The tribal religion, founded on cultural practices that had become infeasible to maintain, particularly buffalo hunting and intertribal warfare, became more and more difficult to sustain in the face of lived reality in the modern world. The situation among the Lakotas during the early reservation and self-determination periods can be profitably compared to Daniel Swan’s (1998) and Jason Jackson’s analysis of a similar process that occurred among the Osages. Jackson writes, “Continued practice of the tribal religion was further complicated and compromised (in this colonial historic context) because linkages existed among social hierarchy, tribal demography, economic change, and the possession and transmission of complex bodies of esoteric ritual knowledge. During the 19th century, Osage society, economy, and demography had changed in ways that meant that this religion, which had focused on complex ceremonies organized around sacred bundles, could not be perpetuated as an integrated cultural system and was no longer meeting the needs of Osage communities and individuals” (Jackson 2004:193).

⁸⁰ This is an interesting example of sacrifice or offering, key Lakota religious concepts, during the creation of Walker’s *wašičuŋ*, and it was and is evidently a common occurrence. Sacrifice is necessary to create and bound power or potency and to imbue it in objects. The origin of the belief that blood is powerful and perhaps the origin of other-than-human potency can be found in Oglala mythology: *Ínyan* (Rock) existed before anything else and his powers were in his blue blood. According to Walker (1991:51), *Ínyan* “longed for another that he might exercise his powers upon it. There could be no other unless he would create it of that which he must take from himself. If he did so he must impart to it a spirit and give to it a portion of his blood. As much of his blood as would go from him, so much of his powers would go with it.” Another interesting connection is the possibility that *wasé* (red ceremonial paint; vermilion), often created by mixing animal fat or grease with powdered vermilion and used for sacrificial and ritual purposes, originated

required to hold them all in my hands while the holy men placed their hands on my head and implored the Gods to give me their aid when I should need it. Then the articles were carefully enclosed in the container and it was folded about them and bound with cords made of sinews, each holy man tying a knot in the cords, muttering his special formula while doing so.

When finished, the bundle was given to me and I was informed that it was my personal possession to be held by me only and that its potency could be made effective only by my repeating the formula that was taught to me; and that if I failed to give to my *sicun* the reverential care due it, its potency would bring upon me disaster of some kind; that if I regarded my *sicun* with due reverence I would understand the sacred lore of the Oglalas, but until I professed a faith in their Gods, powers to do supernatural things or receive communications from the Gods would not be granted to me. I was then pronounced a holy man and was so addressed by all the Oglalas.⁸¹

The holy men required me to comply with the rites and ceremonies which they prescribed. I did so sincerely, for I recognized in their traditions that universal equality of mankind which sees in nature mysteries beyond human understanding and deifies that which causes them. The sacred mysteries of the Oglala holy men were certain rites to be done which would impart to them superhuman powers and enable them to hold communion with their deities and speak their will and by the aid of consecrated fetishes to do miraculous things. [Walker 1991:49]

An individual's *wašičuŋ* was his personal "medicine" in a spiritual sense. As we have already seen from the very earliest accounts and descriptions of Lakota religion and ritual the English term "medicine" has been used and confused with other foundational religious concepts, such as *wakḥáŋ*. In fact, "medicine" has become a conventional gloss for *wakḥáŋ* among many contemporary Lakotas, despite a broad semantic range of meanings. The topic of Part Three is the connection between *wakḥáŋ* and the term "medicine" and nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory.

in the ritual smearing and offering of human or other-than-human blood. *Wasé* is often smeared on the hands to purify and consecrate them before the handling of ritual objects. It can also be used on ceremonial objects themselves, such as pipes or bows and arrows (Fletcher 1884a:275 n 22). A connected custom is that of using red cloth or blankets in ceremonies to lay ritual objects upon. All of the beliefs and customs associated with *wasé* appear to be connected to the concepts of *ša'íc'íya* and *ša'íya*, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

⁸¹ If what Walker reported is true then perhaps he was the first non-full-blood Oglala holy man.

PART THREE: WAKĤÁŃ, MEDICINE, AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA DISEASE THEORY

1. PĤEŽŪTA (MEDICINE)

Not only is *wakĥáŃ* difficult to comprehend due to blurred semantic boundaries, it is also frequently confused or equated with another important religious concept: medicine. The term medicine has perennially complicated and befuddled analytic classifications of Lakota magico-medico-ritual belief and practice, and yet it continues to be a central, polysemous cultural symbol among the Lakotas and across Native North America. *Pĥežŭta* (medicine; literally, ‘grass roots’) is often confused and amalgamated with the English usage of the word “medicine” from historical sources, which are clearly translations of *wakĥáŃ* or the power concept. Despite commonalities, *wakĥáŃ* and *pĥežŭta* in Lakota are separate but overlapping domains. For analytic purposes common herbal medicines (*pĥežŭta* [*ikĥéka*]) must be distinguished from mysterious, spiritual “medicines” (*[pĥežŭta] wakĥáŃ*), despite the tendency for the two domains to bleed together semantically and in common and ritual speech. Boundaries blur and meanings become muddled over time due to past translations and explanations by Euro-American outsiders and semantic drift. But if we take medicine broadly to indicate anything or any method that alleviates pain, treats and cures sickness, or sustains life in the body then we must categorize both herbal and spiritual, common and mysterious, forms of *pĥežŭta* under the general heading of medicine.

Since the earliest written accounts of Sioux life and culture the concepts of medicine and power have been blurred. This complicates attempts to classify and categorize nineteenth-century Lakota religious belief and magico-medico-ritual practice, especially in the case of “medicine men,” which we will examine later. Inconsistencies,

mistranslations, and misunderstandings in the ethnohistorical record have been repeatedly glossed over and repeated, gradually becoming fact, accepted as truth, and perpetuated in the literature. Around the turn of the twentieth century the photographer and ethnologist Edward S. Curtis, discussing the use of the English term in reference to Lakota concepts, wrote:

The word “medicine” is continually employed by those writing and speaking of the Indians. This common usage has caused it to appear in modern dictionaries, and, as misleading as the word is, it seems impossible altogether to avoid its use. For this reason it is essential to define its meaning. As used in connection with the Sioux and other plains tribes the word does not in a true sense imply medicinal properties, but rather spiritual strength. [Curtis 1908:61]

Decades later Deloria echoed Curtis’s findings, noting that “Medicine is used so often popularly to indicate mystery or supernatural power” (Deloria n.d.:1).

The English word “medicine” often actually refers to *wakǰáŋ* or spiritual strength or power, but the Lakota *pǰeǰúta* (medicine) is a distinct domain referring largely to herbal medicines. As No Flesh (in Walker 1917:163) explains, “The medicinemen learn their medicines from the spirits in a vision. The spirits tell them what to use and how to use it. Their medicines are nearly always herbs (*wato*) or roots (*hutkan*). Therefore, all their medicines are called grass roots (*pezuta*).” However, the efficacy⁸² of *pǰeǰúta* is believed to be ultimately other-than-human or *wakǰáŋ*. As Richard Two Dogs put it,

⁸² Efficacy in terms of magico-medico-ritual practice refers to the ability to accomplish or do something or to overcome or subdue sickness. Efficacy is expressed in Lakota by the term *okíhi* (to be able to do something, be capable of; to overcome, defeat, or subdue someone or something, to accomplish or achieve something). See Bushotter (1937).

wak'háŋ and *p'hežúta* are definitely separate but interrelated concepts, and spiritual healing must take place as a precursor to physical healing (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Tabeau describes medicine as “supernatural and powerful” and as people or objects regarded with “superstitious respect” (Tabeau 1939:201), obviously references to the power concept. In the 1830s Catlin defined medicine as “*mystery*, and nothing else” (Catlin 1973:1:35). He contextualizes the historical connections between American Indian understandings of the power concept and the English and French “medicine”:

The Fur Traders in this country, are nearly all French; and in their language, a doctor or physician, is called “*Medecin*.” The Indian country is full of doctors; and as they are all magicians, and skilled, or profess to be skilled, in many mysteries, the word “*medecin*” has become habitually applied to every thing mysterious or unaccountable; . . . The Indians do not use the word medicine, however . . . [Catlin 1973:1:35–36]

Catlin notes that the English and Americans quickly adopted this usage as well, perpetuating the close semantic association and blending between the two concepts. Interestingly, it appears that Euro-American outsiders initially forged the hybridity between American Indian power concepts and the word medicine in the contact zones in which disparate cultures met.

Denig sheds light on the distinction between medicine and spiritual power, explaining that nineteenth-century upper Missouri River tribes believed:

. . . in a Great Power, the First Cause of Creation, though they do not attempt to embody this idea and call it by name Wah-con-tun'-ga or Great Medicine. The word “medicine” in this case has no reference to the use of drugs, but the sense of it is all that is incomprehensible, supernatural, all-powerful, etc. Everything that cannot be explained, accounted for by ordinary means, or all that is above the comprehension and power of man

(Indians) is called Wah-con or medicine. Thus their own priests or jugglers are named Wah-con. A steamboat, clock, machine, or even toys, of the movements of which or the principle of motion they could not account for, would likewise be termed Wah-con. Now, Wa-coñda⁸³ refers to something greater than is within the power of man to accomplish, and its effects are manifested in the elements, natural phenomena, sickness, death, great distress, or loss from enemies, famine, lightning, and any other thing to them unaccountable by any visible means. They think Wakoñda pervades all air, earth, and sky; that it is in fact omnipresent and omnipotent, though subject to be changed and enlisted on their part in any undertaking if the proper ceremonies, sacrifices, and fasts are resorted to. They consider its power to be made applicable to either good or evil according to their observance of these ceremonies. They admit the existence of its good in years of great abundance of game, seasons of general health, triumphs over enemies, etc.; and its evil or danger is felt in every loss, infectious disease, or distress, the cause of which they are ignorant. These are the attributes of Wakoñda, and his residence is supposed by some to be in the sun, but his power everywhere. [Denig 2000:92]

Denig's use of the English term medicine here clearly refers to *wakḥáŋ*. The distinction between *wakḥáŋ* and *wakḥáŋda* (or *wakḥáŋla*) is rather ambiguous but may involve the idea that the former is the underlying source of all other-than-human power and energy in the universe, while the latter is the manifestation or demonstration of that power on earth. Denig also highlights the trifold religious significance of ritual, sacrifice, and fasting among the upper Missouri River tribes in the mid-nineteenth century and the moral ambiguity of undirected, latent *wakḥáŋ* power. Finally, Denig suggests the centrality of abundance or food and health—in a phrase, life movement—to Plains Indian conceptions of religion and medicine. Denig also discusses the medicinal concept *pḥežúta*, writing, “A great variety of roots, leaves, barks and plants are used by these

⁸³ *Wakḥáŋda* may be the same as or similar to the Lakota concept of *wakḥáŋla* (spirit-like, little spirit) mentioned by Walker's interlocutors.

Indians in common with other natives of the Upper Missouri for medical purposes” (Denig 1961:13).

Nicollet (1976:269) equates the two terms when he defines *wakǰáŋ* as “medicine, the Grand Medicine, the ceremonies.” The fur trader Rufus Sage (1857:104), who traveled Lakota country from 1841 to 1844, notes that medicine, “in Indian signification, means any person or thing possessed of extraordinary or supernatural powers, as well as any act for conciliating the favor and obtaining the assistance of the Great Spirit. That medicine is the strongest which is the most efficient for its intended purposes.” Clearly Sage is referring to *wakǰáŋ*. Significantly, he highlights the direct correlation between the strength of power or medicine and its efficacy, effectiveness, or ability to act or produce desired effects and transformations in lived reality. Tabeau confirms Sage’s findings, writing that recovering from one’s wounds or a sickness was proof of “good medicine” (Tabeau 1939:191).

Francis Parkman, who traveled along the Oregon Trail and spent three weeks camping and hunting with Smoke’s Oglala band in 1846, describes the great semantic spectrum of objects and practices labeled “medicine”: “The *medicines* of the various tribes differ. A red-headed woodpecker⁸⁴ is great medicine with the Sioux” (Parkman 1947:2:395–397, 428, emphasis in original). Later Parkman explains how “medicine” (read *wakǰáŋ*) can be infused and reckoned in natural phenomena, objects, or actions. Parkman describes medicine whistles, rattles, and drums used for healing, and how a ritual specialist places a special “medicine” hat on a warrior’s head, rendering him courageous and invulnerable in battle. The tipis comprising Smoke’s village had

⁸⁴ Fletcher writes that dreaming of the hawk was “lucky” among the Oglalas, while dreaming of the bear and snake was less auspicious (Fletcher 1884b:281 n 4).

“medicine” in the form of three poles and a shield colored and designed in various symbolic ways, depending on the head of the household. Some Lakotas used images of horses drawn in the earth or painted on hides as “medicine” to catch or steal horses, reflecting the inherent power of images and aesthetic form.⁸⁵ Medicine also involves spirit-sanctioned prescriptions, proscriptions, and taboos in terms of practice. Parkman describes one Lakota whose personal medicine was to light the pipe, one whose medicine forbade him to go to war, one whose medicine was to sing at night, and another whose medicine was to give another person a cup of water (Parkman 1947:2:438–439, 442, 448, 459–462, 466–467, 470).

Mason Wade, the editor of Parkman’s Oregon Trail journal, explains that:

Anything could be a “medicine,” but usually personal medicines were parts of or objects associated with animals, birds, or insects. An Indian’s personal medicine was usually revealed to him during the initiatory fast . . . the medicine might be merely some inanimate object involved in the vision—a tree, plant, or stone. Anything connected with these things was a medicine object. . . . All living objects were venerated for their medicine power, but special veneration was paid to the personal medicine. [Wade in Parkman 1947:2:619 n 77]

⁸⁵ According to Beede, frequently both private and public prayer was without words, which speaks to the concept of vocables in American Indian music. “One common way of individual prayer, in feeling of great need,” explains Beede (1912:Western Sioux Cosmology), “was to go to the peak of a hill and there make on the earth a picture representing what the suppliant wanted. This picture was on the earth as a prayer to Woniya through the aid of the earth as the pitying mother of all. It was on the peak of a hill so that it would be, for the longest possible time during the day, in the view of the Sun, who as a remote offspring of Mother Earth as well as her constant consort, would also aid in the supplication in endeavor to become atune with Woniya [Life-Breath]. . . . When prayer was made in this way, by a picture, no oral word was uttered by the suppliant. Naturally the uttering of words would be ridiculous, for, assuming that the picture was properly made, it would be an insult to Woniya and to the helping Earth and Sun and whatever other helping persons, to act as if they had not the intelligence to read and understand the picture.” Creating an image or manifesting the physical form of what one desires is comparable to practitioners seeing the cause or location of sickness in a mirror or water dish, which we will discuss below. If the practitioner sees the patient in good health, he or she will recover.

Wade's "personal medicine" is likely the ceremonial bundle (*wašičuŋ*), or possibly the personal war medicine (*wóthawe*). Clearly there was a subtle yet important distinction between medicine in terms of herbal remedies used for treating the sick and medicine in terms of one's personal medicine or spiritual power, symbolic forms and expressions of visionary experiences imbued with potency and magical or occult potentiality.

In the early 1900s Curtis reported that "medicine," defined as "supernatural strength" or "supernatural occult power"⁸⁶ . . . derived from the mysterious forces of nature." He reckoned it as the first of two primary concepts upon which the "entire culture of the Sioux is based" (Curtis 1908:21). Curtis (1908:21) writes, "The conduct and the effort of every Sioux throughout life were so to strengthen his supernatural power that he could not only resist any harm threatening him from ordinary sources, but could become possessed of invulnerability to those imbued with like power. He desired this mystery-power to be stronger than any he was to encounter."⁸⁷ Clearly Curtis's use of the word medicine is a reference to mysterious, *wak'háŋ*, other-than-human power. The Oglala author Luther Standing Bear (2006b:46) succinctly describes the indigenous understanding of medicine, writing, "The Lakotas believed that their bodies were nourished not only by food – meat, fruit, and plant – but that wind, rain, and sun also nourished. All things that helped sustain the body – food, pure air, water, and sun – were

⁸⁶ From Lakota perspectives *wak'háŋ* power transmitted from an other-than-human person through the Vision Quest and localized in a human being was referred to as *wówas'ake* (strength, power, energy) (Curtis 1908:62).

⁸⁷ Apparently the power of invulnerability or to be bulletproof was the apex of other-than-human power aspired to by nineteenth-century warriors (Curtis 1908:21). Crazy Horse was the epitome of a warrior with strong war medicine and power. According to Curtis (1908:21 n 1), "General George Crook, considered one of the best rifle shots in the army, in talking with scout Charles Tackett said that on one occasion he had shot deliberately at Crazy Horse more than twenty times without effect."

medicine.” In this sense medicine must be understood broadly as anything that sustains and perpetuates life movement.

Medicine is also frequently confused with *wóthawe*, a warrior’s personal war bundle or war “medicine.”⁸⁸ Curtis recounts that a Lakota warrior’s shield is:

. . . consecrated and made *wakáⁿ*, by painting on it, literally or symbolically, the animals or objects that constituted his “medicine.” If it was a bird that appeared to him, feathers of that bird were fastened around the edge of the shield, and as a further protection he wore about his person a portion of the bird; or if an animal, some portion of it, as, for instance, a necklace of bear claws, was used as a part of the warrior’s personal adornment. Ordinarily such objects would be classed as fetishes or talismans, but as used by the Indian they are more than that. Consecrated weapons also formed a part of his war equipment. [Curtis 1908:21–22]



Curtis’s account raises an important issue involving the concepts of symbol, image, and form. Discussing the “immediate quality of experience” inherent in American Indian cultures, particularly in the arts and crafts, Brown (2007:3) states, “The natural materials used in the creative activity manifest sacred powers in accord with their particular nature and place of origin; and the completed form itself, or what is externally ‘represented,’ is seen to manifest its own sacred potency, but again, not in the dual manner or process by which we translate a ‘symbol.’”

Brown continues:

⁸⁸ Perhaps the term *wóthawe* comes from the possessive stem *tháwa*, in which case it would refer to something owned by an individual and localized somewhere, as in a bag, bundle, or some other container. Bushotter and Deloria frequently refer to medicine and power in terms of possession, using the forms *wóthawe*, *thawášičuŋ*, and simply *tháwa*. See Bushotter (1937).

The generally understood meaning of the symbol—as a form that stands for or points to, something other than the particular form or expression—is incomprehensible to the Indian. To the Indian’s cognitive orientation, meanings generally are intuitively sensed and not secondarily interpreted through analysis; there tends to be a unity between form and idea or content. Here the “symbol” *is*, in a sense, that to which it refers. . . .

In their visual art forms, there is no separation between the created form of whatever medium, and the message or power this form bears and transmits. It may be the case that the powers of certain forms must become activated through rite, song, or prayer, yet the power is always latently present in the created design or object.⁸⁹ [Brown 2007:55, 57]

Living religious symbols that comprise living mythologies and religions evoke and direct signs on a deeply unconscious psychological level. Functioning symbols communicate their meaning immediately through direct experience without being consciously or explicitly interpreted. Interpretation is a secondary process. Religious symbols work of themselves, directly and immediately producing meaning in the psyche, organizing and giving form to ordinary experience. The source of sacred symbols, as well as their significance, is derived psychologically (Geertz 1973:138).

According to Fletcher (1884b:276 n 1), “To the Indian mind the life of the universe has not been analyzed, classified, and a great synthesis formed of the parts. To him the varied forms are all equally important and noble.” While it is undoubtedly true that most individuals did not consciously interpret and wax philosophically about the underlying meanings of religious symbols, it is equally true that the persuasive and pervasive power of those symbols is undeniable, whether individuals can explicate their

⁸⁹ See also Fletcher (1884b:287 n 13). The underlying issue here is the problematic nature of dualisms and mutually-exclusive dichotomies or binaries, such as natural/supernatural, from cross-cultural perspectives; trying to fit foreign ideas into intellectual frameworks that are not culturally relevant. See Brown (2007:53–55) and Saler (1977). Instead of conceptualizing binaries as polar opposites, it is more productive to view them as two extremes on a spectrum of meaning; as a range of possibilities or options. It is a natural tendency for human beings to juxtapose opposites, and they have been doing so since antiquity.

significance or not (Geertz 1973:138). I differ with Brown's suggestion that the interpretation of polysemous symbolic meaning was "incomprehensible to the Indian" (Brown 2007:55). Lakota history is full of brilliant religious thinkers and synthesizers, such as Black Elk, Sword, Fools Crow, and Catches, who were extraordinarily gifted and effective in terms of the secondary interpretation of symbolic meaning and polysynthetic meaning-derivation.

In the 1830s Catlin famously painted a portrait of Lone Horn, chief of the Minneconjou Lakotas, near the mouth of the Teton River. After the chief's portrait was completed the ritual leader of the band began to harangue the people, predicting bad luck and premature death for all who had their portraits painted by the famous artist. It was not until Lone Horn himself intervened and convinced the people that no harm would come to them on account of Catlin's paintings that the artist was able to continue. Ironically, Lone Horn died young a few years later (Catlin 1973:1:221–222).

Despite Lone Horn's assurances some still refused to have their portraits painted. As Catlin (1973:1:226) explains, "About one in five or eight was willing to be painted, and the rest thought they would be much more sure of 'sleeping quiet in their graves' after they were dead, if their pictures were not made." This belief is similar to the common folk belief that Crazy Horse refused to have his picture taken because it would in some way diminish or distort his power, bring misfortune, or "steal his shadow" or spirit [*naǵi*]. According to Dorsey (1894:484), "for many years no Yankton Dakota would consent to have his picture taken lest one of his 'wanagi' should remain in the picture, instead of going after death to the spirit land." Further, those who had their portraits painted by Catlin vehemently guarded them, which puzzled the artist until he

realized that the Indians believed that “there may be life to a certain extent in the picture; and that if harm or violence be done to it, it may in some mysterious way, affect their health or do them other injury” (Catlin 1973:1:227). Clearly the Lakotas believed in a mystical or spiritual connection between physical forms and their representations.

The same can be said in regards to language and the spoken word. Language has long served the Lakotas as a key to defining themselves culturally. Words are believed to have inherent spiritual potency associated with their specific sounds, much like mantras, and speech reflects knowledge (DeMallie 1991:11). Intellect and language are powerful forces in (re)creation, (re)generation, and the life-transformation-process. Brown (2007:2) writes, “What is named is therefore understood to be really present in the name in unitary manner, not as ‘symbol’ with dualistic implication, as is generally the case with modern languages. . . . Just as words bear power, the full statement, or even an unspoken thought, is understood to have a compulsive potency of its own, especially when the utterance is in a ritual or ceremonial context.”⁹⁰ This insight allows us to comprehend the importance of naming specific spirit beings during rituals, essentially invoking the actual presence of the named power through the voice and language in a very real sense. This also explains why the names of other-than-human persons and the personal names of human beings are not often spoken aloud or in vain (Densmore 2001:85 n 2). According to Fletcher (1884c:295 n 14), personal names index a relationship and imply affiliation with a particular other-than-human person and, consequently, protection. Favor and influence are claimed through the source of a name, and hence, names are imbued with power. Fletcher (1884c:295 n 14) explains, “The personal names among Indians,

⁹⁰ This idea is the basic hypothesis of Reichard’s “Prayer: The Compulsive Word” (1944), later developed further by Gary Witherspoon (1977; 1980).

therefore, indicates the protecting presence of a deity and must, therefore, partake of the ceremonial character of the Indian's religion." This is why in most contexts, and especially in ritual scenarios, kinship forms were favored and used over personal names.

From this perspective Lakota speech and language, especially in ritual contexts, are akin to J. L. Austin's (1962) conception of the performative word. According to Barnard and Spencer (1996:617), the term performative indicates "any utterance which is in some way equivalent to an action: e.g. 'I name this ship . . .', 'I promise you . . .'." Austin distinguishes between statements that *assert* things and performative utterances, statements that have no truth-value and actually *do* things or accomplish something. Performative utterances are equated with performing certain kinds of actions, which Austin labels speech acts and later illocutionary acts. An illocutionary act, like a performative act, is a speech act in which the utterance is equivalent to an action, such as 'I *order* you to go' or 'I *apologize*' (Barnard and Spencer 1996:609; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hymes 1971). So in Lakota ritual contexts, when a religious practitioner says aloud, "the Earth and the Rock and the Buffalo are in the lodge," they are literally understood to be *in* the lodge; invoked and manifested by the speech act itself (Walker 1917:131). The same is true of calling songs that function to call and invite spirits into the lodge at the beginning of a ceremony and closing songs that send the spirits back to the spirit realm.

Deloria discusses the performative power of the spoken word in Lakota culture. Describing the common belief that supernatural retribution would kill an individual who failed to tell the truth or broke an oath (*wókičhunze*), Deloria gives a number of examples of beliefs connecting speech to action:

[The Lakotas] declare that these various things in nature, etc., are witness to their truth-speaking. . . . These things they swear by are holy, so no matter how secretly they call them to witness, they will hear it--such is the believe [*sic*]. . . . When a man uses these words in vain, he brings calamity upon himself by his words, they say. Also people were careful not to speak of breaking their neck, or any other evil thing, just in fun; they did not court evil by speaking of it; and whenever they did, as in the above cases, they did it with mysterious significance back of it, so they believed. Thus they considered that they were exceedingly reverent and respectful to their gods, so I often heard said. All my life as an Indian among Indians, I have heard things of this sort, so I recall it very well. [Deloria in Bushotter 1937:Story 240]

Deloria's words speak to the religious significance of oaths (*wókičhunze*) in Lakota culture. The earth or other other-than-human persons were frequently called upon to "hear" (*onámañ'uŋ* [hear me]) the oath-maker, acting as witness. Deloria writes, "This whole matter of 'speaking audibly', i.e., once a remark or promise is released into the ether, it is holy and can not be recalled, and is beyond the control of the speaker and now in the hands of the Wak'á, is pretty general, or was, among the older Indians. Retracting or 'eating' one's words, then, was of no avail; 'But you have said it!' is the common retort if somebody says, 'I didn't mean it!'" (in Bushotter 1937:Story 240). A spoken vow or obligation made to the other-than-human persons inhabiting the Lakota universe was sacred, binding, and utterly unbreakable. This in turn may have had an impact on the people, making them more stoic, less likely to speak flippantly, and more careful about what was said audibly.

In any case the term medicine continues to be used frequently in Native North America today, and it calls for some clarification. The sense that one gets from contemporary usage is that medicine refers to anything along a broad spectrum of

meanings from Western medicines or medications, to herbal remedies for various physical ailments, to a more general, mystical understanding of the term, similar to the historical meaning of *wakǰáŋ*. The latter meaning of medicine as a generalized spiritual power is the most common sense of the term used today, especially in the religious and ritual domains.

Contiguous with past conceptions, medicine—as the animatistic force *wakǰáŋ* or as actual herbal or other medications—today can be either positive or negative; used for good or evil; healing or causing sickness or death; for sustaining and perpetuating life movement or for obstructing and terminating it. Therefore, medicines can be either desired, feared, or both.⁹¹ According to Takes the Gun (in Walker 1991:214), “If one wishes to do something bad he must burn sweetgrass and make bad medicine. Then the bad spirits will help him. Each one makes his own medicine. He knows which medicine is good and which is bad. Some medicine men made very bad medicine.”

Walker illustrates a significant and pervasive aspect of historical conceptions of medicine: the connection between medicine, potency, and efficacy. He writes that during the preparation of the sacred area for the Vision Quest a practitioner or his helpers “fasten to the smaller end of each of these wands [marking off the sacred site and/or the four directions] a little packet of medicine. There is no particular medicine used for this purpose, for the substance is immaterial as its efficacy is given it by the ceremony of preparing it” (Walker 1991:134). This is a crucial point: similar to beliefs concerning *šičúŋpi* and *wašičuŋpi*, the power, potency, or efficacy of sacred objects and even herbal

⁹¹ It is still a common belief at Pine Ridge that bad people can make bad medicine and shoot it at their enemies, causing pain, sickness, and death. Shooting malign potency is at the heart of Lakota sorcery/witchcraft. For instance, I was told that if people at Pine Ridge did not like my research and what I was doing there they would have a ceremony that would precipitate my death.

medicines do not come from the objects themselves. Instead, potency is a reflection of their underlying spiritual essences and is activated through the process of consecration, during which *wakǰán* power is invoked and imbued into an object or person. It is the infused power or spirit (*šičúŋ*, *thúŋ*, or *thunwáŋ*) that renders objects and medicines potent, not the objects or medicines themselves (Walker 1991:197). This is why medicines are often ineffective on their own without the proper ceremony, prayers, incantations, and songs. Ceremonies, prayers, incantations, invocations, and ritual songs, indeed any process or means of rendering something *wakǰán*, are often glossed as “making medicine” (Walker 1991:79–80, 203, 214).

Medicines may also be good for specific things, such as war or treating specific types of sickness or wounds (Walker 1991:92, 132, 136, 161, 163). Tyon spoke of the origin of *wóthawe* (war medicine), writing (in Walker 1991:155), “The man who was the Rock dreamer could not be shot even by a bullet, they thought, it is said. And this they believed, it is said. So the men who could not be shot made war medicine (*wotawe*), it is said.”⁹² As the term medicine is used today it can refer to anything or any method used to alleviate pain or treat and cure sickness— whether it is physical, physiological, psychological, psychosomatic,⁹³ spiritual, or symbolic sickness, injuries, and wounds—or

⁹² *Wóthawe* (war medicines) are still made today for Lakota soldiers going off to fight wars overseas in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. *Wóthawe* represent a definite continuity with the past, although it is likely that the frequency of opportunities for creating, consecrating, and using them has diminished. Richard Two Dogs told me that his father’s *wóthawe* was prepared for him by the famous holy man Little Warrior before he went to fight in World War II. All of the details of the medicine were given to the practitioner by the spirits during a *Yuwípi* ceremony. The spirits demanded that the soldier bring home four items or offerings in exchange for their protection: a German Luger handgun, a German helmet, a SS lapel pin, and an enemy scalp. All were acquired and brought back to Pine Ridge for a *Wóphila* (Thanksgiving) ceremony upon the soldier’s safe return home after the war (Posthumus 2008-2014).

⁹³ By psychosomatic we mean a physical or physiological sickness or condition caused or aggravated by psychological factors, such as internal conflict or stress. Psychosomatic relates to the interaction of mind and body. “Sickness was a spiritual matter which affected the physical,” explains Royal Hassrick (1964:290), “and consequently the proper cure was psychotherapeutic.”

to other-than-human power or potency that gives individuals and objects mysterious powers and abilities. The semantic generalization of the term medicine and its close relationship to *wakǰáŋ* among contemporary Lakotas is a common trend that is occurring in other areas of spirituality as well. It is an example of what Wallace (1952) refers to as the “replication of uniformity” as an organizational principle of culture. This semantic hybridity inherent in the usage of the English term medicine is the direct result of historical cultural and linguistic contact with nonnative peoples, but perhaps the understanding of *pǰeǰúta* as referencing both physiological and psychological aspects, having scientific⁹⁴ and spiritual applications, is indigenous.

If we take Walker and his interlocutors seriously then we must grasp the fact that among pre- and early reservation period Oglalas *pǰeǰúta* (medicine; literally, ‘grass roots’) was distinct from *wakǰáŋ* or spiritual power and was more regularly associated with herbal medicines used for physical or physiological medical treatment by various types of *pǰeǰúta wičháša* (medicine men, male herbalists) and *pǰeǰúta wiŋyaŋ* (medicine women, female herbalists). As Sword explains, “The Lakota call a thing a medicine only when it is used to cure the sick or the wounded, the proper term being *pejuta*” (Walker 1917:152). Medicines in this sense are carried and contained in *oǰúha* (or *wóǰuha*) *pǰeǰúta* (medicine bags) and are either swallowed, smoked, or steamed.⁹⁵ Distinguishing a medicine bag from a *wašičuŋ*, Sword says, “*Ozuha pejuta* is a medicine bag. *Ozuha* means a bag, and *pejuta* means a medicine. *Ozuha pejuta* means simply a bag to keep

⁹⁴ Throughout this study science and scientific should be understood in terms of the German *Wissenschaft*, meaning knowledge derived from any systematic investigation, rather than English or American understandings of these terms.

⁹⁵ For a list of various Bear medicines and their application procedures, see Sword (in Walker 1991:93).

medicines in. It is the same as any other bag, and it has no more power than a bag to keep corn in” (Walker 1991:80).

According to Tyon (Walker 1991:120), *Makhá* (Spirit of the Earth) “especially presides over the medicines that come from the earth and gives to them potencies for good or evil according to its pleasure and according to the familiarity of the shaman or medicine man with it and the methods of his invocations.” *Hunúnpa* (Two-Legged, Bear) is also frequently considered the founder and revealer of herbal medicines and treatment techniques among the Lakotas. Medicines are used by medicine men mainly to treat physical ailments, sicknesses, injuries, and wounds, as opposed to the *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundle) of a *wičháša wakhán* (holy man, shaman), which is used to treat more psychological or psychosomatic sicknesses through spiritual, mysterious, or other-than-human means. But more on the distinctions between historical religious practitioners later.

This is not to say that disease and treatment with *pěžúta* lacks a psychological, spiritual, or other-than-human element, one of the reasons for the confusion and mutual permeability of the terms. As Tabeau explains:

. . . as among the Sioux . . . there prevails no natural sickness, as all illness is either the result of the vengeance of some angry spirit or a succession of evil deeds of a magician, diviners are the only recourse. They are called *medicine men*, which signifies supernatural power. . . . often the doctor, . . . if after songs and invocations, the illness persists, he is convinced that it is the moral disposition or sorcery which opposes the cure. Songs of a particular medicine (of which each doctor possesses a certain number, that properly belong to him and that no other can sing, at least, with success, only after having bought them) produce a marvelous effect. They precede and accompany all cures. [Tabeau 1939:183–184]

Each medicine has an invisible essence or potency, called *thūṛwáŋ*, representative of a particular other-than-human person, and an appropriate song and invocation or prayer (Walker 1991:88, 91). As Sword (Walker 1991:91, 248) explains, “When one has a medicine, he must have a song for it and he must know something to say every time he uses it. If the wrong song or invocation is used, the medicine will do no good. Then another medicine man should try his medicines.” In some cases medicines alone cannot cure certain sicknesses or conditions, such as those caused by evil magicians or errant holy men. Medicines in this sense can be poisons or strong love potions. In these cases magicians or conjurors (*waphíya*) or holy men (*wičháša wakháŋ*), practitioners who rely on more than herbal remedies alone and are considered more powerful and potent than medicine men (*pḥežúta wičháša*), are called upon to intervene and work a cure (Walker 1991:92, 162).

As Curtis (1908:61) suggests, “The medicine practices of the Lakota are inseparable from their religious rites. Disease is evil, brought on by some malign influence, and naturally the treatment is in no case by pharmacy alone. In fact, such medicinal plants as are used are those revealed to the individuals during their fastings, and are therefore *wakáⁿ*.” According to No Flesh (Walker 1917:163), “The shamans can make medicines that are very mysterious and powerful. Their incantations (*pikiyapi*) make it powerful. By their incantations they can cause diseases. These diseases are *tokeca* (different from the ordinary).⁹⁶ The medicinemen learn their medicines from the spirits in a vision. The spirits tell them what to use and how to use it.” *Pḥežúta* (medicines), like all things, ultimately have other-than-human origins and are revealed to

⁹⁶ *Thókeča* (to be different, strange, weird) is an important Lakota religious category closely linked to *wakháŋ*.

human beings by *wakǰáŋ* beings. *Wakǰáŋ* potency and the proper rituals performed in the proper, prescribed manner ultimately render medicines efficacious. Truly all things flow from *wakǰáŋ*.

In 1901 Sword (Walker 1991:91) told Walker that “A medicine is called *pejuta* in Lakota. This may be anything that will cure the sick. A medicine man is called *pejuta wicasa* in Lakota. He keeps his medicines in a receptacle called *wozuha pejuta* in Lakota. This is his medicine bag. He may have only one kind of medicine in it or he may have a great many kinds.” Medicines may be discovered or revealed in visions and used very broadly to treat sickness, which is itself caused by *wakǰáŋ*, mysterious, other-than-human forces. Medicines serve a practical purpose in the treatment of physical ailments, sicknesses, and wounds, but can also serve to cure more psychosomatic or spiritual conditions.

In his autobiographical statement Walker (1991:46) writes, “These medicine men had material medicines of actual medicinal qualities and some that were not so effective. Their ministrations were most effective by suggestion.” Unfortunately it is impossible to discern from Walker’s words if he is referencing medicine men, holy men, or both, but it is likely that there was (and still is today) quite a bit of overlap between these two major categories or types, despite some important distinctions which will be developed in greater detail below.

Feraca offers some interesting comparative data from the 1950s and 1960s on the Oglala concept of medicine, driving home the points that specific medicines are of *wakǰáŋ* origin and came with their own “bundles” of knowledge in the form of rites, songs, and prayers. He writes that Mary Fast Horse, a *pǰežúta wíŋyaŋ*, and her husband:

. . . had been given the power by medicine men to gather and use several kinds of plants. They were instructed, that is, in the rites associated with these medicines, a basic aspect of “going for medicine,” since all medicines belong to the supernatural beings. Some Lakotas assert that mounted figures in human guise will often advise a medicine seeker about the danger of certain plants. These figures who ride through the heavens are newer powers adopted by the equestrian Lakotas. They exist side by side with the older, winged spirits like *Wakíya*, who owns many medicines. [Feraca 1998:72]

Participation in the *Inípi* (Sweat Lodge)⁹⁷ is also considered “as a medicine to cure the sick” (Walker 1991:78), likely because of its function to strengthen the *ní* (life) of the participants and retain life in the body, perpetuating life movement, but also because various herbal medicines are smoked (tobacco and kinnickinnick in the pipe), steamed (through incensing with sweetgrass, sage, and cedar), and swallowed (water) throughout the ritual.

Sword lists ten medicines contained in a Bear Medicine Man’s medicine bundle. A selection of the medicines include: *tháópi phezúta* (wound medicine), a powder used to treat wounds stirred into water and then swallowed; *čhanlí wakháŋ* (holy tobacco), used for wounds and smoked in a pipe pointed towards the wound; *hanté phezúta* (cedar medicine), incensed or chewed and applied to the scalp lock to disinfect; and *siŋkphéthawote phezúta* (muskrat’s medicine; calamus root), chewed by the patient or doctor and then rubbed or spat on the patient and used for delirium and other related ailments (Walker 1991:93). The herb rubbed on the hands of *Heyókha* (anti-natural dreamers of Thunder) to protect their hands from being scalded by boiling water during

⁹⁷ For more on the Sweat Lodge, see Brown (1989:31–43) and Bucko (1998).

their distinctive Kettle Dance rite is also referred to as a medicine. According to Tyon (Walker 1991:156), *Heyókħa* “doctor people. And again, their medicine is very good.”

Some major themes concerning *pħěžúta* can be gleaned from a careful reading of the Walker material: (1) there is a definite connection between *pħěžúta* and *wakħáŋ*—those who have sacred bundles consider themselves and are considered by others to be *wakħáŋ*, and the more medicines one has the more *wakħáŋ* one is considered, especially if the medicines are very potent; (2) although classified under the same general semantic umbrella of medicine, *pħěžúta* and *wakħáŋ* are distinct yet interrelated domains; due to glosses and mistranslations of the Lakota *wakħáŋ* into English as “medicine” they have often been confused and amalgamated, a process exacerbated by foreign cultural influences and linguistic change; and (3) medicines—particularly tobacco and tobacco mixtures, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar—are normatively swallowed, smoked, or steamed to treat both physical and psychological sicknesses and injuries and to please other-than-human persons, a foundational element of Lakota religious and magico-ritual belief and practice (Walker 1991:113, 158, 163).

Now that we have addressed the connections between *wakħáŋ* and “medicine” we will apply our knowledge to nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory and the foundational concept *ní* (life, breath).

2. *NÍ* (LIFE, BREATH) AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA DISEASE THEORY

Medical anthropology often examines native or aboriginal medicine,⁹⁸ viewing it as a culturally specific, coherent body of practices underpinned and informed by particular ideas about disease theory, the causation and treatment of disease, and general conceptions of health, sickness, and wellness, all of which are shaped by the culturally constituted worldview of the members of a particular society.⁹⁹ Indigenous medicine, as we have seen, and disease theory tend to be simultaneously characterized as magico-ritual and scientific. It is often impossible to separate the “medical” domain from the religious and ritual domains, all of which tend to crosscut one another (Lambert in Barnard and Spencer 1996:358).

The term “ethnomedicine” is used to characterize anthropological examinations of indigenous forms of healing, healing systems, and disease theory and classification. Ethnomedical research attempts to elucidate emic or indigenous concepts of sickness and its treatment as part of a particular worldview or cultural milieu. Ethnographic investigations of native modes of healing frequently explore the roles, functions, and methods of traditional indigenous healers and religious practitioners¹⁰⁰ (Lambert in Barnard and Spencer 1996:358–359, 604).

⁹⁸ The term medicine itself in the modern Western tradition is problematic and a socially constructed and historically situated concept, similar to our discussion of medicine among the Lakotas. See Lambert in Barnard and Spencer (1996:358).

⁹⁹ One of the major contributions of medical anthropology has been the increasing visibility and general recognition of cultural variability in the expression of signs and symptoms of distress, disorder, illness, and disease through a focus on meaning and symbolization. Much attention continues to be focused on symbolic aspects of healing and the meaning of sickness, illness, and disease within particular cultural contexts. Aside from these interpretive approaches medical anthropologists also utilize more materialist approaches, examining the power relations that shape cultural constructions of ill health, healthcare, and wellness (Barnard and Spencer 1996:360–361).

¹⁰⁰ In the contemporary section we will examine traditional and biomedical approaches to healing in the context of medical pluralism, the coexistence of a variety of different medical traditions within a specific context or cultural group (Lambert in Barnard and Spencer 1996:359). Particularly, we will investigate the continued contemporary adherence to indigenous medical systems and traditions in the context of concurrent reliance upon Western medical options and treatments at Pine Ridge.

The single most utilized dichotomy in medical anthropology and ethnomedicine is the disease/illness distinction first proposed by Leon Eisenberg (1977). As Helen Lambert explains, “‘Disease’ is taken to be the biomedical, measurable identification of bodily disorder central to the process of biomedical diagnosis and is connected with patients’ experiential awareness and understanding of their ‘illness’” (Lambert in Barnard and Spencer 1996:360). Disease is sickness caused by a physical or physiological malfunction or agent; illness is sickness brought on by a patient’s perception of his or her bodily state. Some sicknesses are entirely disease, while others are entirely matters of perception (psychosomatic), but most represent a combination of the two (Monaghan and Just 2000:136–137). Each culture shares a common inventory of “explanatory models,” a term coined by Arthur Kleinman (1980), which are conceptual templates variously constructed by individual patients and practitioners to explain illness and disease. The explanatory model concept has been utilized widely and productively in both academic and clinical settings (Lambert in Barnard and Spencer 1996:360). In this chapter we will examine Lakota explanatory models for disease, illness, health, and treatment.

Hallowell (1935) critically reviews the work of Forrest Clements (1932) on the disease theories of so-called primitive peoples. Clements divides disease into three broad and recurring human interpretations: natural causes, human agencies, and supernatural agencies, arguing that these three categories of disease are cross-culturally attributed to sorcery, breach of taboo, disease-object intrusion, spirit intrusion, and soul-loss. Associated methods of treatment include confession for breach of taboo, sucking as a means of removing sickness believed to be caused by the intrusion of material objects, and exorcism for cases of spirit or other-than-human intrusion. Clements claims that the

most ancient interpretation of the cause of sickness is disease-object intrusion, followed by soul-loss, and then spirit intrusion (Hallowell 1935:365–366).

Hallowell (1935:366) first finds fault with Clements’s general methodological approach and questions the validity of his historical conclusions, writing, “One of the intrinsic difficulties which is basic to the whole investigation is the isolation of the disease concepts themselves.” Hallowell particularly notes the inadequacy of Clements’s approach to the concept of sorcery and how soul-loss and disease-object intrusion are often considered subordinate to sorcery, rather than parallel to it (Hallowell 1935:366). Instead of falling into the same trap Clements does, we will heed the advice of Hallowell and examine nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory from the ground up, so to speak, investigating culturally specific notions of life, wellness, sickness, treatment, and healing from the comprehensive perspective of the whole sociocultural milieu. The connection between *wakǎ́ŋ* and *ní* (life, breath; the source of all life) represents a definite continuity with the past and with pre- and early reservation period traditional belief. Life (*ní*) and the ability to grow (*ičháǵa*) are the foundational principles unifying all being, life, and persons in the sacred hoop of existence and relationship and are important aspects of the Oglala relational worldview and religious ethos (Detwiler 1992; Fletcher 1884b:276 n 1; Walker 1917:69). In 1896, Sword (Walker 1991:83) said, “A man’s *ni* is his life. It is the same as his breath. It gives him his strength. All that is inside a man’s body it keeps clean. If it is weak it cannot clean the inside of the body.¹⁰¹ If it goes away from a man he is dead . . . *Niya* is that which causes the *ni*. It is given at the

¹⁰¹ From Sword’s words we can deduce a connection between (im)purity or pollution and sickness: according to nineteenth-century Lakota disease theories disease and illness result from a dirty, impure, or polluted body due to a weak *ní*. These insights shed light on the central significance of purification in Lakota religious philosophy and ritual practice.

time of birth.” We have already examined the connection between *ní* and the related concepts *niyá*, *waníya*, and *wóniya*.¹⁰² According to the Oglala Lone Star, “*Ni* is also like a spirit. It is a man’s breath. It is the spirit of smoke. It is the spirit of steam. It is the spirit of the sweatlodge. It purifies the body. The bear taught these things to the shamans” (Walker 1917:159).

Sword explains further in a description of the function of the *Inípi* (Sweat Lodge):

When a Lakota does the *ini*, he makes his *ni* strong and helps it to bring all out of the body that is hurtful to it. The *ni* of a Lakota is that which he breathes into his body and it goes all through it and keeps it alive. When the *ni* leaves the body of a Lakota, he is dead. When a Lakota says *inipi*, he means he does the *ini*. The *ni* goes all through the body all the time. Sometimes it is weak and then hurtful things get into the body. When this happens, a Lakota should *inipi* in an *iníti*.

The spirit of the water is good for the *ni* and it will make it strong. Anything hot will make the spirit of water free and it goes upward.¹⁰³ It is like the *ni* which can be seen with the breath on a cold day. An *iníti* is made close so that it will hold the spirit of water. Then one in it can breathe it into the body. It will then make the *ni* strong, and they will cleanse all in the body. They wash it and it comes out on the skin like *te mini*. *Te mini* is sweat. It is water on the body. A Lakota does not *inipi* to make the water on the body. He does it to wash the inside of the body.

He may do this to cure himself when he is sick or he may do it to make himself feel strong. He should always do it when he is about to do some important ceremony so that he will be clean inside before the *Wakan* beings. When a Lakota says *ni*, or *ini* or *inipi*, or *iníti*, he does not think about sweat. He thinks about making his *ni* strong so that it will purify him. [Walker 1991:100]

¹⁰² A related term, *wiǰhóni*, is described by Beede as “the totality of life-forms” (Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology). The contemporary term *mni wiǰhóni* means the water of life or water is life, underscoring the semantic association between water and life (Posthumus 2008-2014).

¹⁰³ Tyon describes this as the breath of the rocks, which is considered very *wakǰán* (Walker 1991:155). Later, Tyon uses the phrase “*mni wakanta najin kin*,” which is translated as “Water, standing in a *wakǰán* manner” or “the water standing above,” a ritual phrase referring to the rising of steam caused by pouring water on hot rocks in the Sweat Lodge (Walker 1991:xxxv, 154, 298 n 6). Water figures prominently in treatment methods, and there is clearly a close semantic connection between *ní* (life, breath) and *mni* (water). Water is needed for the maintenance and perpetuation of life. As Dorsey (1894:524) explains, “The words for ‘water’ and ‘life’ are identical in some of the Siouan languages, and they differ but slightly in others.”

Sword elaborates, explaining that “The idea of the Lakota is that the *Inipi* makes man’s spirit strong so that it may cleanse all within the body and so that the *Ni* may drive from his body all that makes him tired or that causes disease or that causes him to have evil thoughts” (Walker 1917:156). A weak *ní* cannot properly purify the body, allowing harmful agents and toxins to enter it, all of which may ultimately cause sickness. Therefore, strengthening the *ní* through the Sweat Lodge is considered a medicine or treatment to treat, cure, and prevent sickness.¹⁰⁴

Walker refers to the *ní* as “vitality.” He explains that as a precursor to the Sun Dance a candidate must:

. . . enter a sweatlodge to *ini*, or vitalize. *Inipi*, or vitalizing, is an act of more or less ceremony to stimulate the *ni*, or vitality, so that it may increase strength and purify the body. Vitalizing may be merely a means of refreshment, a remedial measure for disease, or to purify the body for some important undertaking. It ought always to be done as a preliminary to ceremonies pertaining to the *Wakan Tanka*, or the Great Gods. In its simplest form, it is done by releasing the spirit-like [*naǵila*] of water in a confined space so that it may enter the body. This spirit-like stimulates the vitality so that it overcomes harmful things that may be in the body and the spirit-like of the water washes them out of the body and they appear upon the skin like sweat and can be washed or wiped away. Thus, the vitality is strengthened and the body purified. If the vitalizing is a remedy for disease, medicines may be added to the water so that their potency, or spirit-like, may be released and enter the body, and there cause the desired effect. [Walker 1917:66]

Clearly, the Sweat Lodge is significant as a means of purifying and strengthening the *ní*.

For nineteenth-century Lakotas there was a strong connection between a living, breathing

¹⁰⁴ As Amiotte (1982:27–28) explains, “ritual cleansing in the sweat lodge is thought not only good for expelling toxic matter, the *miniwatukala*, through the pores, but also for strengthening and purifying the *Niya* through ritualized union with the spirit world.”

person's *ní* (life, breath) and the *wakǰáŋ*. Indeed, the *niyá* is given to human beings at birth by *Táku Škaŋškáŋ* and unifies all life forms in an expansive web of relationship.

One late nineteenth-century chief likened manifestations of life to *wakǰáŋ*, referring to them as “stopping places of the god” (Fletcher 1884b:276 n 1). Little Wound addresses the important life-giving and life-sustaining aspects of *wakǰáŋ*, saying, “When anything is food, it is *wakan* because it makes life. When anything is medicine, it is *wakan* for it keeps life in the body” (Walker 1991:69). The connection between *wakǰáŋ* and *ní* is likely tied to the great respect with which Lakota people have generally for all life forms. Fletcher recognized this in 1881-1882, writing that among the Oglalas (1884b:276 n 1), “the varied forms [of life] are all equally important and noble.”

In connection with the distinction between the *wakǰáŋ* of a tree and that of a human or animal (see Walker 1991:118) it is important to note that the type of vessel through which *wakǰáŋ* is transmuted is not the only distinguishing qualitative factor. The underlying difference here may involve the *ní* (life, breath), itself a subcategory of the more generalized concept *wakǰáŋ*. Particularly, the *ní* of inanimate objects or beings that do not breathe (such as rocks) tends to be distinguished from the *ní* of animate objects or beings that do breathe (such as humans and animals). One “devout old Indian” explained to Fletcher (1884b:276 n 1) that “The tree is like a human being, for it has life and grows, so we pray to it and put our offerings on it that the god may help us.” Breath or the breath of life is a powerful and prevalent concept used by pre- and early reservation period religious practitioners to distinguish between, categorize, and index various life forms.

Much Lakota ritual centers on the concept of life and good fortune in the future, with many prayers and songs focusing on life and the sustainment and perpetuation of life

movement (Fletcher 1884b:282 n 4). Ritual songs often contain the stem *ní*, with lyrics such as *Yaní kte ló* (You will live [meaning you will recover from illness]), *Yanípi kte ló* (You all will live), *Théhaŋ waní kte ló* (I will live for a long time), and *Niwáčhiŋpi* (They wish to live) (Densmore 2001:121, 124, 131, 135, 255, 259). There is also the common ritual phrase *Héčhel lená oyáte kiŋ nípi kte* (That these people may live).¹⁰⁵

It is probable that the concept *ní*, coupled with conceptions of reciprocal kinship relations and a relational worldview, is the basis for Lakota hunting rituals, some of the most ancient forms of Sioux religious expression (Deloria n.d.). Fletcher writes that an “apology” was offered to slain animals “for the life of the one is taken to supplement the life of the other; ‘that it may cause us to live,’ one formula expresses it” (1884b:276 n 1). The Sioux treat game animals with reverence and respect, as relatives, incorporating various species into the inclusive domain of personhood based on shared traits, rather than differences. They refer to various species as *oyáte* (people, nation, tribe), as in *pté oyáte* (buffalo nation, buffalo people) or *šúŋkawakháŋ oyáte* (horse nation, horse people). A basic appreciation and grasp of the *ní* (life, breath) concept provides us with the key to unlocking and understanding Lakota disease theory, which in turn sheds light on treatment methods and practitioner types.

The Lakota terms for disease, illness, and sickness are generally derived from the stems *yazáŋ* and *khúža* (to be sick). *Yazáŋ* is a stative verb meaning that one’s body part is sore, aches, or hurts or that one feels pain somewhere in the body. Interestingly, pain is

¹⁰⁵ This may indicate a recent shift in Lakota prayer forms. Prayer is no longer largely about life, sustaining and perpetuating life movement, and having *Wakháŋ Thánka* hear and recognize someone per se. Now the “Creator” is addressed, often in formulaic English, like the Christian God, and asked to “watch over” people. In this vein *Mitákuye oyás’iŋ* (All my relatives, we are all related) as a universal benediction may be quite recent too. Nineteenth-century Lakotas often used the phrase *Waní kta wačhiŋ* (I want to live) as a formalized closing to prayer.

frequently conceived of as the physical manifestation or cause of sickness, so that a practitioner locates the sickness when he localizes the pain associated with it. Extracting and alleviating the pain is essentially indistinguishable from extracting and alleviating the sickness. The stem of *yazáŋ* is *-zaŋ*, meaning loose material, such as hair; hurt; or pain. The former is perhaps a reference to the idea of foreign materials or pollutants in the body (disease-objects) leading to impurities, a weakened *ní*, and ultimately sickness. The Lakota term for health is *zaní* or *zaŋní*,¹⁰⁶ a stative verb meaning to be healthy, well, not sick, in good health, or whole, referring to both physical and psychological health. The term for well-being among late nineteenth-century Northern Lakotas, according to Beede (1912:Western Sioux Cosmology), was *tanyáŋunpi*, which he describes as “well-being or ‘civilization’ which they carry with them wherever they move or go.”

When the *ní* is unclean, weak, or under the influence of a malevolent other-than-human person sickness results. Sword contends that sickness is ultimately caused by the *wakháŋ*, understood simply as something mysterious and inexplicable from human perspectives. According to Sword (Walker 1991:91), “Disease is caused by the *wakan* (mysterious), or it may be caused by the mysterious-like (*wakanla*). The evil mysteries may impart their potencies to the body and this will cause disease. Poisons and snakes and water creatures cause disease in this way. A magician can cause disease by his mysterious powers. A holy man can cause disease by his songs and ceremonies.” The disembodied spirits of human beings (*naǵí* or *wanáǵi*) and other malevolent persons, such as the *mniwátu* (water sprites), are Sword’s “evil mysteries.” They are believed to

¹⁰⁶ This term may literally mean ‘not hurt’ or ‘not sick’, from *zaŋ* + *ni*, the latter of which also functions as a negative suffix meaning “not.”

frequently strike or shoot (*ópi*) people with disease-objects that cause sickness (Denig 2000:100).

No Flesh, whose father was a medicine man and “knew all the diseases” (Walker 1917:161), corroborates Sword’s basic understanding of sickness. For No Flesh, Sword, and others of their generation disease was ultimately a spiritual or *wakǰáŋ* matter, conceived of as foreign elements or impurities in the body causing physical symptoms.¹⁰⁷ In healthy individuals the *ní* functions to cleanse and purify the body of these alien abnormalities and impurities. As No Flesh explains, “Evil spirits cause all diseases. Good spirits do not cause diseases. The evil spirits may cause worms to enter the body. The evil spirits get into the body” (Walker 1917:161–162). In this way we can see how the propitiation of malevolent spirits plays an important role in religion and ritual in terms of averting sickness, maintaining wellness, and perpetuating life movement.

According to No Flesh:

All diseases are things which get into the body and do violence to it in some way. The thing to do is to get these things out of the body. May be it is the influence of a supernatural being (*Taku Wakan*). May be it is something like a worm. If it is an influence (*tonwan*), then the shamans (*Wicasa Wakan*) can cure the sick the best.¹⁰⁸ If it is something else, then the medicinemen (*Pejuta wicasa*) can make the best cure. If the sickness is of long duration, then someone should seek a vision and learn what to do. It is always the best to *iwani* (take a vapor bath with ceremonies). It is best always to make smoke of sage and then smoke of sweetgrass. This will drive away the evil spirits and please the good spirits. . . . The medicines drive the disease out in the sweat, in the vomit, in the defecation, in the urine, and in the breath [*ní*].¹⁰⁹ To drive disease out in the sweat, is the

¹⁰⁷ Some foods can also cause disease, either because they are poisonous or *wakǰáŋ* (Walker 1917:163).

¹⁰⁸ No Flesh elaborates on this point: “The shamans can make medicines that are very mysterious and powerful. Their incantations (*pikiyapi*) make it powerful. By their incantations they can cause diseases. These diseases are *tokeca* (different from the ordinary)” (Walker 1917:163).

¹⁰⁹ We will recall that Lakota traditional medicines are either steamed, smoked, or swallowed (Walker 1991:80).

best and easiest way; in the breath, is the next best and easiest way; in the defecation, is the next best way; in the urine is a good way; and in the vomit, is a very hard way, but some diseases will not come out in any other way. [Walker 1917:163]

Mythical characters classified with *Wakháŋ Šiča* (Malevolent *Wakháŋ*) were known to frequently disrupt life movement, cause sickness, and were blamed as secondary rationalizations for various ailments and conditions (Walker 1917:161–163). For example, there was a pervasive nineteenth-century Lakota belief in a category of elf-like spirits known as *wiwíla*.¹¹⁰ These spirits inhabited springs and other water sources, guarding them against human interference. It was believed that these little spirits used tiny bows and arrows to shoot foreign objects and projectiles [perhaps conceptualized as *thunwáŋ*] into unsuspecting humans stopping for a drink, especially at nighttime.¹¹¹ These

¹¹⁰ A contemporary religious leader explained that *wiwíla* are not necessarily evil, but frightening to humans (Posthumus 2008-2014). The *Unktéhi* (Water Monsters), nemeses of the *Wakíŋyaŋ* (Thunder Beings), also present threats to humans in regards to water sources and may be confused with the *wiwíla* (Dorsey 1894:425, 434, 438–443, 537–538; Walker 1917:83, 89). According to Walker’s interlocutors, “When one is in the water they will shoot him with their tails and they will cramp and go down so that they may get them” (Walker 1991:108). As No Flesh explains, “the *Unktehi* and the dragon fly made a little worm, took it to *Iya* [Giant Eater, Cannibal; the chief malevolent *wakháŋ*] and told him to put it in the water. When anyone drank the water they would die and he would have plenty of meat. So *Iya* put the worm in the water and when anyone drank the water, the worm would go down the windpipe and into the lungs. It would draw all the fat from the body and eat it and one would cough and spit out the fat that the worm would not eat. When the worm had eaten all the fat then the person died, so that there was little meat or fat. This was what *Iya* wanted, for his favorite food was spirits. This was how consumption began” (Walker 1917:162). Myth provides the basis and origin for many sicknesses, while usually visions provide the treatments for them.

¹¹¹ According to Bushotter, invisible essences could enter the body at night, usually by being shot into the tender parts of a human being’s flesh, often by a duck (*šiyáka[thánka]-o* [to be shot at by a (large) grebe duck]). These things never approach visibly but are always in an invisible state (Bushotter 1937:Story 216). Therefore, they are feared and believed to cause physical abnormalities and other conditions. There is a parallel belief concerning *wahínheya* (pocket gophers, sometime referred to in the literature as moles or simply gophers). It is believed that pocket gophers shoot humans in the neck with blades of grass or whiskers, causing glandular swelling and scrofula, if the patient is not treated in a timely fashion. Only very powerful practitioners with potent medicines can treat these injuries by extracting the grass or whiskers. According to Bushotter, the people thought of pocket gophers as holy, but did not pray to them. Instead, pocket gophers were hated and no one touched them or went around their holes for fear of being shot. Because potatoes are considered the food of all subterranean animals, including pocket gophers, those who are shot in such a way never eat potatoes. As a treatment for being shot the fat of predators of the pocket gopher, such as the badger, is rubbed on the victim’s throat. These remedies are inspired by visions (Bushotter 1937:Story 191; Dorsey 1894:496; Walker 1991:169–170, 299 n 17). According to No Flesh,

projectiles are believed to result in illness and disease (Walker 1991:91, 94, 170–171).

According to Tyon:

When a man has been shot by a spring, he returns home and the medicine men doctor him assiduously (*wapiyapi kin lila kuwapelo*). Whoever is strong (*wakix'ake*) can be made to live, it is said. But some they can not cure, it is said. The medicine men draw out the scum from those shot by the springs and then they live, it is said. These medicine men draw out the scum by sucking, it is said. To this very day, the Lakotas have this belief. This is the way it is. [Walker 1991:170–171]

The *wiwíla* or elf-like guardians of springs are differentiated from *mniwátu* or *mniwátukala*,¹¹² although both infest and infect the body through disease-object introduction and intrusion. A contemporary religious leader described *mniwátu* as microscopic creatures, often too small to be seen, that cause sickness when ingested through water. He explained that this is the reason for straining and filtering water with deer hides. Frequently, the *mniwátu* are physically manifested in the form of worms or maggots. As No Flesh explains, “When persons drink water from the streams, they are apt to suck in worms and swallow them. These worms scratch the bowels and gnaw the internal organs and make pains. One is apt to swallow snakes and frogs in the same way

“The influence of the mole is bad. It gives scars and burrows under the skin (scrofula). It also causes lice” (Walker 1917:162). As Tyon explains, “Those who go to where gophers live hide their throats. They still believe in this custom to this day” (Walker 1991:169). However, because the pocket gopher transcends realms, freely passing between the terranean and subterranean worlds, it is also considered to be *wak'háy* in a positive sense. The pocket gopher is symbolically associated with warfare. The earth pulverized by pocket gophers is considered a sacred and powerful medicine used in many rituals, such as *Yuwípi*, and also figures prominently in ceremonial bundles and war medicines. The holy man Wooden Cup or Drinks Water used pocket gopher dirt as part of his medicine and in one instance transformed a sack of the pulverized dirt pushed up out of the ground into gunpowder. The religious practitioner Chips gave pulverized pocket gopher dirt to Crazy Horse for protection in battle. The pocket gopher in Black Elk’s great vision turned into the soldier weed that had the power to destroy nations in war (DeMallie 1984:135 n 25, 137, 337, 340; Densmore 2001:350; Posthumus 2008-2014).

¹¹² Buechel (n.d.:49) refers to these beings as *manitúkala*, defining them simply as spirits. Perhaps this is a loanword or borrowing and further evidence of Sioux-Ojibwe hybridity: The Lakota *mniwátukala* is very similar to the Ojibwe *manitu* or *manitou*, the Ojibwe equivalent of *wak'háy*.

and these things live in such a one's belly and they must be fed or they will writhe about and cause pains" (Walker 1917:163). No Flesh's worms sound much like tape worms.¹¹³

Worms inserted or shot into the body that eat away at the lungs are also believed to be the cause of tuberculosis, as noted by No Flesh and Walker (Walker 1917:162; Walker 1991:8–12).¹¹⁴

According to Walker:

The *Mini Watu* or Water Sprites are material beings whose substance is visible, except when too small to be seen. Their form is that of maggots and they cause things to rot. They ever seek entrance into the bodies of mankind and lurk in the waters to do so. When in the body they pinch the bowels, or pull the cords of the joints, or beat upon the brain, for they delight in the suffering of mankind. They ever war against the *niya*, or ghost, and if they prevail, the ghost leaves the body. But they may be exorcised in a vitalizing lodge by a Shaman or a medicineman. [Walker 1917:89]

Walker describes the ritual procession bringing the Sun Dance tree back to camp. On one of the four ritual stops, if there is running water or some other source of water, explains

¹¹³ When Bushotter's younger brother was sick and on the verge of death he began acting demented and strange. Bushotter's parents solicited a practitioner who reported that a ghost was causing the sick boy's bizarre behavior. The practitioner proceeded to smudge him, making an incense of sacred herbs to smoke the boy until he felt better. Next, the practitioner sucked to draw blood from a cut on the sick boy's chest. He tried again and again, as only blood came out of the cut, not the matter or pollution symbolic of the ghost causing the illness. The practitioner informed Bushotter's parents that there was something flat, a serpent, in his body. Furthermore, if the practitioner was able to extract or exorcise it the patient would recover. Bushotter's family offered the practitioner a horse as a fee. The practitioner accepted the payment, agreeing to work on the boy until he was cured. When he was beginning to recover the practitioner told the family to catch a fish to feed the recovering boy. Bushotter's brother caught a catfish and gave it to his father, who prayed over the fish and made some marks on its head with a knife, before cooking it for his ailing son. The boy ate the fish and recovered fully soon after (Bushotter 1937:Story 255).

¹¹⁴ Some worms (*waglúla*) also apparently eat at the bowels, causing diarrhea. Maggots and worms are commonly associated with decay, and this connection makes perfect sense in terms of the cause of sickness: maggots and worms appear when a wound festers and in other instances of rot and decay (Posthumus 2008-2014; Standing Bear 2006:66). Smoke repels insects and the like, perhaps the origin for using smoke to banish evil spirits. Evil spirits are believed to be the cause of headaches. For a fascinating and valuable description of other diseases, their causes, and treatments from the perspective of No Flesh, a nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioner, see Walker (1917:161–163).

Walker (1917:106), the Sun Dance intercessor or ritual leader “should strike it four times with his Fetish, to drive from it the *Mini Watu*, or evil water creatures that can infect the people.”

Beede’s Northern Lakota interlocutors apparently had similar conceptions of disease theory and treatment. According to Beede, the Lakotas believed that:

. . . sickness was caused by evil spirits in the patient. The Western Sioux also believed it was often caused by “*taku niun chickchistina*” (little living things), in the patient, and this was oft versioned by white men to mean “ghosts”—an idea laughable to Indians—for it really meant to them little living things chiefly, but not always, in “bad water,” microbes or bacteria which they claimed to see. . . . They loved the waters of the Missouri river precisely because it was believed to be free from these “*taku niun chickchistina*.” They had a harsh, quick-acting cathartic used for typhoid (which they seldom had), the purpose of which was to expel these “little living things” (also called “little living people”), from the patient. They had considerable knowledge of organic diseases, and their remedies. And they did also, at the same time, most fully believe that it was of great help and benefit to a man in sickness to keep his mind [*thawáčhiŋ*] and soul [*wičhánaǵi*] in harmony with Woniya, or to have it thus kept by the aid of others assisting him; and the “*wapiya*” (powwow),¹¹⁵ was with precisely this intent. [Beede 1912:Western Sioux Cosmology]

Beede is perceptive to compare the *táku ní úŋ čisčísčila* (little living things or persons) to bacteria or germs that enter the body and require expulsion through a variety of methods and techniques.

Treatment of sickness depends on the vision and expertise of the practitioner. As Densmore (2001:244) explains, “All treatment of the sick was in accordance with dreams. No one attempted to treat the sick unless he had received a dream telling him to do so, and no one ever disregarded the obligations of such a dream. Each man treated

¹¹⁵ Evidently, Beede is referring to a doctoring or healing ceremony.

only the diseases for which his dream had given him the remedies.”¹¹⁶ Vision-prescribed specialization was pervasive among nineteenth-century practitioners. As Shooter explained to Densmore:

In the old days the Indians had few diseases, and so there was not a demand for a large variety of medicines. A medicine-man usually treated one special disease and treated it successfully. He did this in accordance with his dream. A medicine-man would not try to dream of *all* herbs and treat *all* diseases, for then he could not expect to succeed in all nor to fulfill properly the dream of any one herb or animal. He would depend on too many and fail in all. That is one reason why our medicine-men lost their power when so many diseases came among us with the advent of the white man. [Densmore 2001:244–245]

For No Flesh banishment and invocation were essential preliminary elements of treatment:

In all sickness evil spirits should be driven away first. This may be done by making smoke with the sage. There are other things which will drive away certain kinds of evil spirits. Then when the evil spirits are driven away, the good spirits should be invoked. This may be done by singing songs.¹¹⁷ A medicineman will know what song to sing. He learns what song to sing when he has his vision. It may be that he learns the song from someone else. [Walker 1917:161]

Amiotte discusses some of the theories outlined by Sword, No Flesh, and Beede from a more contemporary perspective. When the *niyá* (life-breath) leaves the body the body will have the appearance of a corpse.¹¹⁸ Amiotte explains:

¹¹⁶ Today, many religious practitioners are generalists rather than specialists, a topic we will examine in greater detail in the section on contemporary belief and ritual.

¹¹⁷ Or by incensing or smudging with sweetgrass. See Walker (1917:161).

¹¹⁸ Beede (1912:Western Sioux Cosmology) describes a person whose *thawáčhiŋ* (mind) has temporarily left him or her as *t'a nuys'é* (nearly the same as dead). According to Amiotte (1982:28), this was the historical impetus for above-ground, scaffold burial practices among the Lakotas.

The ritual “doctoring” and healing processes, then, treat not only the body but also the *Niya* [life-breath], a relation the modern world has begun to realize with the holistic approach to medicine. In this sense we see one dimension of the Lakota belief that dreams are explanations of medical realities. For if a person’s *Niya* leaves his body, probably accompanied by the second soul or *Nagi*, and re-enters the spirit world, the body is quite without motion and the *Niya* must be retrieved and reintegrated with the body. [Amiotte 1982:28]

Clearly, there are different levels of treatment and healing, focusing on the mind, body, and spirit of the patient. Different sicknesses call for different treatment techniques and practitioner types.

Amiotte also discusses sickness as a form of soul-loss leading to physical and spiritual disequilibrium, in which case the *niyá* remains in the body while the *naǵí* (spirit) leaves the body. In such instances, writes Amiotte (1982:29), “the body would continue to function, but in a state of coma or in semiconsciousness. In such a state the person may appear to others as strange in his or her actions and attitudes.” The temporary absence of the *naǵí* may result in states of illness or insanity. The role of the practitioner in such cases is to locate the errant *naǵí* in the spirit world and coax it into returning to and reuniting with the body of the patient through the proper ritual methods (Amiotte 1982:28–29). Now we will summarize what we have discussed, attempting to reach some overarching conclusions and gain a broader understanding of Lakota disease theory from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cultural perspectives.

3. CONCLUSIONS: (RE)ARTICULATING NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA DISEASE THEORY

As a point of departure it is useful to conceptualize of nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory in terms of a continuum, the two extremes of which are disease and illness (see Figure 7). By disease we mean sickness caused by a physical or physiological malfunction or agent; common (*ikčéka*) physical or physiological ailments, injuries, and wounds that afflict the corporeal body of patients and are treated by more-or-less techno-scientific means. By illness we mean sickness brought on by a patient's perception of his or her bodily state; unusual (*wakǰáŋ* [mysterious] or *thókeča* [different]) psychological, psychosomatic, or spiritual conditions that afflict the non-corporeal aspects of patients, such as soul-loss or disease-object intrusion introduced by sorcery/witchcraft or other forms of malevolent magical attack, which nevertheless afflict the body, causing physical symptoms. These spiritual sicknesses are treated by mystico-spiritual, magico-ritual, or psychological means, often akin to psychotherapy. Some sicknesses are entirely disease, while others are entirely matters of perception (psychosomatic), but most represent a combination of the two (Monaghan and Just 2000:136–137).

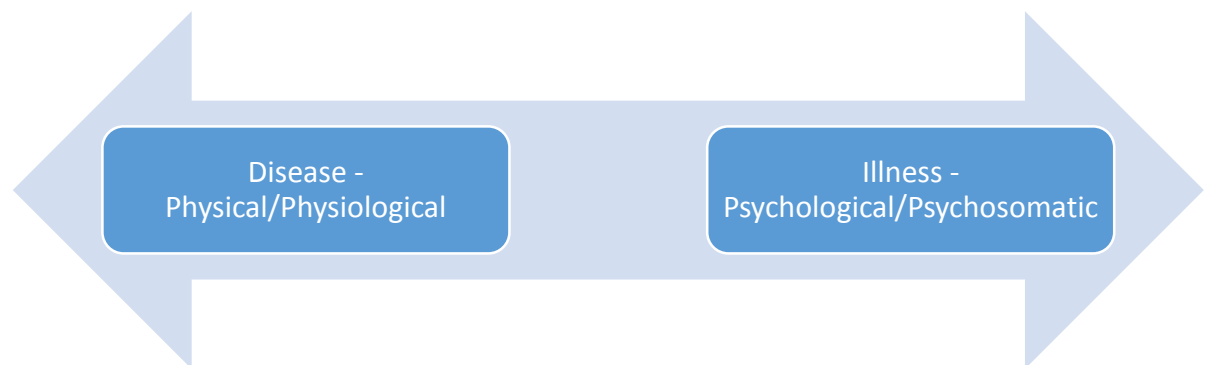


Figure 7: Continuum of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Disease Theory

This continuum is useful as an analytical and conceptual tool, but we must remember that nearly all forms of sickness are believed to be ultimately of *wakǰáŋ* or

mysterious origin. Since, according to nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives and worldview, all beings and things are related persons and each has *wakǰáŋ*, other-than-human power and potency, there is no “natural” cause for sickness. Again, we are faced with the inadequacy of the natural/supernatural dichotomy as applied to Lakota culture and philosophy. Definitions of “natural” are culturally relative. Rather, aside from physical injuries and very practical medical treatment, all sickness is ultimately the result of malevolent other-than-human influence, intervention, or interference, although human agency may play a role in cases of sorcery/witchcraft or shooting medicine.¹¹⁹ Disease theory concretely impacts, stimulates, informs, and directs treatment techniques, methods, and cultural conceptions of medicine, healing, and wellness.

From nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives disease and illness result largely from the introduction of foreign elements (disease-objects) and malignant spirit beings into the body (Hassrick 1964:288). The foundational theme underlying Lakota disease theory—and much of Lakota religion and ritual in general—is purity and purification: sickness results from impurity and contamination in one form or another—or, in other words, the absence or opposite of purity—and calls for purification as a universal treatment prerequisite. Sickness and pain are the physical or physiological manifestations and symptoms of psychological conflict and spiritual disequilibrium, disharmony, and imbalance.

The specific causes of sickness, conceptualized as impurity or contamination in the form of disease-object or spirit introduction or possession, are numerous and

¹¹⁹ Interestingly, there is less evidence of classical sorcery/witchcraft among historical Lakotas than among some other North American tribes, such as the Navajo. See, for instance, Kluckhohn (1944). We will discuss sorcery/witchcraft in greater detail in our examination of nineteenth-century ritual specialists.

varied.¹²⁰ Disease and illness may be caused by the *wakǰ́án* or *wakǰ́ánla* influence of a malevolent spirit being or mythological persona; a breach of taboo or ritual errors; ethical violations; poison or scum; mysterious or poisonous foods; microscopic living things comparable to bacteria or microbes; various creatures, such as snakes, frogs, pocket gophers, worms, or maggots; or various human sources, such as malignant practitioners (conjurers, sorcerers, or malevolent holy men), interaction with and contamination by ghosts, or contact with menstruation. If any one of these are introduced into the body—often as a result of a weakened *ní*, comparable perhaps to a weakened immune or respiratory system—sickness and physical symptoms may result. Disease and illness may also be conceptualized as a form of soul-loss in which the *niyá*, *naǰí*, or both break ties with the corporeal body and wander, leading to various physical and psychological ailments and conditions. In any case these *wakǰ́án* or mysterious causes lead to any number of physiological and psychological conditions and sicknesses, such as headache, fever, flu, the common cold, frostbite, boils and other skin conditions, spasms, stroke, scrofula, rheumatism, colic, diarrhea, stomach issues, aches and pains, arthritis, paralysis, venereal disease, sexual disorders, delirium, depression, and hysteria (Walker 1917:162–163).

Sickness is ubiquitous: every society develops methods and means for treating and alleviating it based on culturally constituted worldviews. As a result, each society creates medicines to deal with the universal problem of sickness (cf. Hallowell

¹²⁰ Apparently, much traditional knowledge relating to disease/illness has been gradually eroding since the dawn of the early reservation period. As *Yuwípi* practitioner George Flesh explains, “Most explanations for the cause of disease died out a long time ago with the old people” (Fugle 1966:25). However, a number of religious leaders from Pine Ridge still possess knowledge of this type, and new traditions have developed based on more recent social conditions and health issues faced by contemporary Lakota people, leading to new shared conceptions of physical and psychological or spiritual health, wellness, sickness, medicine, and treatment.

1963:258). If all sickness is of other-than-human origin, conceptualized as *t̥hún* or *t̥húnwán*¹²¹ (spiritual influence, essence, or potency of a *wakhán*) or as foreign elements introduced into the body (such as worms, fingernails, grass, whiskers, hair, little living things or people, etc.), then we can begin to understand a great deal of nineteenth-century Lakota disease theory, medicine, treatment techniques, health, and the practices of magico-medico-ritual practitioners. Disease-object intrusion, spirit intrusion, and soul-loss have been noted as common explanatory models for the causes of sickness or methods of its transmission. Sorcery/witchcraft and breach of taboo¹²² must be relegated to secondary causes, because although they may provide the impetus for sickness they are not the ultimate root cause of it, conceived of as malevolent other-than-human substance or influence introduced into or otherwise localized within the body.

From nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives, then, medicine very broadly can refer to anything or any method used to alleviate pain, sustain life (*ní*), and treat or cure physiological or psychological sickness; disease or illness. The English term medicine can be thought of as *p̥hěžúta* (*ikčéka*) ([common] medicine, herbal medicines, grass roots), *p̥hěžúta wakhán* (mysterious or spiritual medicine), or anything in between these

¹²¹ Buechel defines *t̥húnwán* in a telling way that connects the idea of spiritual potency to the common theme of shooting (*ópi*) medicine or other-than-human power or influence. For Buechel, *t̥húnwán* is associated with any kind of arrow or projectile. The term *túnwán*, on the other hand, involves the act of looking or glaring, flashing the eyes on someone or something, as in *wakínyan túnwánpi* (lightning; the glare of the thunder beings). Both forms are semantically associated with the idea of shooting other-than-human potency or influence.

¹²² Interestingly, in nineteenth-century Lakota religious belief and ritual practice there appears to be no concept of confession or penance for breaches of taboo, as described among the Saukteaux Ojibwe by Hallowell (1935; 1963). Instead, the Lakotas seem to be more focused on the future, rather than past transgressions, negotiating their relationships with other-than-human persons through concepts such as purity, propitiation, offering, and sacrifice. However, breaches of taboo can lead to misfortune and sickness. As No Flesh explains, “If one has dedicated an animal or part of an animal according to his vision and then such a one should eat that animal or part of the animal before the dedication runs out, then the thing that it was dedicated to, will bring some kind of sickness upon such a one” (Walker 1917:163). See also Sword (in Walker 1991:78).

two extremes of the disease-illness (*ikčéka-wakǰáŋ*) continuum. Medicine is a central and polysemous cultural symbol, and its applications are broad and varied.

Medicines and their administration are essential to the treatment process, those of the common variety generally being ingested, fumigated, swallowed, steamed, or smoked. Often medicines were infused in teas and ingested, inhaled through smoke or steam, powdered and chewed by a practitioner and spat or rubbed on the patient's body (Walker 1991:93). In cases of disease-object introduction treatment was directed toward the removal of the cause or foreign pollutant through its extraction from the body. This was executed by various means, one of which involves the ingestion of swallowed, smoked, or steamed medicines that drove out sickness (disease-objects) through sweat, breath, urine, feces, or vomit. Hence, purgatives and emetics were common varieties of Lakota medicine. Bloodletting (*kǰaŋkáka* or *wekákpa*) was another common treatment type aimed at expelling disease-objects, in this case, bad blood (*wé šiča*) (Posthumus 2008-2014). According to Standing Bear (2006b:62), "Bloodletting was practiced occasionally and considered a cure for spring fever and for headache. A slight cut was made in the temple and a little blood allowed to run for headache. For lassitude in the spring the veins in the crook of the arm opposite the elbow were cut, from which a small amount of blood was allowed to flow."

Manipulation, both physiological and psychological, was and is a significant treatment category. Massage and the physical manipulation of various body parts and organs played an important role in pre- and early reservation period Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice. Often carried out in tandem with the giving of herbs and other medicines, massage was used to treat conditions from general pain to stroke to Bell's

palsy, the latter believed to be caused by encounters with ghosts. The patient's body was methodically worked over, rubbed, and manipulated from head to toe or vice-versa to decompress nerves and aching joints, relieve pain and stiffness, and dissipate clots and other blockages (Posthumus 2008-2014). In these cases the sick organ or member was physically involved, treatment often involved manipulation or suction aimed at extracting or dispelling the cause of the pain or sickness, and the administering of remedies (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:191, 196–197).

Psychological manipulation was also a significant form of treatment, used mainly to treat cases of soul-loss. Suffering and sickness occurred because a patient lost an aspect of his soul, whether it be the *niyá* (life-breath) or *naǵí* (spirit, double). Collectively, these aspects constituted one's vital strength and life. All aspects of one's soul were functionally interrelated, cooperating as a corporate, harmonious, multipart whole, much like an organism. When any one aspect was awry, malfunctioning, or errant the integrity of the entire organism or body (*thañčháŋ*) was threatened and compromised. In these cases a practitioner, assisted by his spirit helpers, engaged in a classically shamanistic technique, journeying to the spirit world to retrieve the lost aspect of the soul and restoring it to its human host (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:188–189).

The emotional or affective content of physical disorders and physiological disturbances is apparent and significant. Various foundational elements of Lakota ritual, when stripped to their essences, may be conceptualized as psychological treatments and manipulations of sick organs and body parts.¹²³ In treatments involving psychological

¹²³ These ritual elements include banishing, incensing, purification, songs, prayers, invocation, and evocation. They are essential preliminal and liminal aspects of ceremony and prerequisites to treatment and healing. Banishing, incensing, and purification appear to be semantically and functionally interrelated. Describing the role of the drum and music in ritual contexts, Black Elk explains, "The drum arouses one's

manipulation the practitioner does not typically touch the body of the patient or administer remedies or medicines. And yet these manipulations involve, directly and explicitly, the pathological condition and its locus, utilizing psychotherapeutic methods to treat psychosomatic disorders. And cures are expected from and frequently effected through these psychological manipulations of ideas and symbols¹²⁴ (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:190–192, 200–201).

Psychological manipulation is also essential to the treatment of cases of malevolent spirit introduction or possession. Again, treatment was directed toward removing the cause. Practitioners used a variety of techniques to extract or exorcise malignant other-than-human persons, including banishment, incensing, music, prayer, incantations, and purification. As Hassrick explains:

Expelling evil spirits was no easy task. It demanded the patient's devoted faith in the shaman's complete rapport with the supernatural. Sickness was a spiritual matter which affected the physical, and consequently the proper cure was psychotherapeutic. The shaman's incantation were designed in part literally to frighten the evil forces out of the victim. That the patient may have also experienced a certain consternation at the magic performance had the double advantage of providing a shocklike [*sic*] therapy and instilling an awesome reverence for the practitioner. [Hassrick 1964:290–291]

First, the practitioner must locate the foreign object—conceived of as an actual physical or material thing; the personification of pain and sickness—through “jugglery” or divination, executed through communication with other-than-human persons and often

mind enough to make you feel the actions of this world and think about them and after you have thought about this you are happy. This has been used for a long time with the Indians and it is also used for enjoyment. The voice of the drum is an offering to the spirit” (Black Elk in DeMallie 1984:237).

¹²⁴ As Lévi-Strauss (1963:200) explains, “the manipulation must be carried out through symbols, that is, through meaningful equivalents of things meant which belong to another order of reality.”

the intervention of sacred stones (Densmore 2001:244–247). Next, the practitioner must extract the foreign element, substance, or influence (the cause of symbolic illness¹²⁵), sometimes through sucking or blowing out the projectile; sometimes purged in the sweat, vomit, defecation, urine, or breath of the patient; or other times through extraction or exorcism. Finally, once the foreign object or influence is removed, the practitioner must renew, rejuvenate, and strengthen the *ní* or *niyá* so that it can begin to function normally again in its capacity as a natural cleanser of alien impurities within the body.¹²⁶ As

Richard Two Dogs explained to me, physical healing cannot take place without spiritual

¹²⁵ Powers, citing Mary Douglas, describes symbolic illness as representative of “the ritual acting out of the drama of life and death. Symbolic illness also marks a larger category, that of social disorder in general, further symbolized in terms of aches and pains, or personal anxieties related to the individual’s transgression of social regulations, that is, the commission or error or sin” (Powers 1986:177). Powers’s “transgression of social regulations” parallels Grobsmith’s understanding of *wakúŋza* as supernatural retribution underpinning a system of social control and Bushotter’s translation of *wókuŋze* as an observance or rule imposed by a spirit being (Bushotter 1937:Story 109; see also Grobsmith 1974). Symbolic illness marks the category that subsumes all forms of social disorder or disequilibrium that, if left unchecked, would lead to complete social disintegration. Symbolic illness may take the form of alcohol or drug abuse, physical aches and pains, anxiety, “heartsickness,” PTSD, and other psychological conditions. It may be compared to “Indian sickness,” as opposed to “white man’s sickness” (see Powers 1986:178). It is my contention that the *Yuwípi* Ceremony is the temporary and regular or daily cure for symbolic illness in life crises—restoring spiritual equilibrium, balance, and harmony—on the individual or microcosmic level, while the Sun Dance functions in the same way for the group on a macrocosmic level. The Sun Dance is the annual, restorative ritual that addresses and balances collective spiritual equilibrium. Both *Yuwípi* and Sun Dance could be considered rites of passage and rites of affliction, but the focus differs: generally, *Yuwípi* sees to the spiritual and psychological needs of the individual, while Sun Dance functions in the same way for the group. Most Lakotas today seek treatment for physical ailments at Western medical facilities, although this type of treatment is frequently paired with traditional magico-medico-ritual treatment through traditional religion and ritual or the Native American Church. Consequently, much of contemporary Lakota religion and ritual focuses on symbolic illness or “Indian sickness” in terms of general physical and mental health and spiritual equilibrium. Because of these considerations since the 1960s *Yuwípi* and Sun Dance have become the most popular, common, and visible forms of modern Lakota religious life and ritual practice. They fulfill all or most of the individual and collective psychological and spiritual needs of the people. An unforeseen consequence of this development has been an overall decline in diversity in terms of both belief and practice, a concomitant loss of ritual specialization, and a general trend towards the replication of uniformity in the religious and ritual domains. However, these trends have led to new and complex issues in the ever-changing Lakota religious landscape. Sioux culture has always been pragmatic, rooted in innovation and adaptation, yet the roots of contemporary religion and ritual speak to strong and undeniable continuities with the past.

¹²⁶ The term for doctoring and treatment in general, *waphíya*, comes from *phiyá* (to make anew, renew) (DeMallie 1984:102 n 3). In this sense treatment may refer to the initial locating and extraction of the disease-object or malevolent spirit and the giving of medicines, while doctoring may refer to renewing the *ní* or *niyá* or retrieving a lost *naǵí* (spirit). Healing may be conceived of as a strengthened and properly-functioning *ní* or *niyá* or the reunification and reintegration of the errant *naǵí* with the body.

healing and the reestablishment of spiritual equilibrium, balance, or harmony (Posthumus 2008-2014). In the case of soul-loss a practitioner must either strengthen the *niyá*, locate the errant *niyá* or *naǵí* and reunite it with its host, or both.

The type of sickness, the cause of which is conceptualized either as a foreign substance, projectile, or influence localized in the body or as some form of soul-loss, determined the treatment method, as well as the type of practitioner best suited to bring about healing. Disease called for more human or earthly remedies, in which case the services of a *pěžúta wičháša* (medicine man, male herbalist) or *pěžúta wínyan* (medicine woman, female herbalist) are enlisted. Herbalists administered *pěžúta* (herbal medicines; literally, ‘grass roots’), usually through smoking, steaming, or swallowing.

Illness called for more celestial or mystical remedies and the intervention of other-than-human persons or spirit beings. In such cases a *waphíya* (conjuror, magician) of some type, for there were many varieties, or a *wičháša wakhán* (holy man, shaman) was enlisted to intervene with the spirit world in an intermediary role, working a cure through other-than-human or occult means. Ultimately, treatment and healing were concerned with maintaining life, balance, and spiritual equilibrium; with sustaining and perpetuating life movement. In fact, the propensity to maintain life movement, on the one hand, and disrupt or terminate it, on the other, is a key distinguishing factor among traditional practitioners.

Clearly treatment and the type of practitioner utilized depended on the type and severity of the sickness as well. Physical/physiological and psychological/psychosomatic/spiritual are two interrelated, culturally constituted ways of understanding health, wellness, disease, illness, medicine, and treatment. These domains

overlap, representing two mutually reinforcing and influencing ways of understanding sickness, agency, causality, the universe, and why things happen from the perspective of a particular worldview. While organic processes and physiological wellbeing are essential to health, keeping the mind (*t̥hawáčhiŋ*) and spirit (*naǵi*) in harmony with *Wóniya* (Life) and the greater, transcendent forces of the universe is also necessary.

According to Standing Bear (2006b:255), “The spiritual health and existence of the Indian was maintained by song, magic, ritual, dance, symbolism, oratory (or council), design, handicraft, and folk-story.” Curing or healing is expressed in Lakota by the word *asní* (to recover [from sickness or anger], to be well) or the related term *asníya* (to cure, make well, heal; to mend; literally, ‘to cause to recover’). From Lakota perspectives healing is about prolonging life (*ní, niyá*), causing someone to live, and maintaining and perpetuating individual and collective life movement (Densmore 2001:275). Healing is about renewal, (re)generation, unity, and wholeness. Describing his understanding of the healing process Black Elk explains, “When the power of the west comes to the four-leggeds it is a rumbling and when it passes it leaves the world green and fresh. Everyone lifts his head up in expectation and everyone is left happier as a result. And so now I used the drum to make the rumbling sound which represented the power of the west” (Black Elk in DeMallie 1984:236). Purification and sacrifice are often essential prerequisites to the healing process, which seeks to restore spiritual equilibrium, balance, and harmony. In Part Four we turn our attention to the role, varieties, characteristics, and functions of nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists.

PART FOUR: *TUWÁ OGNÁ WIČHÁKA'AYAPI* (THOSE THEY BRING THE PIPE TO): NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS

1. INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century Lakota religious organization reflected both ecological conditions and sociopolitical organization. Changes in social and political life, along with environmental and ecological adaptations, have been major determinative forces in the development and evolution of Lakota religion throughout history into the present. Hultkrantz writes:

These belief structures certainly reflect, in their very organization, the ancient social and political structure of the tribe: the prevalent socio-political pattern in the old days was one of a semi-independent band-organization interacting with an emergent centralized authority¹²⁷ . . . At the same time these structures corresponded to specific cultural, social and ecological situations which challenged the balance of man and released culturally determined responses in him: the desire for success in hunting or on the war-path induced him to guardian spirit¹²⁸ quests . . ., the longing for safety in thunderstorms made him appeal to the thunderers, and the immediate need to escape from great danger forced him to call on the high god himself for help. The social and political, and partly also the ecological motivations have disappeared with the breakdown of traditional Plains culture at the end of the last century, but the religious patterns are largely intact to this day. [Hultkrantz 1981:23]

Throughout the pre- and early reservation periods, when ancestral Lakota sociopolitical organization flourished relatively unabated, that organization, paired with environmental and ecological considerations and constraints, encouraged the

¹²⁷ A general, centralized authority existed more in the case of the Plains Shoshones than among the Lakotas. If we think of centralized leadership in terms of civil and religious leaders on a more minute scale, such as at the camp- and band-levels of social organization, Hultkrantz's insights fit the Lakota case quite well.

¹²⁸ According to Deloria (1937:Story 198), the term *wašiču* was used to refer to a guardian spirit, or "the personal spirit which a holy man has, working for him." Apparently, the term derives from *waší* (to order about) and *ču* or *ku* (his), similar to the possessive prefix *thá*. As we have discovered possessives are often used in reference to other-than-human power or spirit guardians or helpers, as in *wóthawe* (personal war medicine), from *wa* (something) + *o* (locative) + *tháwa* (his/her). *Wašiču* is the contemporary term for whites or Euro-Americans.

individualism, innovation, and specialization characteristic of nineteenth-century Lakota religious belief and magico-ritual practice. For all these reasons nineteenth-century Lakota religion was extremely diverse and complex. DeMallie elaborates, writing:

Lakotas possessed a great diversity of rituals that brought power into their lives. . . . Many rituals expressed individuals' dream experiences
In Lakota culture, the quest for knowledge of the *wakan* was largely a personal enterprise, and it was predominately the work of men. Each individual formulated a system of belief by and for himself.¹²⁹ There was no standard theology, no dogmatic body of belief. Fundamental concepts were universally shared, but specific knowledge of the *wakan* beings was not shared beyond a small number of holy men. Through individual experience, every man had the opportunity to contribute to and resynthesize the general body of knowledge that constituted Lakota religion. [DeMallie 1984:82–83]

Taking our analysis a step further we reach the unavoidable conclusion that the religious foundations and ritual practice of each *thiyóšpaye* reflected its specific sociopolitical organization, validating and necessitating the individualism and diversity of pre- and early reservation period Lakota belief and ritual. Although the basic underlying elements were similar, based on shared mythology and common culture, customs, language, and traditions, the details and specifics differed from band to band. In essence, each Lakota *thiyóšpaye* had a distinct brand of religious belief and magico-ritual practice that mirrored its social fabric, composed of the makeup and organization of its specific families and extended families, men's societies, civil and martial leaders, and,

¹²⁹ Deloria writes that each *Heyókħa* (Contrary, Sacred Clown) dressed and painted in unique ways based on individual vision and dream experiences. "Of course," she writes (n.d.:82–83), "each dancer was made up symbolically. But as a rule, each symbol was an emblem only to himself. There was no cut-and-dried, stereotype designs such as the Camp Fire Girls try to read into Indian material. But one thing that marked the Heyoka, was and [*sic*] zig-zag mark up and down the body. It stood for the lightning, and that my father said was the Heyoka symbol which all heyokas used, in common; beyond that, other markings were all individual. But this one was constant."

significantly, its religious leaders. These were the marked, special, and *tǎ́okeča* (different) individuals who established and nurtured relationships with other-than-human persons and attained or obtained miraculous power through self-sacrifice and self-determination. The common people brought pipes to these individuals with tears in their eyes, looking to them for the curing of sickness, the performance of ceremonies, and to intervene on behalf of the people with the spiritual forces of the universe. These powerful diviners, doctors, intermediaries, interpreters, councilors, and practitioners may be generally referred to in English as religious leaders, ritual practitioners, or ritual specialists, terms that are used interchangeably herein.

Ritual practitioners were known by many names and functioned in a variety of capacities. They were wise and respected ritual leaders, knowing the ceremonies of the Lakotas in great detail; they were leaders in war and hunting; interpreters of the *wakǎ́ą́*, speaking the esoteric sacred languages of the holy men and spirits; intermediaries between human and spirit beings; diviners of the future; magicians; sorcerers; doctors; curers; healers; theologians; philosophers; and counselors (Posthumus 2008-2014; Walker 1991:136). They were classified largely according to the source of their power(s) (i.e., by the spirit guardian[s] they identified and had a special relationship with); the quantity and quality of their power(s); their specific abilities, methods, and techniques; and their reputations, based on public opinion and their publically established records of ritual efficacy. Based on historical evidence it is unlikely that nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners operated on a full-time basis. Rather, their expertise was available

to their people on an *ad hoc* basis as the need arose, performing various calendrical, life-crisis, and transition rituals and rites of affliction.¹³⁰

Much ink has been spilled on what may ultimately be a Western impulse to neatly categorize the great variety of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners. In particular, the works of Hassrick (1964) and Powers (1982b; 1986), while useful in terms of initiating and stimulating discourse, are problematic and in need of updating. Both authors assert a far-too-exact and well-ordered delineation of practitioner categories, imply a forced or unnatural sense of impermeable hierarchy among those categories, and present an overly simplistic model of historical practitioners that lacks depth. The following chapters attempt to reinterpret and rearticulate the classification of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners in order to reach a broader, more nuanced understanding of the indigenous classificatory system of ritual specialists from native perspectives.

In Part Four I establish a number of interrelated points and identify a number of significant distinctions in terms of the classification and practice of Lakota ritual

¹³⁰ The majority of Lakota rituals fall into these categories. Based on the historical literature and verified by contemporary Lakotas the only truly calendrical ritual, the Sun Dance, was largely a warrior's ordeal derived from customs associated with warfare and led by a *blotáhun̄ka* (war leader). The Sun Dance gradually became a more general and all-encompassing fertility ritual throughout the early reservation period and the ban on traditional religious and magico-ritual practice. Instead of being directed by war leaders, general religious practitioners have taken the lead in contemporary Sun Dances. In particular, *Yuwípi* men have now largely assumed the role of Sun Dance intercessor, yet another reason for the increasing popularity and visibility of *Yuwípi* and its practitioners and for the general increase in uniformity and erosion of diversity in Lakota religious belief and ritual practice since the early reservation period. *Yuwípi*, Sun Dance, and Sweat Lodge ceremonies are by far the most popular and common Lakota rituals practiced today, and all three are directed largely by *yuwípi* men. Although the Sun Dance still retains some symbolism associated with warfare, it is now widely considered a general healing and renewal ritual, similar to many other contemporary Lakota rituals (Posthumus 2008-2014). Some Dream Society ceremonies appear to have been calendrical, such as the Elk Ceremony, which was only performed in the spring because that was when the elks bore their young (Bushotter 1937:Story 88). Certain hunting and harvest ceremonies were also calendrical (Deloria n.d.), but the majority of Lakota rituals may be classed as rites of affliction, life-crisis, and transition rituals.

specialists, many of which continue to be relevant in contemporary religious life and thought. These themes and distinctions include:

(1) The distinction between innate vs. acquired power or obtainment vs. attainment of power.

(2) The distinction between power source vs. method/practice/technique.

(3) A major category distinguishing practitioners was based on power source.

These individuals were generally known as dreamers (*ihánblapi*) of specific other-than-human persons, usually animal spirit guardians. There was a great variety of categories or types of practitioners identified by power source. Dreamers performed specific initiation rituals that functioned as rites of passage called *káǵapi* (imitations, performances), in which they (re)enacted events from their visions pertaining to specific animal or spirit guardians, during which the dreamer was known as a *káǵa* (imitator, performer).

(4) Another major intersecting category distinguishing practitioners was based on method, technique, and practice. These individuals were known by various names (in addition to being known by their power source, as mentioned in [3]) indicating particular treatment methods, such as *h̄múnǵa* (sorcery/witchcraft, to bewitch), *lowán̄pi* (to sing), *p̄h̄žúta* (herbal medicine, to administer herbal medicine), *waphíyapi* (to cure, to mend, to renew), *yaǵópa/yaph̄há* (to extract sickness through sucking, to draw out), *yuwípi* (to bind, to tie up), etc. There was a great variety of categories or types of practitioners identified by method or practice.¹³¹

(5) The categories or types listed in (4) were permeable, not mutually exclusive, and cumulative or processual.

¹³¹ The categories differentiating practitioners by method and practice also tended to coincide with specific types of rituals, such as the *Mat̄hó Waphíyapi* (Bear Doctoring), *Mat̄hó Lowán̄pi* (Bear Sing), etc.

(6) Conventionally, practitioners were simultaneously known by power source(s) as well as method(s), technique(s), or practice(s) so that a single practitioner may have been concurrently identified as a *Mathó ihányblapi* (Bear dreamer) and a *Mathó waphiyapi* (Bear doctor), for example.

(7) Some particularly gifted individuals, such as Sword and Brave Buffalo (see Densmore 2001 and Walker 1917, 1991), attained or obtained numerous power sources and mastered a variety of *wakháŋ* methods and techniques throughout their lives.

(8) There were definite elements of hierarchy or structure in the classificatory system of nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists in terms of prestige, social status, reputation, wealth, and the cumulative nature of both qualitative and quantitative other-than-human power and (access to) knowledge. Knowledge and power were linked, collectively functioning as a form of religious social control. This hierarchical structure reflected the cumulative or processual nature of spiritual powers, abilities, methods, and techniques. Hierarchy in the sense used here should be understood in terms of the Turnerian, British social anthropological usage of the term structure, that is, social structure, or “a more or less distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of positions and/or of actors which they imply” (Turner 1969:166–167).

I conclude that nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners may most usefully and practically be divided into three semi-cumulative, permeable, and non-mutually exclusive categories: medicine men or herbalists, conjurers or magicians, and holy men or shamans. Based on our discussion of Lakota disease theory from Part Three these practitioner categories may be subsequently plotted on a continuum of sickness type

(disease [physical-physiological]/illness [psychological-psychosomatic-spiritual]) and treatment method (techno-scientific/mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual) that corresponds with the type of practitioner best suited to treat specific sicknesses and conditions. I also conclude that a significant distinguishing factor among practitioners that crosscuts all other categories (other-than-human power source, method, technique, etc.) is whether they utilize and promote the forces of good and creation, on the one hand, or evil and destruction, on the other; whether they are benevolent, sustaining and perpetuating life movement, or malevolent, disrupting and terminating life movement. Like other-than-human persons, human beings may be good or bad, working toward creation or destruction. Within all the categories examined below there is always an element of human variability and the potential and propensity for good or evil, defined in culturally distinct ways grounded in the Lakota ethos and worldview. A dreamer of any spirit being may be benevolent or malevolent, just as a practitioner of any method or technique might strive toward good or evil; the maintenance or destruction of life movement, respectively.



There was a great variety of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners—mostly male—who practiced a diversity of techniques and mediated between the other-than-human persons and spirit powers of the universe and the common people. These individuals were specialists in the *wakǵáŋ* or sacred. Alone in the wilderness, they sought relationship and interaction with the spirit realm throughout their lives, vying to attain spirit guardians and mysterious powers that often translated into power, prestige, wealth, and influence among their people (Bushotter 1937:Story 199; DeMallie 1984:81; DeMallie 2001:806–807; Landes 1968:48). Religious practitioners with *wakǵáŋ* power

were employed as healers of the sick, controllers of the weather, divine interpreters, diviners of the future, and locators of lost or stolen objects, herds of animals, or the enemy. While the essential religious elements were similar, individual innovation in ritual practice was pervasive (Deloria n.d.:63).

Religious practitioners nurtured relationships with the spirits and shared to a greater or lesser extent in the universal, animatistic *wakǰán* power permeating the universe. According to Walker's Oglala interlocutors, a shaman, the most powerful of Lakota practitioners, "is a wise man who has intercourse with the spirits. He is generally a medicine man. He knows about the medicines and what sickness they are good for. He is respected and feared by the Indians. He is usually the leader of a sect who have certain spirits they have intercourse with. He leads in all the ceremonies" (Walker 1991:104).

Religious leaders were the instructors and repositories of traditional knowledge, myth, religious belief, and ritual practice. Some sacred people were specialists, while others were generalists, although variation among practitioners was pervasive.¹³² Their power and authority was established through the Vision Quest and their relationships with other-than-human persons. Their prestige and social standing was maintained through reputation, ritual efficacy, specific abilities, and the public demonstration of those abilities (Powers 1982b:57, 66–67). It is likely that historically each *thiyóšpaye* had at least one religious practitioner to administer to the band's medicinal and spiritual needs. A specialist with many followers was likely to have acquired many spirit

¹³² A major shift has occurred in contemporary Oglala ritual, so that now nearly all practitioners are generalized healers, rather than specialists in particular forms of healing or ceremony. Nearly all contemporary practitioners run Sweats and practice *Lowáŋpi*, *Yuwípi*, preside over the Sun Dance, or some combination of the three (Posthumus 2008-2014). There is a generalized decline in ritual specialization and diversity and a concomitant increase in ritual uniformity. This situation has led to many new and fascinating elements and themes in contemporary Lakota religious life and ritual practice that call for further investigation and explanation.

guardians through numerous Vision Quests and to have publically proven himself to be powerful and effective in his *wakǰáŋ* doings.

Being a religious practitioner ultimately meant that an individual self-ascribes and is ascribed by others as being endowed with mysterious or transcendent powers and abilities, usually through an established and recognized relationship with an other-than-human person or spirit guardian. Practitioners participated in, memorized, conducted, and transmitted ceremonies and rituals, generally referred to as *wakǰáŋ wičhóh'áŋ*, actions performed to get results (DeMallie and Parks 1987:211). Nineteenth-century Lakota rituals were incredibly diverse, regularly centering on themes such as war, the hunt, the common people, and the holy men. They involved purification, sacrifice, singing, dancing, doctoring, healing, and feasting (Walker 1991:67, 75). While many of the themes underpinning ritual have changed over time, the practices themselves and the reasons for ritual remain relatively stable.

Lakota religion and ritual deal largely with maintaining spiritual and physical equilibrium, harmony, well-being, and health. Again, Anderson's concept of life movement is useful, which combines at least two core Lakota religious values. The first and most fundamental value is *wičhózani* (health). The stem, *zaní* (to be healthy, well, whole), refers to both physical and psychological health and well-being. Lakota people value health very highly and pray for it for themselves, their relatives, friends, and tribe as a whole. Another important religious value encompassed by the concept of life movement is *wičhóičhaǵe*, or the generations, life, growth, and longevity, which captures the idea of continuing health and prosperity for the people into the future and throughout the generations and time (DeMallie and Parks 1987:211). The common Lakota ritual

phrase “That these people may live” captures this focus on sustaining and perpetuating life movement. Sickness is generally believed to be caused by other-than-human forces and can therefore be conceptualized as the physical symptoms of spiritual disequilibrium or disharmony. Thus, one of the major responsibilities of religious practitioners is to treat the sick—those who are spiritually out of balance with the universe—and to restore spiritual harmony through mystico-spiritual or magico-ritual means. Hence, one practitioner type is the *waphíya* (curer, healer; literally, ‘to make over, to make anew, to renew’).

Nineteenth-century religious practitioners acted mystically (*wakǰáŋyaŋ* [in a sacred, mysterious manner]), interpreting for the spirits in their role as intermediaries between the spirits and human beings on earth.¹³³ Practitioners spoke with and for the spirits and were considered holy (*wakǰáŋ*) just as the other-than-human persons comprising the Lakota spirit world were also considered holy (Walker 1991:118). The spirits were the model for human practitioners, who were conceived of quite literally as sacred beings on earth, comparable to the spirits themselves from the perspectives of the common people. This distinction is evident in the Lakota term for holy man, *wičháša wakǰáŋ*, as opposed to the term for common man, *ikčé wičháša*.



A fascination with the spirit world and the powers and techniques of religious practitioners often developed early in Lakota youths. As Standing Bear (2006b:204–205)

¹³³ This role has increasingly come to define contemporary practitioners, so that today they are often referred to as (*wakǰáŋ*) *iyéska* ([sacred] interpreters) (Posthumus 2008-2014). The religious category of the intermediary is significant and prevalent in both historical and contemporary Lakota religious belief and magico-ritual practice.

recalls, “We watched the medicine-men and repeated their acts in our play until the time came to try to be a dreamer.” Bushotter provides a description of a children’s game called *Wakǰán-škàtapi kin* (the Mysterious Game), in which children pretended to be *wakǰán*. Revealing children’s perspectives on religious practitioners and significant elements and themes, it serves as an interesting and useful segue into the following examination. Bushotter’s accounts also highlight and introduce many of the categories and subcategories of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners and ritual behavior we will be exploring.

Bushotter explains that young boys and girls played this game away from the village, pretending they were all living together in an imaginary community. According to Bushotter, in the village:

. . . somebody is ill [*tuwá wayázq*], so they have a mystery feast [*wak’á-wòhapi*], and sing [*lowǰhapi*] and give the patient medicine [*p’ezúta k’úpi*]. And some confess to having a personal helper, a god, [*t’awówaši* (controls Gods)]¹³⁴ and they say such a being is *wak’á* [*táku kǰ wak’ápi*].

And they claim that they hear holy matter, voices etc. [*táku wak’ák’ayq nah’úpi*], and so they consider themselves holy, and demonstrate their powers [*wak’á-iglùt’api*]. They do not know such matter in detail, but they carry on as they please--as they think it ought to be. Some have a stone [*ǰyq*], or other article which they say embodies their unseen helper [*t’awówašitkupi*];¹³⁵ and they say that these helpers are put to work for whatever they, the owners, wish [*wówašiwic’ayapi*].
[Bushotter 1937:Story 177]

Some of the boys “go through the business of doctoring [*wap’iyapi*], actually imagining themselves possessors of mysterious power [*wak’á ic’ila šna*]” (Bushotter 1937:Story 177). They administered roots and leaf mixtures to cure patients

¹³⁴ Again, note the usage of the possessive prefix *thá-* in reference to spirit helpers.

¹³⁵ See note 131 above.

[*asníwic 'ayapi*]. Away from camp boys and girls “act out the matter of sickness and doctoring [*wap 'iyapi*],” Bushotter (1937:Story 178) explains, “exactly as they see it happening about them among the people. Children like to imitate life, and especially the medicine-man’s role.” The children ceremonially carried a filled pipe to the imaginary practitioner [*wap 'iya*], who agreed to treat [*p 'iyá*] the sick person. The practitioner, writes Bushotter (1937:Story 178), “opens out his medicine bundle [*wóphiye glubléca*], and at once he sucks (blood) on the affected place [*kiyágopa*]; and goes through the motions of administering medicine [*p 'ezúta k'ú*]. He even foretells the day of his recovering [*akísni*], to the family; and diagnoses the kind of illness.”

Young girls impersonated famous female practitioners as well,¹³⁶ administering medicines for horse bite and snakebite, swelling, clotting [*we-ínat 'ake* (blood check)] for continuous blood flow from the nose or wounds, wolf poisons, and many others, all of which were ultimately *wakhǎŋ* or mysterious. Both male and female play practitioners received “offerings” for their skills [*takúku ís eyá wóheyak-k 'iyàpi* (they also assigned certain things as reward)]. “If one makes false claims of having holy power,” Bushotter (1937:Story 178) explains, “the true doctors show him up [*hená ís eyá glawák 'api nq tuwá wap 'iya owé wak 'ák 'q kǐ hená okíc 'iyakapi s 'a*], so people no longer take pipes to them.” Thus, public ritual contestation and demonstration differentiated the efficacious practitioners from the charlatans.

Children pretended to bewitch people [*wic 'áhmugapi*], throwing pulverized earth mixed with cactus needles at them. One of the youths played the part of the bewitched individual, “staggering along, with his body bent, and finally he falls sliding to the

¹³⁶ For accounts of the exploits of powerful Lakota female practitioners, see Deloria (n.d.:16–17) and Standing Bear (2006b:140–141).

ground.” Then another youngster pretending to have “supernatural power . . . who himself is accustomed to bewitching others [*wic`áhmúǵe s`a*], is brought out to the man lying helpless, and that one immediately takes from his body the bit of something which had penetrated his body to bewitch him [*táku ú`hmúǵapi kǐ hé ikícicu*].¹³⁷ He keeps blowing water on him to restore him to life [*mniapóǵqhǩ c`á ak`é kinl*]” (Bushotter 1937:Story 177).

Young boys also pretended to create and use love medicine [*p`ezúta ú`wiók`iyapi*] to seduce and marry women. The practitioner [*wap`íye*] instructed [*iwáhoje* (coaches)] the purchaser of the love medicine in its proper administration and prescribed usage. The children, Bushotter (1937:Story 177) writes, “were simply copying their elders in all their ways. The boys and girls played they could get a wife or husband by medicine.” In this way Lakota children were gradually enculturated or socialized, imitating in great detail nearly all the mysterious or ritual acts performed by religious practitioners, so that by the time they reached puberty, they were prepared for their first experiences with the other-than-human or spiritual domain, which, among males, usually took the form of the Vision Quest. Although most young men at some time tried to attain a vision of power and become a practitioner, few succeed. Even fewer women become practitioners (Standing Bear 2006b:39, 205).

Next we must examine the key terms and concepts used to analyze nineteenth-century magico-medico-ritual practitioners and their abilities, methods, powers, and

¹³⁷ Bushotter’s description of a bewitched person is comparable to someone with a physical handicap or mental illness. Perhaps bewitching is a secondary rationalization explaining mysterious mental and physical defects or malfunctions. Clearly, sorcery/witchcraft was associated with disease-object introduction, apparently conceptualized as a symptom of a foreign substance or projectile penetrating the body. In fact, the word *hmúǵa* here appears to be equated with the foreign object itself, the medicine or projectile responsible for the sickness. One might also conceptualize of bewitching as a form of soul-loss, in which the *naǵi* leaves the body, causing physical and mental disturbances.

techniques. For our purposes it is critical that these concepts, and the webs of meaning associated with them, be explored in both Lakota and English.

2. GLOSSED IN TRANSLATION: ARTICULATING LAKOTA MAGICO-MEDICO-RITUAL TERMS AND THEIR ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS

Before proceeding further we must first define, translate, and semantically untangle the words and concepts used in this discussion in both English and Lakota.¹³⁸ Many of the terms used herein are borrowed from occultic metaphors. “Occult” has negative connotations in Western society for various historical and cultural reasons, but this is unfortunate and often unwarranted. Christian missionaries and zealots have used the term to demonize, differentiate, exoticize, index, and ultimately discriminate against the religious beliefs and magico-ritual practices of indigenous peoples, which they usually neither understood nor attempted to comprehend from native perspectives. This religious persecution extends even to Euro-American practitioners of Western mystical or occult traditions.¹³⁹

In actuality, occult refers to a cluster of interrelated meanings, such as mysterious, secret, hidden, “supernatural,” other-than-human, magical, mystical, obscure, psychic, unknown, strange, arcane, esoteric, and invisible. Most of these common glosses for occult do not have negative connotations, and, in fact, fit closely with the conception of *wakǵháŋ* and other-than-human, strange, transcendent force, energy or potency. Kapferer’s minimalist definition of the occult is instructive: “that which is mystical and stands outside, or is opposed to, science and the rule of reason” (Kapferer 2003:2). The occult has perennially stood as a symbol of the opposite of reason and rationality. But, as Kapferer (2003:2) explains, “Anthropology established itself as the science of unreason, initially at least. This constituted its principal object. Indeed, unreason, or apparent

¹³⁸ Cross-cultural translation is a perennial and complicated challenge for anthropologists offering potentially great rewards. See Beidelman (1980), Hanks (2014), and Hanks and Severi (2014).

¹³⁹ For more on this general theme see Meyer and Pels (2003), Tambiah (1990), and Thomas (1971).

unreason, defines the Other, the conventional region of anthropological inquiry.” Today, the occult as a whole is reattracting anthropological attention, partly because empirically occultic practice is globally on the rise, and partly because of a need to understand the unreason of a relativized reason implicated in systems of power, authority, and domination (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Kapferer 2003:2–3).

Breaking free from our cultural and historical baggage and understood in this way the occult may be conceptualized as the foundation of all religious experience, comparable to Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*. It is the label for the mystical or spiritual dimension of reality, opposed to scientific reason and rationalism; the unknown and unknowable powers outside of, beyond, and greater than human beings; and the concomitant awe, fear, respect, and obligation we feel in response to it. This is the natural human reaction to the occult, mysterious, or inexplicable, chaotic aspects of lived human realities. In addition, many terms borrowed from the “occult sciences” are useful as analytic tools in the examination of American Indian religious, magico-medico-ritual, and mystical traditions and practice.

The following is a list of terms used in the forthcoming discussion defined in English with their Lakota equivalents. As the list progresses it becomes clear that a number of English terms tend to cluster semantically around a select number of significant Lakota concepts, which will be identified and analyzed in the conclusion of this section. All the English definitions, unless otherwise noted, come from Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2003). Lakota definitions come from Buechel’s *A Dictionary of the Teton Dakota Sioux Language* (1970).

(1) Alter: an active verb meaning to change or transform something. Alter is translated into Lakota as *wóthokeča* (something different).

(2) Amaze: a verb meaning to surprise or fill someone with wonder. Amaze is translated into Lakota as *iníhaŋ*. The noun amazement is *iníhaŋpi*, while the causative form is *iníhaŋyaŋ*.

(3) Astonishment: a noun meaning the state of being astonished or struck with sudden and great wonder, surprise, or amazement. Astonishment is translated into Lakota as *wóyuš'íŋye*.

(4) Bewitch: a verb meaning to use magic to make someone do, think, or say something. Other meanings include to put a spell on someone, to influence or affect someone through the use of sorcery or witchcraft, or to enchant or attract someone in a way that seems magical. Bewitch can be used in a positive or negative sense, aiding or injuring its target or victim. The Lakota term *h̄mún̄ḡa* and its derivatives *waḥmún̄ḡa* and *wičháh̄mun̄ḡa* refer to this magical influence or sorcery/witchcraft. *Wičháh̄mun̄ḡa* may also refer to a male bewitcher, sorcerer, or to the process of bewitching people, while *wiḥ̄mun̄ḡa* refers to a female bewitcher, sorceress, or witch. In Lakota, *h̄mún̄ḡa* refers to bewitch and enchant, but also to sicken and to cause sickness or death¹⁴⁰ (Buechel 1978:205; Powers 1986:216–217).

(5) Conjure: a verb meaning variously to manifest something by magic, to summon something by invocation or incantation, to affect or effect by magic, or, generally, to practice magical or occult arts. According to J. Gordon Melton (2001:1:323), “To conjure originally meant to call up spirits or practice magic arts, but in

¹⁴⁰ *Tḥókeča* is used for the English “unwell,” meaning different or strange.

the course of time a secondary meaning of sleight of hand displaced the earlier meaning, and the term now indicates trickery or deception (usually for entertainment). In the United States, the term *magic* is usually used for conjuring, although this too originally had an occult meaning.” In Lakota, conjure is usually translated as *phiyá*, an active verb meaning to repair or conjure the sick. *Waphíya*, a semantic relative of *phiyá*, is also used for repairing the sick or “to powwow,” an older form of the term that used to refer to magico-medico-ritual practice. The form *waphíyapi* translates as conjuring. Another semantic relative of *phiyá* is *phikhíya*, a verb that translates into English as to doctor, treat, or conjure. Based on data from Bear in the Woods, Deloria, and Reverend E. Perrig, S.J., Buechel associates conjuring specifically with extracting sickness through sucking (*yaǵópa/yapǵá*) it from a patient, a common form of treatment that will be discussed below. A related form is *kíčiyapǵa*, a verb meaning to suck the affected part of a sick person, as if drawing off poison, as in conjuring. The significant Lakota stem here is *phiyá* (to doctor, mend, repair, make anew).

(6) Consecrate: a verb meaning to make or declare something holy, sacred, or set apart from ordinary, everyday reality. Consecrate may also mean the dedication of something to a specific, oftentimes sacred, purpose. In most occult traditions and magical practice consecration refers to the “process of charging an object with magical or spiritual energies, either to transform it into a working tool or to empower it to perform some specific work of magic” (Greer 2003:112). Consecration is considered an art essential to many varieties of magical practice. The consecration process usually begins by preparing a ritual space and banishing evil or unwanted influences. Then potencies or other-than-human persons are invoked that will be used to charge the object to be consecrated.

Invocation commonly involves prayer, ritual formulae, music, and the burning of various types of incenses. Once the desired potency has entered the sacred space and reached an adequate level of intensity it is then projected into the object being consecrated, a process known as evocation. The consecrated object is then wrapped or contained in some manner so that its potency is insulated and will not diminish, escape, unintentionally discharge, or cause other unwanted effects. Finally, the remaining potencies are banished or sent back to the spirit world, and the consecration is complete¹⁴¹ (Greer 2003:112). In Lakota, consecration is often expressed as *wakǰáŋ káǵa* (to make *wakǰáŋ* [holy, mysterious, sacred]) or *yuwákǰáŋ* (to consecrate, to make or render holy, sacred, or special).

(7) Cure: a verb meaning to make someone healthy again after a sickness, to stop a sickness, to restore health, to effect a cure, or to bring about recovery from a disease or illness. Cure is closely related semantically to heal, a verb meaning to become healthy or well again, to make someone healthy or well again, to make sound or whole, or to restore to health. In Lakota, the stem for cure and heal, along with the closely related concept recover, is *asní*, a stative verb meaning to recover from sickness or anger or to be well (literally, ‘to rise’). *Asní* is the stem of many Lakota terms relating to curing, healing, and recovery, such as: (1) *asníya*, a causative verb meaning to cure someone or something, as a wound or a sick person; to make well; to heal; to mend something (literally, ‘to cause someone or something to recover’); and (2) *akísniya*, an active and/or causative verb meaning to cure something, such as a sickness; to cause something to heal, such as a sore,

¹⁴¹ Notice the similarities here to the ritual preparation of a ceremonial bundle (*wóphiye, wašičuŋ*) and to the sending away of the spirits song (*wanáǵi khiglápi* [spirits departing]), a terminal element in many Lakota rituals. See Powers (1986:215).

wound, or a disease/illness, apparently referring only to the sickness, not to the patient or afflicted person. From *asní*, the terms for curable and incurable are also derived, *asníyephiča* and *asníyephiča šni* respectively. Another Lakota term referring to healing is *okíyuta* (to heal).

(8) Curse: the noun curse refers to magical words said to cause trouble, bring misfortune or bad luck, or cause sickness or death for someone, or the condition that results when such words are spoken. Connected to the significance and generative potentiality of the spoken word in Lakota culture, a curse is some kind of audible ritual formula that disrupts life movement in some manner. To curse then is the act of speaking words with the intention of causing trouble, misfortune, sickness, or death; any kind of magical or occult working intended to bring misfortune, sickness, injury, death, or any other disruption to life movement to its target or victim. The concept of the curse is extremely common cross-culturally, and there are various methods for cursing that vary widely. Some involve contagious magic, such as the use of fingernails, hair, or other objects associated with a specific body, while others involve aspects of homeopathic or imitative magic. There are also methods to break and reflect curses. Discovering and breaking curses are important abilities attributed to many religious practitioners throughout the world (Greer 2003:120).

In Lakota, the concept curse is expressed variously by the verbs *kúŋza* (to put a curse on someone, to doom someone to die) and its semantic relative *wakúŋza*¹⁴² (to curse people, to say a curse, to foretell a tragedy or misfortune, to be a bad omen of something bad to happen); *t'ekhó* or *t'ekhúŋ* (to wish someone dead, to predict or

¹⁴² For more on *wakúŋza* see Grobsmith (1974).

prophesy someone's death, to foredoom someone, to put a death curse on someone); *šiláptanyeya* (to cause someone to have bad luck, to curse); and *wayášiča* (to speak evil of, to curse). Interestingly, *ḥmún̄ḡa* and its semantic relatives *waḥmún̄ḡa* and *wičháḥmun̄ḡa* are not used in Lakota to express the concept curse. Apparently, the distinction between the two concepts is similar to that between bewitch and curse in English: bewitch refers to causing someone to think, say, or do things through magical means, basically manipulating or controlling a victim for another's purposes, whereas curse refers to using either the powers of the mind and thought or the spoken, audible word to inflict disaster, misfortune, or any disruption of life movement on another.

(9) Divination: a noun describing the art, method, practice, and science that seeks to divine, foresee, or foretell past, present, and future events or discover or obtain hidden knowledge and information of the unknown and unseen, usually by the interpretation of omens, signs, or by the aid of other-than-human persons or occult powers (Hanegraaff 2005:313). As it often involves direct communication between other-than-human and human persons, divination is viewed as the receptive side of occult practice, whereas magic is the active side. Divination is very common cross-culturally and is an ancient form of obtaining knowledge. There are many types or systems of divination, such as omen divination, pattern divination, symbol divination, and trance divination. Trance divination, hydromancy (water divination), blood divination, and divination by dreams and visions were and are particularly common among American Indian peoples (Greer 2003:134–135; Melton 2001:1:426–429). We will examine the concept of divination in greater detail in the chapter on magico-medico-ritual practice.

In English, divination is similar to conceptions of foretelling, foreseeing, or predicting the future. In Lakota, various forms are used to refer to the process of divination, such as: (1) *waáyata*, a verb meaning to prophesy things, to have the ability to prophesy or predict, to foretell, or to be a prophet or an oracle; (2) *waátuŋwaŋ*, a verb meaning to observe or a noun meaning an observer; (3) *wakǵíŋya* (from *wakǵáŋ* [sacred, mysterious] and *iyá* [to speak]), a verb meaning to say something that comes true, to foretell, to divine, to talk mystically, or to be in communication with the spirits or other-than-human persons¹⁴³ (Bushotter 1937; Deloria n.d.); (4) *waátanŋyaŋ*, a verb meaning to divine the future;¹⁴⁴ and finally (5) *wókčañ wičháša*, a noun meaning a prophet, seer, diviner, or oracle that does not appear to be analyzable and remains somewhat mysterious. Buechel defines *wókčañ* as a noun meaning a seer and as a verb meaning to see for oneself with one's own eyes. A related term, *wókčañka*, is a noun meaning an individual who understands things.

(10) Doctor: in English, as is the case with many of the terms discussed herein, doctor may refer to an individual or to a process; to a noun or to a verb. As a noun doctor refers to a person who is skilled in the science of medicine, a person who is trained to treat sick and injured people, or a person skilled or specializing in healing arts. As a verb doctor refers to the act of giving medical treatment, to restoring someone to good condition, to repairing an injured or sick person, or to practicing medicine. In Lakota, doctor clusters semantically with translations for the terms treat and conjure, the stem being *phiyá*, from which the words *waphíya*, *phikhíya*, and others are derived. *Phiyá* in

¹⁴³ According to Buechel, *wakǵíŋya* is the Teton or Western Sioux form for divination, while *waáyata* is the Santee or Eastern Sioux form.

¹⁴⁴ This form was elicited from a contemporary Oglala ritual practitioner and does not appear in any dictionaries. It may be a mispronunciation of *waáyata*.

general is a verb meaning to make anew, to make someone better, to mend, repair, or fix. In another sense *phiyá* may be translated as to make someone well, to cure, doctor, treat, or conjure the sick. *Waphíya* has the same general meaning as *phiyá* but may also be used as a noun to refer to the individual practitioner, the curer, doctor, or specialist.

(11) Exorcise: in English, exorcise clusters with other terms, such as expel and extract. It generally refers to the expulsion or casting out of something through adjuration or some magical, occult, or parapsychological means. Exorcise is a loaded symbol in Western culture, laden with cultural and historical baggage. In occult practice exorcism is generally similar to banishment, referring to the “process by which a possessing or obsessing spirit is driven out of a person, object, or place” (Greer 2003:165). In Lakota, the term *wokhábiyeya* (to remove what has been sent or shot into another’s body by magic) is possibly the closest equivalent to exorcise, but *yaǵópa/yaphá* may also be semantically and functionally related.

(12) Magic: defined and understood in many culturally specific ways, magic is an extremely complex concept. It has been of central interest and importance in anthropology since the discipline’s inception.¹⁴⁵ There is no universally agreed-upon definition of magic, as it is extremely difficult to bound and distinguish from other concepts, such as religion and science (see, for instance, Meyer and Pels 2003 and Tambiah 1990). Magic, the active side of occult practice, is a social and historical category consisting of coherent bodies of theory and practice often dealing with

¹⁴⁵ See, for instance, Tylor (1958), Frazer (1998), Mauss (1972), Durkheim (1915), Malinowski (1954; 1965), Evans-Pritchard (1937), Tambiah (1990), and Kapferer (2003). Magic has been understood largely in terms of three influential theories: (1) the intellectualist theories of Tylor and Frazer; (2) the functionalist theories of Durkheim and Mauss; and (3) the understandings derived from French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of participation. See Hanegraaff (2005:716–717).

conceptions of cause and effect. It has been defined as “ritual workings and special preparations of substances meant to affect the universe by methods that don’t make sense in the framework of modern scientific thought,” “the science and art of causing change in conformity with will,” “the ability to cause change to occur by supernatural or mysterious powers and abilities,” and a “set of traditions . . . directed toward shaping the world of human experience through contact with nonphysical powers” (Greer 2003:287–290; Melton 2001:2:957–958).

From anthropological perspectives magic has often been contrasted with science as the antithesis of reason and rationalism, closely tied to conceptions of the occult. It may be defined generally as “the art of influencing the course of events through occult means” (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:340). Early anthropologists, such as Tylor and Frazer, saw magic from a unilineal evolutionary perspective: magic inevitably led to religion, which inevitably led to science. Durkheim and Mauss note the individual or secretive nature of magic, as opposed to the collective or public nature of religion. Benedict suggests that magic involves wish fulfilment and exemplifies the universal capacity of reasoning by analogy. Malinowski argues that magic, religion, and science all exist simultaneously in human societies, yet occupy different niches and fulfill different roles. From this psychologism perspective magic coordinates chaotic and inexplicable actions and events for which controls are lacking and thus is utilized in exceedingly dangerous situations, functioning as a psychological buffer against anxiety and providing a sense of confidence and control. Malinowski argues that magical acts are comprised of three essential elements: (1) incantations, prayers, spells, or ritual formulae; (2) a usually invariant or standard sequence of symbolic acts; and (3) the moral or ritual condition of

the practitioner, often associated with various taboos. Evans-Pritchard argues that from indigenous perspectives magic forms a logical and coherent belief system. He emphasizes the connections between magic, witchcraft, and divination in the explanation and secondary rationalization of otherwise inexplicable and unfortunate events. Many contemporary anthropologists tend to shy away from using the term magic, which may be understood as pejorative, opting to use witchcraft or sorcery instead. Those who still grapple with the concept highlight the meaningful symbolic elements in magical belief and practice. Postmodern anthropologists celebrate magic as representative of alternate realities or ways of knowing, presenting it as an objective reality in its own cultural terms (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:340–343).

In Lakota, magic is usually translated using some form of *ħmúnǵa*, such as *wahmúnǵa* or *wičháhmunǵa*, the latter a noun meaning magic or a magician. But magic may also be translated simply as *wakhǵan* (mysterious, sacred), as in *wakhǵan ečhún* (magical or sacred doings). Apparently, from Lakota perspectives magic is ambiguous and amoral in its latent or pure form, as are the spirits. Human agency and intentionality channels and directs *wakhǵan* or magical power, rendering it either good or bad, both culturally relative symbols. On one hand, magic is very similar to bewitching and sorcery/witchcraft. On the other, it is unmistakably *wakhǵan* in that it is powerful and transcends human knowledge. From Lakota perspectives magic may generally be understood as the willful and purposeful channelling or directing of invisible (*thúnthunšniyan*) magical or occult force for either benevolent or malevolent, social or antisocial, purposes. Although sorcery/witchcraft and other magical processes tend to

have negative connotations magic can also be used for good, such as the use of love magic to woo a potential mate or magical healing processes.

(13) Sorcery and witchcraft: sorcery may be generally understood as the use of magical, occult, or paranormal powers, often obtained through evil or malevolent spirit beings or other-than-human persons. Cross-culturally there is a strong correlation between sorcery, conjuring, and divination. As Melton (2001:2:1437) explains, sorcery commonly refers to “the practice of malevolent magic, or black magic, most commonly the use of supposed supernatural power by the agency of evil spirits called forth by spells by any person with a desire for malice, often motivated out of envy or revenge. . . . [Sorcery also] connotes the use of special charms, potions, or rituals to cast a particular spell.”

Witchcraft is semantically similar to sorcery. It may be generally translated as the use of sorcery or magic; the use of destructive methods and magical or occult powers, especially those obtained from evil or malevolent spirits; or the craft or acts practiced and performed by individuals believed to have such powers and abilities. Sorcery and witchcraft relate to influencing, attracting, or bewitching people through occult means. In some contexts both sorcery and witchcraft may be generally glossed simply as magic. Although not always used for evil or antisocial purposes sorcery and witchcraft often have negative connotations, being generally associated with evil or malevolent spirits and the disruption of life movement. For this reason witches and sorcerers are often associated with filth, sickness, murder, incest, cannibalism, and other socially unacceptable practices. Witches and sorcerers are sometimes represented in inverted forms and are commonly associated with darkness, night, dirt, and wild animals.

However, Kluckhohn and others have noted the social leveling effects of witchcraft fears in a given community (Greer 2003:518; Kluckhohn 1944; Melton 2001:2:1437, 1678–1682; Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:563).

From anthropological perspectives sorcery and witchcraft are varieties of malign occult action. In Evans-Pritchard's (1937) classic ethnography of the Azande peoples of Central Africa his interlocutors made an important distinction between witchcraft and sorcery: in essence, explains Roy Willis, "'witchcraft' is an inherited ability to cause occult injury to others which, at least for the Zande, can be exercised unconsciously by its possessor. 'Sorcery' is a conscious activity associated with the skilled manipulation of certain substances, with the intention of causing harm" (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:562). This witchcraft/sorcery distinction has been widely reported in many cultures throughout the world, but is by no means universally applicable. Apparently, the distinction lies in the greater proportion of individual human agency, consciousness, and intention involved in sorcery, as opposed to witchcraft. Among other peoples the emphasis is on the use for malign purposes of occult or paranormal techniques, often involving "medicines." According to Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft explains otherwise inexplicable events, providing a secondary rationalization for the chaotic, unfortunate, and incomprehensible aspects of human life. Witchcraft does not answer the *how* of these events, but rather, it answers the *why* (Evans-Pritchard 1937:69–70; Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:562–564). Evans-Pritchard's theory may be interpreted as an extension of Malinowski's theory of magic, in which magic functions to lessen anxiety and fear in the face of dangerous and confusing events.

There does not appear to be a sharp distinction between sorcery and witchcraft among the Lakotas. Both are considered *wakǰáŋ* in that they transcend human understanding and provide frameworks for the explanation of otherwise inexplicable events. Both sorcery and witchcraft may be translated using some form of the stem *ǰmúnǰa*, such as *wahmúnǰa* (to do witchcraft, to bewitch people, to poison, to use bad medicine). Apparently, witchcraft is associated with a particular type of potency or medicine called *wiǰmunǰe* (witch medicine; a spell; literally, ‘something used to bewitch someone with’). But sorcery and witchcraft are not always perceived as malignant practices among the Lakota; they can be used for good or evil, as illustrated by the definition of the stem *ǰmúnǰa* (to cause sickness or death; to cause kindly enchantment, to bewitch). However, there is a general underlying assumption that sorcery and witchcraft are negative, evil, or antisocial.

It is unclear whether Lakotas believe the ability to perform sorcery/witchcraft or cause occult damage is inherited or not. Probably the abilities and powers associated with sorcery/witchcraft are inherited in some cases but not in others, similar to the mystical abilities and powers among other religious practitioner types. It is clear, however, that there is a firm contemporary belief in sorcery/witchcraft, often in the form of shooting bad medicine that causes misfortune, sickness, and death, a topic which will be discussed in greater detail below.



So what can we glean from this analysis that will give us a clearer picture of Lakota religious life and magico-medico-ritual practice? Certain English concepts tend to cluster semantically with a few significant Lakota terms. For example, the terms divine (as in

divination), predict, foretell, and foresee tend to be translated as *wakḥīnya* (to speak mystically or mysteriously, to foretell; from *wakḥān* + *iyá*). Some form of *phiyá* is commonly used to translate doctor, treat, and conjure, generally considered benevolent abilities and powers associated with healing, curing, recovery, and the maintenance and perpetuation of life movement. Some form of *asní* is used to translate cure, heal, and recover. On the other extreme some form of *ḥmúnǵa* is used to translate bewitch, enchant, sicken, sorcery, and witchcraft, generally considered malevolent abilities and powers associated with causing or inflicting misfortune, sickness, death, and other obstructions to life movement. In general, it seems that conjurers preserve life and are considered benevolent, while bewitchers or sorcerers destroy life and are considered malevolent.

Another significant conclusion is the clear association between conjuring (*phiyá*), specifically, and sucking, extracting, or drawing out sickness, translated variously as *yaphá* or *yaǵópa*. Conjurers are associated with other forms of removing various disease-object intrusions, such as blowing, *wokḥábiyeya* (to remove disease-objects by magic) and *walkiču* (to remove or take from others by magic). This removal of foreign or harmful substances is a prerequisite to healing and recovery (*asní*). Sorcery/witchcraft (*ḥmúnǵa*), on the contrary, is closely connected to the idea and practice of shooting projectiles and otherwise introducing foreign objects, pollutants, and substances (bad medicine, negativity, disease-objects) into victims, causing misfortune, sickness, symbolic illness, and death. Buechel translates *wičháḥmunǵa* as to shoot in or into by magic. So, generally, conjuring is associated with doctoring or extracting sickness through magical or occult means, while sorcery/witchcraft is associated with shooting, implanting, introducing, and otherwise causing sickness through magical or occult means.

Magic straddles the two extremes. As a latent impersonal force or power it is morally ambivalent, ambiguous and amoral. Magic can be used by human and other-than-human persons for either good or evil. The potential is there for both maintaining and perpetuating life movement or for obstructing and destroying it. In this way magic may be translated as either *h̄mún̄ḡa* or, more generally, *wak̄h̄án̄*. In the sense of a latent, impersonal, ambiguous, and amoral power our understanding of magic is very similar to Lakota conceptions of the power concept *wak̄h̄án̄*. Both conjuring and sorcery/witchcraft are likely considered *wak̄h̄án̄* or mysterious and powerful, but conjuring is perceived as the benevolent aspect of magic or occult practice, while sorcery/witchcraft represents its malevolent counterpart (see Figure 8).

Now that we have defined and analyzed the various terms used below, we will move on to the specific attributes and characteristics and towards a general classification of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners and ritual specialists.

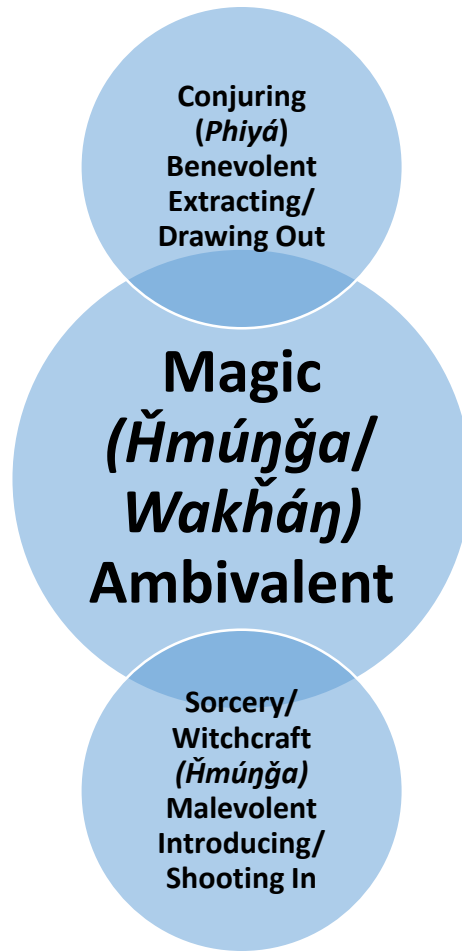


Figure 8: Magic, Conjuring, and Sorcery/Witchcraft

3. INNATE VS. ACQUIRED POWER OR THE OBTAINMENT VS. ATTAINMENT OF POWER

The mysterious powers and abilities of Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners are derived from other-than-human persons or spirit beings encountered in visions, whether they be in one's tipi during sleep at night, in a waking dream,¹⁴⁶ or in the fasting and praying of the Vision Quest atop a lonely hill. As Standing Bear (2006b:205) explains, "In the solitudes the dream-seeker felt that he would come into the precinct of spiritual power; would speak to beings with whom he could not speak in life's daily existence, and in recognition of his high resolve they might offer to him the gift of their powers and for this exalted contact he wished in every way to be worthy." These spirit beings and powers bestowed knowledge upon the vision seeker, revealing certain plants or herbs that cured sickness or gave an individual power and success in horse raiding and warfare. A man's vision guided and often dominated the rest of his life, providing him with direction, identity, power, and prestige (Curtis 1908:62–63; Standing Bear 2006b:206).

The life-long quest for understanding the mysteries of the *wakǰáŋ* and the desire to secure a personal spirit helper or medicine were and continue to be driving forces of Lakota culture. Religious practitioners guided this quest for the people, helping them to attain understanding and power. Largely through personal experiences in prayer, fasting,

¹⁴⁶ Bushotter describes a more or less typical example of a waking vision: a group of Lakota men on the warpath heard a beautiful song ahead of them, drawing nearer. The source turned out to be the voice of a male elk singing a fine song. As Bushotter (1937:Story 104) explains, "In this and similar ways have stories been heard which have made men enact the elk spirit [*heǰák-káǰapi*],; also other things are said to have appeared supernaturally [*wakǰáŋyan*] like this, and so in certain cases, the men have made songs about them and sung them." Of the mysterious qualities of the elk and why men imitated the elk's song, Bushotter continues, "When the elk gives a call it is very beautiful in quality, but they are rarely heard; . . . consequently when someone does really hear an elk, they take it he is really saying something and so they treat the matter in a supernatural light [*wak'áya*]. In such ways they act out holy things [*táku wak'áya*] (enacting the spirit of this or that.) and (in the case of the elk, although at other times as well,) they go by, blowing short notes on the flute in sweet tones" (Bushotter 1937:Story 104)). The power of religious practitioners is evidenced in remarkable feats and considered to come not from an individual, but from the *wakǰáŋ* (Deloria n.d.:1–2; Densmore 2001:275).

and ceremony Lakota religious practitioners came to some understanding of the *wakǰáŋ* and attempted to tap into it and wield some of its dangerous power, either for the good of the people or to the detriment of society, depending on the individual and his power source. As Hassrick (1964:266) suggests, “The Sioux believed that man could not succeed without power. But with power, almost anything was possible. Power was conceived as a force emanating from the supernatural with which man might be endowed. To a few men it came naturally with little effort. To others it came only after rigorous supplication and search. But to most men it never came.” Hassrick continues, writing:

Power came to men in dreams or visions. Once it was obtained, it became as much a part of the individual as his physique and his character. Like that of the animals through whom it was bestowed, it was specific and limited to particular areas of achievement. Furthermore, as a trust, it carried grave responsibilities. Nonetheless, the advantages which the endowment wrought in success, prestige, and presumed security were so universally recognized that most Sioux men took special pains to secure it. [Hassrick 1964:269–270]

The relationship between a human being and his spirit guardian was extremely significant. These spirit helpers were called *šičúŋ* or *wašičúŋ* (Deloria n.d.:20; Walker 1917:158–159) and were frequently used with possessive forms. It was believed that the spirit guardian of the animal or object encountered in a vision entered the body and became part of an individual’s *wakǰáŋ* strength (*wówaš’ake*) or medicine, such as the little blue man in Black Elk’s vision. Multiple successful Vision Quests sometimes led to multiple indwelling tutelary spirits (Curtis 1908:21; DeMallie 1984:98, 139, 225, 238–239). Deloria (n.d.:25) writes, “The supernatural aids are regarded like faithful servants; loved and depended on, and scolded sharply on occasion, by their owners.” If an

individual succeeded in obtaining or attaining a vision the *thúŋ* (essence) of the spirit guardian encountered became transeferable and could be imbued into other objects. Such an object, infused with the *thúŋ* of the spirit guardian (also referred to as *šičúŋ*), was encased in a bag, rawhide, or animal skin and became the individual's *wóphiye* or *wašičúŋ* (ceremonial bundle). If the ceremony was performed correctly, Sword explains, "Then that *Sicun* must do as it is directed to do by the one who chooses it; but the chooser must know the songs that belong to it"¹⁴⁷ (Walker 1917:158). When one properly invoked his *wašičúŋ* (ceremonial bundle containing the *thúŋ* of his spirit guardian) it would do as he willed (Walker 1991:96).¹⁴⁸

Generally, an individual became a religious practitioner in response to a mystical or transcendent experience. Often a disembodied voice or a spirit being conversed with an individual, giving him a directive and an obligation to carry it out, such as the imposition of a taboo or the obligation to (re)enact one's vision. Vision experiences, which were acknowledged but rarely recounted in detail, could compel an individual to walk the path of the magico-medico-ritual practitioner. The *wakháŋ* appeared to different people in different forms, both visible and invisible, material and immaterial. The practical evidence in everyday life reflecting one's interaction and relationship with the

¹⁴⁷ Sword's comment implies that medicine, other-than-human power, or a spirit guardian could be chosen, purchased, or otherwise obtained through the proper ritual channels and under the supervision and guidance of the appropriate ritual specialist.

¹⁴⁸ Deloria's provides further evidence in support of the practice of classical Lakota shamanism. Cross-culturally shamanism is masculine, active, and controlling in terms of spirits. In Lakota practice spirit helpers were seen as subservient, owned by the practitioner, who used possessive forms in reference to them. A spirit served its human master much like a faithful dog would, the two parties sharing a kinship relationship defined in terms of friendship (*k'holátakuya*) (Bushotter 1937; Mails and Fools Crow 1979:50; Powers 1986:206; Wilson 2013:195). According to Walker (1917:89–90) and his Oglala interlocutors a practitioner's *wóphiye* or *wašičúŋ* (ceremonial bundle) was subservient to its possessor. We will recall that the ceremonial bundle contains the potency and is considered to be a manifestation of a practitioner's spirit guardian.

spirit world often took the form of a taboo, certain rules, regulations, and proscriptions prescribed by other-than-human-persons (Bushotter 1937:Story 109).

Taboos could be voluntarily imposed on oneself, imposed by a spirit, or imposed by a holy man or shaman. Sword discusses nineteenth-century Lakota conceptions of taboo¹⁴⁹ in connection to sacrifice and offerings, which he insists are always taboo (*wótheĥíla*) to the one who makes them, except offerings of food and drink. The Lakota root for taboo, *theĥíla*, literally means ‘to love someone or something, adore, hold dear, cherish’.¹⁵⁰ In 1896, Sword explained:

¹⁴⁹ An interesting example of a taboo is given by Tyon. In connection to Bear society members moving camp, he writes, “The wounded never go against the wind. They carefully see to this” (Walker 1991:159). This taboo seems strange based on Fletcher’s insistence that “the four winds . . . blow away disease and baneful influences” (Fletcher 1884b:286 n 11). But upon further examination we discover a common belief that strong winds and other sudden movements that disturb the atmosphere have negative metaphysical consequences that may disrupt spiritual equilibrium and disturb life movement (Fletcher 1884d:300). In particular, the wind was believed to carry along harmful invisible essences that can enter or be shot into the human body, causing sickness. Invisible things were to be feared, and the wind carried these unseen dangers. Bushotter explains that some people who have boils believe that “they caught the cause from the night wind, because when it, the cause, was being blown along, they happened to be so ill-fated as to cross its path and collide with it” (Bushotter 1937:Story 216).

¹⁵⁰ Terms for taboo vary, the most common forms being *wótheĥíla*, *wókunze*, and *wógluze*. Bushotter uses the term *wókunze* (observance, rule; a ceremonial rule or regulation that must be observed) for taboo. This is especially interesting in connection with Grobsmith’s work on *wakúnza* (supernatural retribution) in the 1970s at Rosebud Reservation (Grobsmith 1974). Perhaps *wakúnza* may be better understood as a supernatural observance, rule, or taboo imposed by an other-than-human person and the disastrous consequences of the failure to observe it. An interesting research project would be an examination of the relationship between contemporary *Yuwípi* practice and spirit-imposed taboos or *wókunze*. According to Lynd (1889:160), among the Dakotas or Eastern Sioux *wóhduze* refers to taboo. He points out that the origins of the taboo concept stem from and are deeply embedded in the foundational concept of sacrifice (*wóšnapi*). The Lakota equivalent of *wóhduze* is *wógluze* (something sacred or forbidden, a spiritual taboo or ceremonial restriction). Lynd is careful to distinguish between two related but distinct meanings of the Dakota *wóhduze*, which in all likelihood apply equally among the Lakotas. One form of *wóhduze* is tied to sacrifice and animal ceremonialism. In this form, a hunter holds particular portions of specific animals as sacred, sacrificing them to particular deities associated with the animal or the chase in general. The head and heart are commonly sacrificed, and in birds and fowl the wing is common. In both cases the portion sacrificed is representative and symbolic of the creature as a whole. The part sacrificed may differ from one individual to the next but is consistent: a specific individual always sacrifices the same part. Lynd juxtaposes these hunting sacrifices with the taboo proper, both of which are referred to as *wóhduze*. The taboo proper among the Dakotas is bestowed or imposed upon a young man by a religious practitioner or ritual specialist around the time of puberty. Normatively, at that time the practitioner prepares and consecrates the young man’s *wóthawe* (war medicine, sacred armor) and assigns him a personal totemic deity, seemingly at random (Lynd 1889:161–163). Lynd (1889:162) explains, “At the same time that the old man presents the armor, he tells the youth to what animal it is dedicated, and enjoins it upon him to hold that animal sacred. He must never kill or harm it, even though starvation be upon him. At all times and

A Lakota may be forbidden to do anything. The thing he is forbidden to do is *tehila* (taboo) to him. To secure the favor of *Wakan Tanka* a man may vow to taboo something. Or to placate *Wakan Tanka* or a spirit he may make such a vow. Or a shaman may forbid one to do something and then that is a taboo to the one forbidden. Or *Wakan Tanka* may in a vision forbid one to do something, and then that is taboo to that one.¹⁵¹ . . . If the taboo is the part of game animals it must be taboo to everyone, and must be left as food for the spirits. If one does that which is taboo for him *Wakan Tanka* will be displeased, and will bring some misfortune on such a one.¹⁵² The only manner of freedom from a taboo is by *Inipi* [Sweat Lodge] and *Hanblapi* [Vision Quest]. [Walker 1991:78]

One who successfully received a vision from an other-than-human person was thereby consecrated (*wakǰáŋ káŋa, yuwákǰáŋ*) and considered holy, mysterious, powerful, and often dangerous. An individual knew largely by intuition and vision or dream experiences that he was destined to be the mouthpiece, apprentice, and representative of the *wakǰáŋ* (Bushotter 1937:Story 199; DeMallie 1984:81; DeMallie 2001:806–807; Landes 1968:48).

The relation or kinship with an individual's *wakǰáŋ* or spirit guardian, with whom one was in league, was recalled in battle and in dangerous or desperate situations. The spirit guardian was usually the spirit of an animal or some other natural phenomena. By

under all circumstances the 'taboo' or *sacred injunction* is upon it, until, by slaying numerous enemies it is gradually removed. By some the animal is held sacred during life, the *taboo* being voluntarily retained. Frequently they form images of this animal and carry about with them, regarding it as having a direct influence upon their every-day life and upon their ultimate destiny—a thing supernatural, all-powerful, and sacred." Sword seems to combine the two forms of taboo discussed by Lynd under one general heading. His words also hint at the possibility that the origin of the contemporary practice of offering a spirit plate before meals emerged from hunting rituals, animal ceremonialism, and the tabooing of various parts of game animals. See Sword (in Walker 1991:78).

¹⁵¹ For example, one of Walker's (1991:136) interlocutors explains, "One who sees a white bear in a vision must not eat the heart or the liver of anything."

¹⁵² Perhaps this is the connection between taboo (*wókuyze*) and spiritual retribution (*wakúŋza*) as described by Grobsmith (1974). Perhaps this is the root of contemporary beliefs associated with *wakúŋza* and ideas concerning the spirits collectively as a system of social control. In any case the two terms are clearly related, and breaches of taboo were and are believed to lead to misfortune, sickness, and death.

recalling this relationship the spirit was manifested and imparted its power and abilities to the human, providing protection; the ability or supernatural edge to be victorious in battle, raiding, hunting, healing, and other endeavors; and to ultimately maintain and perpetuate life movement.

This focusing of the mind or will (*thawáčhiŋ*) through mental discipline and recollection was essential to activating and manifesting one's *wakǰáŋ* power. As Bushotter explains:

That spirit is his servant, and when anything like danger or trouble is happening, as long as the Indian does not call him to mind, he feels himself weak; but the minute he recalls to mind the sustaining help of his guardian spirit, then, immediately he is enabled to do anything however difficult, because that Some-thing Holy is helping him. No matter how severe is his opponent, that opponent grows instantly weak, they say, when the guardian spirit of the Dakota is remembered by him, and called; for he then acts for his master. [Bushotter 1937:Story 245]

Deloria describes the common Lakota ritual phrase “remembering” in a ceremonial context in which an Arapaho practitioner named Little Eagle remembered his “beaverhood” to escape a beaver trap:

It is used frequently in Dakota literature. It means, or implies, that the man in question has at some previous time been promised help by the animal mentioned. He is therefore privileged to draw power from that animal. He may so far never have had to avail himself of the right, but now it is necessary. So he “remembers his beaver.” The translation is faulty here. His beaver does not mean a specific beaver which he owns, but rather, his beaverhood, if you will; at any rate, it means he recalls his right to a connection with beavers as a medium of power.¹⁵³ [Deloria n.d.:18]

¹⁵³ Again, we see the common theme of personhood extended to other-than-human persons. Human beings found similarities and common ground and established kinship with animals and other beings, which were usually grouped according to species and collectively referred to as *oyáte* (people, nation, tribe). In this case we are referring to the Beaver nation (*Čhápa oyáte*).

Deloria (n.d.:2) supplements her explanation of the relationship between a practitioner and his spirit guardian, writing, “A Dakota’s attitude towards the medium or source of his power was, as nearly as I can tell, something like a master’s towards a faithful servant—one of affectionate dependence. I have heard of a holy man, for example, speaking sharply to his medium for overdoing a thing; much as you might scold a dog you love for barking too hard and frightening someone who is not used to him.” Again, the parallels to classical shamanism are apparent.

Practitioners rarely related their visions in detail, instead encoding and mystifying them through the esoteric sacred language of the holy men (*wakǰáŋ iyá*), calling on the spirits and reminding them of their kinship obligations and concomitant vow to aid them under certain conditions. Little Wound explained to Walker that he could not tell him about his “shaman’s vision” of the Wind because it was his “secret as a shaman” (Walker 1991:67). There was also a belief that if one had a mystical power and did not develop and use it, it would gradually weaken and fade away. If an individual did develop, culture, and use it it gradually grew increasingly potent and powerful (Deloria n.d.:23).

In fact, in many cases it was only those who were renouncing the past ways in favor of Christianity and under the pressures of colonialism and missionization who related their visions in detail. Deloria writes:

With my own eyes I have seen a sick man or woman, sending out of the house all his mystery apparel, as he prepared to be a Christian and to renounce the past. It is these people who, on asking for Baptism, have related in detail their visions.

They have said too, in my hearing, that the old power left them gradually, as they became imbued with the new teachings. So they

conclude that to have power you must give your entire concentration and confidence to your subject. [Deloria n.d.:4]

Individuals fasted and sought visions out of an obligation to do so and a commitment to Lakota culture, traditions, and values (*Lakǎól wičhóǎ'ay*). Sometimes visions and powers came incidentally or inadvertently. Further, the failure to receive a vision was not considered in any way to be a disgrace (Deloria n.d.:6–7). Deloria (n.d.:6) writes, “Not every man went out to fast. Some men were content without it. But of those who did, most of them were praying, asking for horses or success in battle; and the rest were paying their pledge to fast in return for a life spared. Incidentally, a vision giving them some power of divining or healing or bringing the buffalo, or some such thing, might come to them.” She elaborates, writing (Deloria n.d.:7), “Sometimes a communication of supernatural power might come from being aided if lost or in danger by such things as a wolf or raven or other animal.”

The details of each vision or dream experience tended to be idiosyncratic, although there was a common stock of religious symbols and other-than-human power sources that conventionally emerged in Lakota visions, such as animal spirits, natural phenomena, altars, and the motif of the dreamer being taken to a spirit tipi in the clouds and hosted by a council of other-than-human persons in the guise of human beings.¹⁵⁴ Deloria lists a number of common other-than-human persons that came to humans in visions and bestowed mysterious power upon them. They include the Buffalo Bull, Bear, Ghosts, Elk, Rock (*Táku Škaŋškáŋ*, little pebbles in continuous motion), Screech Owl, Wolf, Dog, Snake, Eagle, Anti-Natural, Thunder, Fish, Mice, Crow, Mole, Skunk,

¹⁵⁴ For more on specific visions or dream experiences see Deloria (n.d.:33–35) and Irwin (1994a).

Beaver, Rabbit, and Horse (Deloria n.d.:40–41). This is further evidence that dreams and the powers that accompanied them were not usually passed down or inherited.

Underscoring the inherent and fundamental individuality and diversity characteristic of nineteenth-century Lakota religion Deloria (n.d.:33) explains that a common Lakota credo was “each man for himself, in the Dakota, as a general thing.” It was either the initial childhood vision or the “shaman’s vision,” as Little Wound refers to it (Walker 1991:67), that provided an individual with an identity and established both a kinship relationship with a particular other-than-human person and determined whether or not he would walk the lonely road of the religious practitioner. The powers that individuals attained through the aid of spirit guardians varied and provided the foundation of a religious specialist’s practice, technique, following, clientele, and reputation. Vision powers required activation through public ritual (re)enactments of visionary experiences.

Vision (re)enactments, concluded with a feast, frequently followed an individual’s Vision Quest. In these performances spirit beings were imitated, episodes from visions were (re)enacted, and the source of one’s power was demonstrated. This ritual category was often associated with a specific Dream Society, but not necessarily. The performance could function as a transition rite to classify ritual specialists or to depict any one of the spectrum of culturally established spirits comprising the overall Lakota religious landscape. The general term for this type of performance, as well as the performer, was *wakǎ́ŋ káǵa* (to make sacred; sacred performance, imitation)¹⁵⁵ (Powers 1986:180).

For instance, an individual who dreamt of a bear was called a *Mathó iháŋbla* (Bear dreamer) and publically performed the *Mathó káǵapi* (Bear performance), during

¹⁵⁵ The term *wakǎ́ŋ káǵapi* (dance) may also be used generically in reference to this performance type.

which he was referred to as a *Mathó káğa* (Bear imitator, Bear enactor). Similarly, a *Heháka ihánbla* (Elk dreamer) performed the *Heháka káğapi* (Elk performance) and was considered a *Heháka káğa* (Elk imitator, Elk enactor) during his performance and perhaps afterwards as well. Because visions were often unique it was unlikely that each performance of this category was exactly alike, aside from a number of common culturally embedded and constituted symbolic associations tied to the spirit being at the center of the ritual. If a Bear dreamer went on to use Bear medicine as a practitioner he would likely be referred to as a *Mathó waphiya* (Bear conjuror, Bear doctor). But more on these classificatory terms later. Clearly, any classification of nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners is a daunting and confusing task, exacerbated by diffuse terminological permeability in terms of categorical interrelations and nearly unlimited diversity in terms of visionary experience, religious belief, and magico-medico-ritual practice.

In enactments of visions human beings recalled their dream and revelatory experiences and were able to accomplish remarkable feats through the aid and intervention of other-than-human persons. These enactments (*káğa*) or imitations (*iyáčhiŋyaŋ*) of dream encounters with spirits served two major functions: first, they demonstrated, proved, and activated an individual's power and efficacy publicly, convincing the people of both the individual's established kinship relationship with a particular spirit power and of the individual's ability to effectively treat the sick. As Black Elk (in DeMallie 1984:6–7) recalls after publically performing the Horse Dance ceremony at Fort Keogh, Montana in the spring of 1881:

. . . it seemed that I was above the earth and I did not touch the earth. I felt very happy and I was also happy to see my people, as it looked like they were renewed and happy. They all greeted me and were very generous to me, telling me that their relatives here and there were sick and were cured in a mysterious way and congratulated me, giving me gifts. Especially the sick people had given me gifts. I was now recognized as a medicine man at the age of seventeen. Everyone had respect for me. . . . After this my people were cured all over for their sicknesses. It seemed that even the horses were healthier after the dance.¹⁵⁶ Before this I was unable to be friendly with the medicine men but after this they were all very friendly with me and wanted to talk to me all the time. . . . The next morning after this horse dance I felt that I was very different from the other men and it seemed that I could pity my people when I looked at them¹⁵⁷ . . . [DeMallie 1984:225]

Secondly, these public vision (re)enactments served as rites of passage for individuals, transitioning them in their own minds and in the minds of the public from a common social status to the status of a *wakǵáŋ* ritual specialist, ascribing them with other-worldly powers and a public reputation. The performances literally “made,” “created,” (*káǵa*) or forged a ritual practitioner out of a common individual, beginning one’s career as a magico-medico-ritual practitioner. As DeMallie (1984:88) explains, “In Lakota belief such public displays of ritual were required before a man could control the powers that had been given him.”

These public performances followed a successful vision or series of visions and introduced the people to the newly christened and initiated practitioner. In the *Mathó*

¹⁵⁶ Health refers not only to physical or physiological health, but also to emotional, psychological, and spiritual health and balance.

¹⁵⁷ According to DeMallie (1984:7), later Black Elk “also performed the buffalo and elk ceremonies and repeated the horse dance so that the people at Pine Ridge would recognize his powers as a healer.” Each of these vision (re)enactments was associated with a particular other-than-human person or vision encounter, and hence one individual may perform multiple (re)enactments throughout his life to demonstrate his affinity with various spirit beings. Hence, there were numerous subcategories of the *káǵapi*, such as the *Mathó káǵapi* (Bear enactment/performance), the *Heǵáka káǵapi* (Elk enactment/performance), the *Thátháŋka káǵapi* (Buffalo [Bull] enactment/performance), the *Heyókǵa káǵapi* (Heyoka enactment/performance), etc.

káǵapi, for instance, a bear was literally and figuratively “made” during the ceremony through symbolic identification and ritual transformation (“acting the bear,” including audibly voicing its characteristic sounds [*ǰnáǰna* (to grunt or growl like a bear)]), while simultaneously a bear practitioner was “made” out of a common person in the minds of the individual and the people. The *káǵapi* was clearly a rite of passage transitioning an individual from one social status or role to another. After the *káǵapi* was publicly performed the practitioner may go on to practice various other rites and treatment types, such as *waphíyapi* (doctorings) and *lowánpi* (sings). In the example above the Bear imitator would go on to practice *Mathó waphíyapi* (Bear doctorings) and *Mathó lowánpi* (Bear sings).

Deloria writes that a religious practitioner:

. . . really depended on something; and unless he was faking, say the old people, he proved he was wak’á. After that, he had the confidence of his people who believed him whenever he went into communication with his control, and then related the results to them. Or if he claimed to have healing powers from some spirit which in a dream pointed out the medicinal plants to him, then he always treated the sick. But of course, deriving power in this way, wak’á men felt that a certain incantation or calling upon the spirit was necessary—hence the inevitable singing in the patient’s presence. [Deloria n.d.:42]

The common people took religious practitioners in all seriousness, regarding their powers as supreme and their word as authoritative, but they did not speak of it in those terms. Instead, they spoke of *wakǰán* power in terms of usage, skill, and ability. They commonly said, “*Wayúphike* (He is skilled at it),” “*Uǰspéǰčešni* (He is not very skilled),” or *Wánlwanǰčala wayúphike* (Now and then he is skillful).” The people generally believed that the religious practitioner as a performer was sincere, letting himself go into various

alternate states of consciousness as the tool or medium of whatever power was using or wearing (*akhóyaka*) him (Deloria n.d.:15–16). As Deloria (n.d.:16) explains, “To be skilled then, was to be skilled in the art of being a tool or medium, and where intricacy was called for, from the spirits or helpers or ‘wašícú’ powers, he, that one in question, was skilled in complying with the needs of the situation.” To be skilled or *wayúphike* also meant that one was skillful in interpreting messages and directives from spirits. A skilled practitioner was one, according to Deloria, who could successfully “interpret . . . mystery [read, *wakhán*] into the vision” (Deloria n.d.:33). Some practitioners were more adept at this than others.

All powers were not equal: some were innate or obtained, while others were acquired or attained. Deloria explains these two kinds or aspects of power and methods for their obtainment or attainment:

One is by fasting and inducing it, voluntarily, and this was the commoner kind; the other is by being called, being chosen as a fit instrument for transmitting the *wak’á*. This was rarer, more compelling and implied greater power. A man so called was consecrated for the rest of his days; while I am told that a man who obtained power by willfully fasting retained it for several years, as a rule, and then lost it. Or if he did not reveal, make manifest, the power obtained, it gradually faded away and he became as other men. [Deloria n.d.:4–5]

Deloria’s words call to mind the distinguishing feature between that which is *wakhán* and that which is common or ordinary (*ikčéka*), namely difference (*thókeča*) and the ability to transform or transmogrify. She further explains that being “called” is “power by obtainment, without conscious striving” and was the “highest sort, the compliment from

the supernatural, as it were, because it was, well, honorary” (Deloria n.d.:26). This type of power was innate to the individual.

“This kind of vision, the visions and supernatural powers of obtainment as I call them,” writes Deloria (n.d.:41), “in contrast to those of attainment which were the result of conscious seeking after and crying for a vision, and fasting for it, was more abundant and was the usual excuse for working cures, divining the future, performing magic and the like.” Deloria’s distinction between visions of obtainment (innate power) vs. those of attainment (acquired power) is a useful one, functioning to index the powers, abilities, potency, and efficacy of a given practitioner. Generally, visions of obtainment were given voluntarily. The receiver may try to forget or ignore such a vision, running the risk of supernatural retribution and punishment for refusing to fulfill a vision obligation. On the other hand one might ponder the vision, share it with an experienced practitioner, and prepare to (re)enact the vision and activate its powers (Deloria n.d.:41–42). The latter represented the conventional career trajectory for most nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners, who, after publicly (re)enacting their visions, were known as dreamers (*iháŋblapi*), the topic of our next chapter.

4. *IHÁDBLAPI* (DREAMERS): CLASSIFICATION BASED ON OTHER-THAN-HUMAN POWER SOURCE

Hassrick writes:

Dreamers, men who had actively sought visions and who may have participated in one of the three lower forms of the Sun Dance, were recognized by the people as influential sources of power but were not accorded the priestly position reserved for shamans. Their powers were limited to those instructions received from their particular animal intercessor and the directions given by a man who had enjoyed a like vision. Such cult members had specialties, either for curing certain ailments or wounds or for preparing *wotawes* or protective devices. [Hassrick 1964:288]

Hassrick (1964:292) simplistically subdivides Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners into three hierarchical categories: herbalists, dreamers, and shamans. He claims the mechanism to rise from herbalist to dreamer was the securing of a vision, while attaining the rank of shaman required a dreamer to participate in the fourth degree of the Sun Dance. Although Hassrick acknowledges the permeable nature of his categories, they nevertheless remain problematic.

In particular, his dreamer category is tenuous. The concept of dreamer (*iháŋbla*) was undoubtedly a native category used to classify and differentiate individuals, but it did not index a practitioner type, as Hassrick claims. Instead, the dreamer category indexed individuals based on their other-than-human power source, uniting those with common visionary experiences and spirit guardians into Dream Societies (*Iháŋblapi Okhólakičhiye*). The dreamer category transcended practitioner type and any classification based on ability, method, power, or technique. For instance, a medicine man or herbalist (*pěžúta wičháša*) often received instruction and ethnobotanical knowledge through visionary experiences, thus securing power and a spirit guardian.

Visionary encounters frequently functioned as a call to the profession, occurring before the individual actually became a practitioner. According to Hassrick's classification this individual would be considered a dreamer, but in terms of practice, the individual might remain strictly an herbalist. Hassrick's dreamer category complicates an already complex classificatory system and is much more productive when understood as a transcendent category tied more to identity and kinship than to method or practice.

A ritual practitioner likely first identified with his animal or spirit guardian, the other-than-human person who reached out to him in the Vision Quest, or in some other dream or revelatory experience, and with whom the future practitioner established a kinship relationship, thus obtaining knowledge and the potential for mystical power. The term *ihánbla(pi)* indicates the source of a practitioner's power and the means by which instructions were often received (Powers 1982b:59–60). For example, a *Tháthánka ihánblapi* (Buffalo dreamer) encountered *Tháthánka* (Buffalo [Bull] Spirit) in the Vision Quest and hence was considered to be in a sacred relationship or in league with that other-than-human person. The Buffalo Spirit was the source of that individual's power, likely revealing to him the plants, herbs, and other ritual objects he utilized in his practice and considered sacred; instructing him in their specific usage; and teaching him the sacred songs, prayers, and ritual acts accompanying them that activated their potencies.

As Brown explains:

The Indian actually identifies himself with, or becomes, the quality or principle of the being or thing which comes to him in a vision, whether it be a beast, a bird, one of the elements, or really any aspect of creation. In order that this "power" may never leave him, he always carries with him some material form representing the animal or object from which he has received his "power." These objects have often been incorrectly called

fetishes, whereas they actually correspond more precisely to what the Christian calls guardian angels, since for the Indian, the animals and birds, and all things, are the “reflections”—in a material form—of the Divine principles.¹⁵⁸ The Indian is only attached to the form for the sake of the principle which is contained within the form. [Brown 1989:45 n 2]

As previously mentioned there is frequently a taboo (*wóthēhīla*; literally, ‘something loved or cherished’) established in honor of the relationship, so that, for instance, a Fox dreamer never hunted, killed, or ate a fox, but wore an acquired fox hide during his ritual doings (Standing Bear 2006b:215). These relationships were extremely significant and binding, nurtured and renewed throughout an individual’s life. The connection between a human and an other-than-human person established through the Vision Quest and (re)enacted and activated through public ritual performances such as the *káǵapi* was recognized both individually and collectively; both self-ascribed and ascribed and confirmed by others through social interaction and public recognition.

Individuals who dreamt of specific other-than-human persons were known as *ihánblapi* (dreamers). There was a great variety of other-than-human power sources or spirit beings who intervened and communicated with human beings so that an individual might be a *Mathó ihánbla* (Bear dreamer), *Heháká ihánbla* (Elk dreamer), *Thathánka ihánbla* (Buffalo dreamer), *Sintésapela ihánblapi* (Black-Tail Deer dreamer), *Šunǵmánituthánka ihánblapi* (Wolf dreamer), *Šunǵila ihánblapi* (Fox dreamer), *Zuzéča ihánblapi* (Snake dreamer), *Čhetán ihánblapi* (Hawk dreamer), *Khánǵi ihánblapi* (Crow dreamer), *Maǵákšiča ihánblapi* (Duck dreamer), *Iktómi ihánblapi* (Spider dreamer), *Wanáǵi ihánblapi* (Ghost dreamer), *Wakinyan ihánblapi* (Thunder dreamer), *Ínyan* or *Tšunǵkán ihánblapi* (Stone dreamer), etc., or any combination of the above (Standing Bear

¹⁵⁸ Here Brown is most likely referring to the concept of *naǵila* (spirit-like, little spirit).

2006b:214). Certain gifted individuals obtained or attained visions, knowledge, and powers from multiple sources throughout their lives. One's power source was likely the major source of identity and affiliation throughout one's life, guiding and influencing a person in both practical and spiritual matters. Individuals who dreamt of the same spirit being united together in *Ihą̀blapi Okhólakičhiye* (Dream Societies), which we will explore below.

In visionary experiences dreamers often received specialized knowledge from other-than-human persons. For instance, it was believed that in mythical times *Mathó* (Bear [Spirit]) taught the secrets of the ceremonies to ritual practitioners during visionary experiences. Bear also taught dreamers about the medicines and treatments they should use in their practice. Bear spoke the sacred language of the spirits and was the patron deity of wisdom, medicine, and magic. Practitioners learned the ceremonies from Bear and other spirit beings through visions and then taught them to the people (Walker 1917:158–159; Walker 1991:75, 116, 128).

Dreamers also received powerful and distinct songs, bestowed by spirits, often in the guise of human beings. As Standing Bear (2006b:214) explains, “The wisdom of these beings was given to the dreamer in song and he in turn sang them to help his people. Now the words of the song might not be clear in meaning to any but the dreamer himself, but that did not destroy its potency to cure when sung by the medicine-man.” These songs became a dreamer's personal songs, part of his personal “medicine,” tied to a particular vision and other-than-human person, and sung in ritual contexts to call on one's spirit guardians for aid and power.

Visions were determinative in many ways. Specific types of dreamers were generally associated with particular attributes, rituals, domains, and methods or techniques. Ultimately, the vision experience and other-than-human power source determined which type of practitioner an individual would become, which powers and abilities one would master, which medicines one would use, which type of cures one would make, and which rituals one would perform.

For instance, *Thǎthǎŋka ihǎŋblapi* (Buffalo dreamers) often had the power to locate and call the buffalo herds. They knew the *Thǎthǎŋka olówaŋ* (Buffalo song), ritually enacted the Buffalo (*Thǎthǎŋka káŋapi*), and presided over the *Thǎthǎŋka lowǎŋpi* (Buffalo sing), an important element of the *Išnáthi Awíčhalowaŋpi*, the rite of passage commemorating a young woman's first menstrual flow and transition to womanhood (Buechel n.d.:21–22, 26; Walker 1991:153).

Šuŋgmánituthǎŋka ihǎŋblapi (Wolf dreamers) acted as scouts, often presiding over rituals pertaining to warfare and horse raiding. Buechel vividly describes the exploits of a Wolf imitator (*Šuŋgkáŋapi* or *Šuŋgmánitu káŋa*), a Wolf dreamer who “acts the wolf,” performing various ceremonies while he and his comrades were on the warpath. The following night ceremony was performed by a Wolf dreamer. Note the element of fire divination or pyromancy. According to Buechel's interlocutor old man Red Feather:

On this occasion he wears a wolfskin [*sic*] and a mask (*itéha*). In his right hand he has a rope which he moves in such a way as to make it look like a snake (*zuzéca káŋa* [imitates snake]). In his mouth he has the *šiyót ǎŋka*, which he whistles with: ti-ti-ti . . .

His work is to see the tents . . . or the fires (*p'elwáŋyaŋk lowán* [or] *péta wanyáŋk lowán* [fire-seeing sing]) of the enemy, i.e., to tell his people where the enemy camps [are].

In the evening the warriors invite him to find it out for them. This is called *iwásiipi*.¹⁵⁹ They bring a pipe (*opági*) to him. He accepts and holds it towards six directions . . . and then smokes until it is empty. He also held the pipe close to the wolf skin, saying: *Blihéic'iya, waúŋšipelo tanyán slolyé wac'ín yo* [Exert yourself, they asked me, I want to know well!]. When he is through with smoking he returns the pipe.

The real ceremony is performed during the night. He orders all the warriors to line up in one long line, to sit down with their horses behind them. Nobody may talk.

Then he goes along the line up and down blowing the whistle: *ti ti* and then again howling like a wolf with the intention to make the wolves howl and then tell him about the enemies what he wants to know (*hoúya*). Naturally, the wolves, too, will howl and from their voice he will know (“he talks with them”).

Then he will also sing while walking:

<i>Wak'anyaŋ mawáni ye.</i>	I walk in a sacred manner.
<i>Wak'ánqli yewáye.</i>	I shoot out lightning.

The answer which he receives he tells all the warriors: if they will obey, they will kill many; if not, many will be killed. [Buechel n.d.:26–27]

Standing Bear (2006b:208) recalls the exploits of a famous scout and Wolf dreamer named Sorrel Horse. Sorrel Horse’s medicine gave him the ability to “travel with ease through snow so deep and weather so cold that it tried even the strongest of Lakota braves. It was a common saying in my time that Sorrel Horse ‘traveled like a wolf.’” Wolf dreamers also had limited curing powers, removing arrows, but did not treat wounds like Bear dreamers. Wolf dreamers were often employed to prepare *wóthawe* (war medicines), especially consecrated and protective shields imbued with *wakháŋ* potency (Wissler 1912:90–91).

¹⁵⁹ From the verb *iwási* (to hire someone for something, to employ someone for a payment of something). Clearly, being a *wakháŋ* practitioner was a business, as well as a profession, and payment (*wíši*) was and is an essential element of all ritual practice.

Mathó ihánblapi (Bear dreamers) were renowned for their ability to treat wounds and administer herbs and other medicines.¹⁶⁰ According to Standing Bear:

While in the spirit condition the dreamer was in contact with the spirits of all things of the world, though in the case of the Bear Dreamer only the bears spoke to him and gave him bear powers. The bears told him to recognize all things of nature and to observe and learn from them. The animals would thereafter observe and learn from the dreamer, and he should do likewise. The dreamer, like the bear, would always be powerful and fearless and the song would be magic in power. When the dreamer went to cure the sick, he was instructed to carry the claw of the bear with which to probe and cleanse wounds, then put over it some clean earth soil. I have seen this done and the healing of wounds was very rapid. [Standing Bear 2006b:215]

Mathó waphiyapi (Bear conjurors, conventionally glossed as Bear doctors) tended to be *Mathó ihánbla* (Bear dreamers, those who dreamt the Bear Spirit) and members of the *Mathó okhólakičhiye* (Bear [Dream] society). They were also generally referred to as *Mathópi* (Bears). As a boy Bushotter considered the Bear doctors to be “the holy men [*wak’ápi*] par excellence” (Bushotter 1937:Story 199). They were particularly adept at treating wounds and using specific methods and herbal medicines derived from vision experiences and interactions with *Mathó* (Bear [Spirit]), referred to as *Hunúnp* (Two-Legged) in the esoteric, symbolic language of the shamans (*wakhán iyá*). *Mathó* was the patron spirit of wisdom, and his presence at a ceremony insured that it would be performed correctly (Walker 1991:128, 227). In 1898, Short Feather explained, “The Bear is the friend of the Great Spirit. He is very wise. He taught the shaman the secrets of the ceremonies. He teaches the medicine men about the medicines and the songs that they should sing. He is a spirit that comes to the shaman when the shaman seeks a vision.

¹⁶⁰ Wissler (1912:88–90) provides a detailed description of Bear dreamers and their practices.

When a man sees the Bear in a vision, that man must become a medicine man” (Walker 1991:116).

A vision of *Mathó* consecrated (*wakháŋ káŋa*) an individual and made him successful in all his undertakings, holy, and potent. As Tyon points out, “The Bear Dreamer society is the only one the people find very astonishing (*wowinihanyan*)”¹⁶¹ (Walker 1991:157). According to Bushotter, *Mathó waphiyapi* could cure [*asníwičhayapi*] any sickness (Bushotter 1937:Story 199). Sword concurs, noting, “The Bear medicine men have all the medicine ceremonies that other kinds of medicine men have and much more” (Walker 1991:74). Walker’s interlocutors (1991:105) report that “The Bear medicine was the most sought because the Bear medicine men could treat all ordinary diseases, and only they were allowed to treat those wounded. . . . One Bear medicine man could instruct another how to use his medicines.” Sword recalls there were ten Bear medicines, often kept in a Bear medicine bag. He explains, “A Bear medicine man should have something in his medicine bag to cut with. He should cut inflamed places and places about wounds that are not healing properly. This should be a sharp flint” (Walker 1991:91–92).

The Bear society was one of the largest Dream Societies among the nineteenth-century Lakotas because membership could be determined in two ways: (1) by a common vision of the Bear Spirit; and (2) membership through treatment, in that individuals who were healed by a Bear doctor learned their methods and were admitted to the society. As Tyon explains, “It is because a Bear doctor has caused him to live that a man takes part in

¹⁶¹ This term, *wówinihanyan*, may also be translated as fearfully, awfully, dreadfully, supernaturally, and awe-inspiringly, capturing the connection between the mysterious power and inherent danger of things *wakháŋ*.

the society. There are many doctors but this is the way the Bear doctors increase in number. Therefore, the Bear doctor songs are very good” (Walker 1991:159). Because Bear doctors were expert at treating wounds their services were essential and their expertise needed regularly during the early historical period, characterized by intertribal warfare, raiding, and, later, warfare with the encroaching whites and the United States military. Tyon explains it thus:

Many men are wounded by bullets or the like; the Bear doctors make all of them well. So those who have been wounded and made well by the Bear doctors are taken into the Bear group. From that time on, men who were wounded participate in the ceremonies of the Bear society . . . and learn everything about them. Because many wounded men are taken in the Bear society includes many men. [Walker 1991:157]

Deloria adds, “The bear society was made up, not only of the ‘Bear-Priest-hood’ as it were, but by all who had dreamed of the bear-spirit, whether they became doctors or not;¹⁶² and by a large ‘lay’ membership, mostly men, who joined, and a few women who were retained as cheerers” (in Bushotter 1937:Story 199). This “lay membership,” Deloria continues, “consider themselves especially blessed, and safe-guarded, because they associate with holy men.” Deloria’s notion of a “Bear-Priest-hood” and her distinction, clearly drawn, between the lay and non-lay members of the Bear society will prove useful later in our discussion of practitioner types.

Bear doctors always sang at Bear society dances (*Mathó wačhípi*) and ritual performances (*Mathó káǵapi/lowánpi/waphíyapi/wóhanpi*), having many powerful songs. As Deloria notes, the Bear society also had some female members who sang the higher

¹⁶² Deloria’s words corroborate our contention that dreamer is not a viable practitioner category per se, as Hassrick maintains.

octaves in Bear society songs (*wičhágłata wičhákagaǰapi*) and honored its members with the screech-owl call (*uŋgnáǰičala hothúŋ*). All other female non-members were forbidden from being present or even in the general vicinity of Bear dances.¹⁶³ This is because all others who had no connection to the Bear Spirit were considered to be safer away from the performances and the possible dangers associated with them (Bushotter 1937:Story 199).

Tyon describes a four-day Bear healing ceremony in which all the Bear doctors from the camp congregated with their medicines (*pěžúta*) in a specially designated “Bear tipi” where the patient to be healed was placed. At the dramatic height of the ceremony, as the Bear dreamers sang and the people looked on expectantly, the leader of the Bear society performed the *Mathó káǰapi* (Bear performance, Bear imitation), in which he was believed to ritually become (*áya*)¹⁶⁴ a bear, growing wild (*gnaškíŋyaŋ*) and running amok (Walker 1991:157–159).

¹⁶³ From nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives the power or medicine of men and women often conflicted (see Deloria 1998; DeMallie 1982). The productive power of women was especially potent during menstruation, a time in which women were secluded in an *išnáthi* (menses lodge) and forbidden to participate in ceremonies, interact with religious practitioners, or handle ritual paraphernalia or regalia. There was a belief that if a menstruating woman tanned a bear hide she would become a bear, growing black hair all over her body and face. Therefore, bear hides were considered *wakháŋ*, and women were afraid of them (Walker 1991:159). Deloria writes, “Indian medicine is rendered impotent by the presence of a woman who is menstruating. So they are very careful to stay away from sickness if they have their flow. A woman who knows herself to be in that state and yet goes to see the sick is said to be cruel. A sick one can not get well, instead he often grows worse. Indian medicine makes people sick instead of well, if it is touched by the flow. It is said to ‘ohákaya’ a sickness. Oháka—to be complicated; ya—to cause” (Deloria n.d.:32). In 1949, John Colhoff, an Oglala from Pine Ridge, wrote to Joseph Balmer, explaining that “a woman in menstrual period . . . queers medicines. This all men is [*sic*] afraid of. For this reason, all women who are in menstrual period must be confined in a hut by herself for four days, not to mingle in a crowd” (Colhoff to Balmer 1948-1953:Letter 15). Colhoff posits that this fear of clashing potencies explains why many religious practitioners avoided large crowds, especially where many non-native women were gathered. A young woman’s habits were believed to be formed during her first menstruation that would decide her disposition for the rest of her life, so during that time she was encouraged to sit and do beadwork and quillwork and to speak quietly, the things deemed proper of traditional Lakota women.

¹⁶⁴ I refer to the phenomenon of ritually becoming an other-than-human person as ritual transformation or spirit mimesis. Symbolic identification is a prerequisite to ritual transformation, both of which were common in Lakota ritual contexts.

Through a trance-like state he projected himself out of the commonplace world of ordinary existence and into the uncommon, out-of-time world of the mythical Bear Spirit, crossing a threshold into another order of existence (cf. Geertz 1973:116). Completely covering his head with a bear skin, the leader burst out of the Bear tipi, grunting and growling ferociously, making the characteristic sounds of the bear. Pawing the earth he mysteriously produced prairie turnips from it. Large canine teeth miraculously descended from his jaw as he shook plum trees in imitation of the bear. He chased people, and if a hapless stray dog happened to cross his path in such a state he literally tore it to pieces with his bare hands, devouring parts of it raw. The people fled from him in fear until he was ritually soothed by other members of the Bear society, often through the singing of Bear songs (Curtis 1908:63–64; Bushotter 1937:Story 199; Walker 1991:158–159).¹⁶⁵ Figure 9 is George Catlin’s depiction of a Lakota Bear dance, first sketched near Fort Pierre in 1832.

¹⁶⁵ In this altered ritual state the Bear dreamer might also become bulletproof, stab people with his knife, and subsequently heal them. He often said he was “going hunting” (Walker 1991:159).



Figure 9: *The Bear Dance, Preparing for a Bear Hunt (1844)*, by George Catlin

Bushotter describes a Bear society performance that is largely in agreement with the description above: “Because those who are to dance suddenly grow sharp teeth [*hiské uyápi*]; and when this happens they are not themselves [*blézapišni*], and no matter what they lay hold on they bite it to pieces or scratch it all up, by clawing it” (Bushotter 1937:Story 199). He continues, reporting, “it is those who are in that insane state [*blézešni*]¹⁶⁶ who can tap on the ground anywhere at all and pull up a bear-turnip [*mat ‘ó-*

¹⁶⁶ The Lakota term most frequently used to describe the altered state of consciousness or trance state attained by religious practitioners during ritual is *bléze šni* (to be insane, irrational, crazed, reckless), derived from the religiously significant term *bléza* (clear, clear-minded, clear-sighted, conscious, sane) and its semantic relative *abléza* (awareness, consciousness, perception, realization, understanding; to notice, pay attention, perceive, realize, understand). *Abléza* is conceived of as the cumulative awareness of oneself and one’s relation to all creation, conceived of in terms of kinship and relatedness, which one develops throughout life. *Abléza* is differential depending on gender, occupation, status, and other factors. This trance state—in which *abléza* is purposefully interrupted and suspended—is the ritual phase during which

t'at'ipsila] from it; and then they pass it about among those who are ailing, so each one takes [*yútapi* (eats)] a piece, and are healed [*akísnipi*] thereby. Some of the bear-actors [*mat'ó kī*] sit with blood streaming out of their mouths” (Bushotter 1937:Story 199).

Bushotter’s mother, father (*C'qkú-waste* [Good Road]), and father’s cross-cousin (*At'ásošapi* [Spat Upon]) were all members of the Bear society in different capacities. Bushotter refers to his mother as a *mat'ó-wic'aglata* (female bear singer). Spat Upon was known as a Bear doctor (*mat'ó wap'íya*) who had “very potent medicines” (*p'ezúta wastéste yuhá*), and Good Road was a common member of the Bear society (*mat'ó-ok'olakic'íye él óp'a*). Spat Upon was the link who drew other members of his *thiyóšpaye* into the Bear society. According to Bushotter, all of his relatives went to Spat Upon exclusively when they were sick or injured: “whenever anyone of us was ill, he cured us [*asníuyapi*]. He alone gave us medicine [*p'ezúta uk'úpi*] and treated us [*p'úuyapi*], always” (Bushotter 1937:Story 199).

Spat Upon used a common treatment technique known as *yağópa* or *yaphhá*, in which the practitioner extracts sickness by sucking or drawing it out with the mouth or some hollow, tubular object.¹⁶⁷ As Bushotter recalls, “Whenever Spat-Upon was doctoring the sick [*wap'íya*] and drawing (by sucking) on the part of the body where the evil lodged [*kiyáğopa*]; and if he had done this for a long while without result, then if his

the practitioner’s eyes may glaze over and roll back in his head. He may become wild or crazed, running amok and hurting himself or others until he is ritually soothed through isolation or song, at which point he may begin the transition and return to the common (*ikčéya*) realm of everyday existence. During the period characterized by *bléze šni* it could be said that the spirit being “wore” (*akhóyaka*) the practitioner, who was (re)enacting or imitating, and hence evoking, the other-than-human person in whose honor the ceremony was being performed. During the *bléze šni* phase the human actor was considered to have actually *become* (*áya*) the spirit being, sacrificing his human agency and becoming a medium for and instrument of the spirits.

¹⁶⁷ This method will be examined in greater detail in the chapter on practice.

bear-spirit¹⁶⁸ wished to assist him [*t'amát'ó kǐ ókiyiŋkta*], then he, inside the man's body, gave forth a great angry growl [*c'uwí-mahel hñáhna*]" (Bushotter 1937:Story 199).

Through this audible manifestation of the Bear Spirit, it became a reality, able to aid Spat Upon in his practice.

Once Spat Upon's indwelling Bear Spirit made his presence felt the treatment was sure to be successful. "And when it, the bear spirit, is so inclined,"¹⁶⁹ Bushotter continues, "out of the doctor's mouth a bear cub falls [*ítqhq mat'ó c'ícála kǐ héc'a wq hiyú*], and moves about, sitting and then walking by turns" (Bushotter 1937:Story 199). While the cub was outside the practitioner's body, without his "sustaining power," Spat Upon "faints and swoons, and well-nigh dies [*t'ekínica*]" (Bushotter 1937:Story 199). Spat Upon also had "medicines [*p'ežúta*] that could counteract the power of bewitching [*wic'áhmuǵapi*]", by which he could "cure [*asníye*] anyone anywhere who had been bewitched [*hmuǵapi*]" (Bushotter 1937:Story 199).

Bushotter describes Spat Upon's Bear doctoring methods in detail:

Whenever he was going to treat the sick [*wap'íya*], first he spread a bear-feast [*mat'ó-wohq*], and from the centre [*sic*] of the tipi he drew forth wild turnips [*mat'ó-t'at'ipsila*] from the earth, and with it he healed the sick [*wayázq kǐ asníwic'aye s'a*]. He passed it around, giving a piece to all who sat inside. He did it that they might retain good health, and never falls [*sic*] sick [*Héc'el ú túweni wayázqšni, zaníya úpikta c'a héc'ú*]. Those men who belonged to the bear-society were always very sure of themselves [*tic'imnapihce s'a*]. They were made so by virtue of their sustained association [*óhñiyq mníciyapi*] with bear-doctors [*mat'ó-wap'iyapi*] and holy men [*wak'ápi*] through their meetings. They considered themselves

¹⁶⁸ As we have noted frequently personal spirit guardians are spoken of using possessive forms, such as the prefix *thá-* (his, her, its).

¹⁶⁹ Deloria (in Bushotter 1937:Story 199) notes that it is not clear from the Lakota if this passage means that "the doctor wishes for the assistance of the bear-spirit residing within him; or, it may mean the bear-spirit within, seeing the doctor is not succeeding, chooses to help him." This discrepancy illustrates the significance of ritual transformation and the ambiguity of the distinction between human and spirit power: the man ritually becomes (*áya*) the bear, as the bear ritually becomes the man.

utterly immune to any sort of sickness, feeling that they were of strong constitution because they constantly ate of the bear-doctors' medicines [T'ap 'ézutapi kǐ héc 'a yúl úpi kǐ ú t'ac 'q-was 'akapi nq wówayazq étkiya sutáka-ic 'ilapi].¹⁷⁰ [Bushotter 1937:Story 199]

This practice of using the objects produced through occult or magical means to cure patients, in this case by ingesting the magically produced wild turnips, appears to have been a common occurrence throughout the nineteenth century. Ingestion of various types of medicines was one of the three most common forms of treatment, used especially by medicine men or herbalists (*pěžúta wičhášapi*). According to Sword, who was himself a Bear doctor, “When the medicine man treats the sick, his medicines must be swallowed or smoked or steamed” (Walker 1991:92).

Bushotter himself was once believed to be the victim of sorcery/witchcraft [*wičhášmunǵapi*], a topic which we will examine in greater detail below. There was a rumor circulating throughout the camp that Bushotter had been the victim of sorcery/witchcraft, which he had publically denied the possibility of. When his father heard the rumor he immediately went to Spat Upon with the news. “Don’t worry;” Spat upon said (Bushotter 1937:Story 199), “whoever that is who thinks he can bewitch [*hmúge*] Trouble [Bushotter’s boyhood name], no matter, I will remove the evil out of

¹⁷⁰ This is similar to what a contemporary practitioner once told me. When I asked him if he ever feared sorcery/witchcraft directed at him by other practitioners out of jealousy or revenge, he looked at me and replied, “No, I never really worried about all that. I always figured that my medicine or power—my *šičún* and *wóthawe*—would protect me from that kind of thing. My power and my family’s status and history could stand up to anyone trying to bewitch me, cause me harm, or make me sick” (Posthumus 2008-2014).

him [*iwécicukte*].”¹⁷¹ Spat Upon’s medicine [*t’ap’ézuta*] could also “revive” [*yuéčhetupi* (to make something right, set right)]¹⁷² those suffering from intense pain.

Curtis vividly describes a bear doctoring ceremony:

In treating a patient he first seizes the man by the hair and shakes him, at the same time growling like a bear; then he strikes himself on the sides of his body and spits out several Juneberries, which he picks up and puts in the wounded man’s mouth. In his own mouth he places a pinch of the mixture contained in his medicine-pouch and blows it into the mouth of the patient. Then some of it is sprinkled on the man’s eyes, rubbed on his temples, and held under his nose for him to inhale. If no improvement is shown, he proceeds no further, for there is no use: the man is bound to die.¹⁷³ [Curtis 1908:63–64]

If the patient responds positively to treatment, the Bear dreamer performs an act of hydromancy or water divination. If the results portend recovery, Curtis explains:

Three or four assistants, men whom he has previously treated for illness, now beat the drum and sing the Bear songs. The medicine-man, while they sing, approaches the patient, simulating the actions of a bear, lifts him and almost throws him down, tumbling him over and over, just as a bear might do.¹⁷⁴ The mixture is then administered, a portion being first blown upon the wound. This treatment is repeated once or twice daily during the four days. [Curtis 1908:64]

¹⁷¹ The word *iwéčiču* literally means ‘to take (out) (or draw up) blood with the mouth’, another direct reference to the medical practice of bloodletting that appears to have been quite common among nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners. Apparently, there is an additional connection between *yağópa/yaphá* and bloodletting (*wekákpa*, *iwéčiču*, or *khaŋkákpa*): Frequently in the resolution phase of treatment the practitioner spat out and publicly displayed the sickness extracted from the patient/victim. Often this physical representation or manifestation of sickness was manifested in the form of blood, a bloody worm, bug, fingernail, or a rolled-up feather covered in blood.

¹⁷² The transitive verb *yuéčhetu* (to make something right, set right) provides additional evidence for the close connection between healing, doctoring, and reviving and restoring spiritual equilibrium, harmony, and balance.

¹⁷³ In this case the doomed man is considered *asniyéphiča šni* (incurable), as opposed to *asniyéphiča* (curable).

¹⁷⁴ Notice the significance of symbolic identification and ritual imitation and transformation inherent in Curtis’s account.

A *Heháka iháŋbla* (Elk dreamer), according to Standing Bear (2006b:216), “was neither singer nor dancer, but an actor, and his greatest power was over women. He had power to protect himself and other men from the wiles of women, or to help them to secure the chosen woman for a wife. He could not, however, assist them in realizing an evil intention, for his powers, like those of all medicine-men, were powers of good.” Elk dreamers were known to be irresistible to women, preparing potent love medicines (*wiíčhuwa*) for attracting and charming females. Flutes and mirrors figured prominently in the rituals accompanying the preparation of love medicines. Elk dreamers used and manipulated sacred hoops, often with mirrors in the center, which could provide protection or wellness for spectators, on the one hand, or mesmerize and bewitch (*h̄mún̄ḡa*) them, on the other. These mirrors, symbolic of eyes, could also charm women, as they were believed to “catch the eye of a girl and bring back her heart” (Bushotter 1937:Story 87; Standing Bear 2006b:217; Wissler 1912:87–89).

Another essential ritual implement utilized by Elk dreamers was the elk mask (*heháka itéha*). Fletcher (1884b) provides a vivid description of a *Heháka káǵapi* (Elk imitation, Elk performance) that she witnessed at Pine Ridge in 1882:

[Elk dreamers] wore masks resembling the heads of elk. These masks were made by bending willow branches so as to form a framework, with a straight bar across the top of the head, two side pieces passing down by the ears and fastened to withes which circled both forehead and neck. Antlers, resembling those of the elk, were ingeniously shaped from boughs and covered with rolled bands of cloth; these were fastened to the side pieces. Over the frame a thin cloth was stretched, having holes to let the antlers through and enclosing the head of the man like a bag. The cloth masks were variously painted and decorated. One had a small circular looking glass like a single eye fastened on the forehead, others had two glasses in place of eyes; nearly all had something fastened on them which would catch and reflect the light. [Fletcher 1884:285]

The dreamers of specific animals often simulated and imitated the characteristic habits, movements, and sounds of that animal in ritual settings. They may have also had the power to locate them and hence had greater success in the hunt. When dreamers publically imitated specific animals they were known as *káǵapi* (imitators, performers) and the ceremony was also called a *káǵapi* (imitation, performance) (Standing Bear 2006b:216–217). Elk dreamers were also known to administer to and treat male sexual and reproductive disorders and conditions (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Wakíŋyaŋ iháŋblapi (Thunder dreamers) were often required to become *Heyókħa*, anti-natural, sacred clowns, doing everything in a backward or contrary manner. These individuals were considered powerful, dangerous, and mysterious by the common people. Those possessing the power of *Wakíŋyaŋ* often had great intuition and the ability to foretell future events. Last Horse was a famous Lakota Thunder dreamer and a renowned warrior. Last Horse and other Thunder dreamers were known to possess the ability to control and manipulate the weather (Standing Bear 2006b:72–73, 206–210). Standing Bear witnessed Last Horse’s power in 1878. When clouds and heavy winds threatened to derail a dance and feast at a Brulé camp Standing Bear (2006b:207) recalls that “Last Horse walked into his tipi and disrobed, coming out wearing only breechclout and moccasins. His hair streamed down his back and in his hand he carried his rattle. Walking slowly to the center of the village he raised his face to the sky and sang his Thunder songs, which commanded the clouds to part. Slowly but surely, under the magic of the song, the clouds parted and the sky was clear once more.” The symbol or emblem of the Thunder dreamers was the zigzag line representing lightning painted on their bodies,

tipis, arrows, and horses. Thunder dreamers, unlike most other practitioners, were known as excellent warriors. According to Standing Bear, Thunder dreamers often used “their powers to bring on a storm that would place their enemies at a disadvantage; also in olden days, before their powers were destroyed,¹⁷⁵ they could stop the rain at the pleasure of their people” (Standing Bear 2006b:209).

Stone dreamers, variously referred to as *Táku Škaŋškáŋ*, *Tšunškáŋ*, or *Íŋyaŋ iháŋblapi*, were most frequently associated with the *Yuwípi* Ceremony. They were in league with the stone spirits (*yuwípi wašičuŋ* or *tšunškáŋ*), who told them many mysterious things. As Standing Bear explains, stones were believed to possess “extraordinary knowledge, for they were on the earth, in the earth, and in the sky visiting the sun and moon” (Standing Bear 2006b:216). Stone dreamers often had the ability to predict future events and locate lost or stolen objects, herds of animals, or the enemy, sending out their stone spirit helpers to locate the missing articles. Some Stone dreamers also administered herbs and were healers (Standing Bear 2006b:139, 206–208).

White Crow was a famous Stone dreamer and also a healer and herbalist. Perhaps the most famous Stone dreamer was Chips or Horn Chips, born in 1836. Chips was a member of Chief Lip’s *Wažáže* band that settled in the Wanblee District at Pine Ridge. He was known as a *Yuwípi* man, practicing the *Yuwípi* technique, and could locate lost objects, horses, or people through communicating with the stones during the Sweat Lodge Ceremony. He also had the ability to foresee the future, and it is said that all of his

¹⁷⁵ Standing Bear (2006b:210–211) elaborates, writing, “That our medicine-men had great powers there was never any doubt among us, and it was only when their hearts became filled with unrest and defiance that their powers waned. They helped to make our lives joyful, to bring the rain so the grass would grow, to bring the buffalo near, and to get in closer touch with the forces of goodness. They were with us all through life, in sickness, and in death.”

prophecies were fulfilled. Apparently, Chips manufactured a potent stone *wóthawe* (war medicine) for Crazy Horse (Feraca 1998:43; Powers 1982a; Ruby 2010:52; Standing Bear 2006b:207–208, 216; Steinmetz 1990:19–21). According to Standing Bear (2006b:208), “Chips always carried stones, some of them painted in colors, in his medicine-bag. When he was making medicine they would fly to him and they could be heard striking the tipi and after we moved into houses I have heard them dropping down the chimney and have seen them lying about on the floor where they had fallen.”

An interesting nineteenth-century Lakota dreamer category is the *Wanági ihánbla* (Ghost dreamer).¹⁷⁶ Certain individuals could see and seem to attract ghosts, especially when they were out alone at night. As Bushotter explains:

A man might be out walking alone, and then they would come to him, these ghosts [*wanági*], for he is a ghost-dreamer [*wanági-iháblapi*]; and not in visible form [*t'áíyáhcj úpi šni*], but more as the wind; and then gradually they take form, in such a form as to resemble the man they had once been. In the spirit body [*naǵi*] this is visible [*t'áí*], they say. But such a man who sees a vision of ghosts can not tell for he can not at the time observe whether they were clothed in flesh, or what they wore for clothing, they simply appear in the spirit [*naǵi*], it is said.

The features of the ghost's face is visible [*sic*], however; and so they can tell what manner of man the ghost was. And they carried fire, these ghosts, it is said. [Bushotter 1937:Story 102]

Only Ghost dreamers could manufacture visual representations of ghosts, a practice that was strictly taboo for others. As Bushotter explains:

To draw a picture of a ghost [*Wanági*] really was forbidden [*yówǵwic'ak'iyapišni* (they are not allowed)]. It was a fearful thing [*wók'okip'eyawàpi*] and if a man did so, people said, He is drawing the

¹⁷⁶ According to a prominent Oglala religious leader as of 2014 there is only one living Lakota Ghost dreamer (Posthumus 2008-2014).

picture of his own ghost [*naǵi*]; and foredooming himself by the act [*ic'ic'uzapi*], he will soon be a ghost.

But only such men as have spiritual intercourse with ghosts, and are familiar with them in visions [*wanáǵi-ihǵblapi*] are able to do so, and do it boldly. It is said they often even portray themselves deliberately and fight others, or to fool children into being more tractable. Ghost-dreamers suffered no serious consequences from such acts, and they could afford to do this just for fun. [Bushotter 1937:Story 112]

Johnson Little Warrior, the famous twentieth-century religious practitioner and friend of Nicholas Black Elk, was known as a Ghost dreamer. Little Warrior, whose chief spirit helper was the Owl, was reportedly instructed by none-other-than Black Elk himself, as well as Medicine Horse. Later, Little Warrior instructed his son-in-law White Wing and the famous practitioner Frank Good Lance (Hurt and Howard 1952:293; Posthumus 2008-2014).

Wanáǵi ihǵblapi (Ghost dreamers) saw the spirits (*wanáǵi*) of deceased human beings in their visions and derived their power and knowledge from them. They ideally presided over the *Wanáǵi Yuhápi* (Ghost-Keeping) Ceremony, acting as Ghost Keeper (Curtis 1908:99–100). Frequently, ghosts were the cause of sickness. The ghost of a deceased person out for revenge might pursue a living person and cause sickness or death. Ghosts often wore gray blankets and white fillets, round bands of hide or material worn around the head and over the hair. “If you see a ghost in broad daylight, anywhere, he is sure to be in a grey blanket,” Deloria (n.d.:25) explains, “and when his head is exposed,—generally it is enshrouded in the blanket—it wears a white fillet or kerchief like a headband. And such a one has invisible feet. ‘I didn’t think to see him take steps like a human; I did not think how he was moving along until he was gone.’ This is a regular comment by anyone who has seen a ghost.”

Clearly there were many types or categories of dreamers in nineteenth-century Lakota religious belief and ritual practice. The source of an individual's power was also a source of guidance, identity, knowledge, and inspiration. Frequently, the spirit being encountered in the vision experience also prescribed the method or technique an individual would practice, another significant determinant in identifying and classifying practitioner types. Thus, we now turn our attention to practice.

5. *WAKĤÁDĤ'ADPI* (PERFORMING MYSTERIOUS ACTS): CLASSIFICATION BASED ON ABILITY, METHOD, PRACTICE, AND TECHNIQUE

In addition to classification based on power source nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners were also classified and identified by the particular methods, practices, and techniques they utilized in their *wakĥáŋ eĥhúŋpi* (sacred or mysterious doings), which are usually revealed through visions or dreams but could also be learned through the master-apprentice model common to both historical and contemporary Lakota ritual training. In the nineteenth century there were numerous such categories that crosscut the classification previously explored based on power source. In some sense method determined the abilities and powers of a practitioner, but, similar to the case with *iháŋblapi* (dreamers), some gifted individuals mastered numerous techniques throughout their lives.¹⁷⁷

Each method or technique was associated with specific attributes, functions, and bundles of religious philosophy and ritual knowledge. Most of the methods to be examined were aspects of the doctoring or treatment liminal phase of a healing ritual. Practitioners could be identified by their method or technique or by their spirit guardian or other-than-human power source. It is unlikely that any single practitioner mastered all the techniques, although the oldest and wisest probably accumulated more than others

¹⁷⁷ There was a normative cultural ideal that limited the number of power sources and methods obtained or attained by a given practitioner. It was believed that the power of someone who attempted too many types of practice or methods was fractionated, leading to ineffectiveness. As Shooter explained to Densmore (2001:244–245), “In the old days the Indians had few diseases, and so there was not a demand for a large variety of medicines. A medicine-man usually treated one special disease and treated it successfully. He did this in accordance with his dream. A medicine-man would not try to dream of *all* herbs and treat *all* diseases, for then he could not expect to succeed in all nor to fulfill properly the dream of any one herb or animal. He would depend on too many and fail in all. That is one reason why our medicine-men lost their power when so many diseases came among us with the advent of the white man.” However, there were those extremely powerful and gifted people who nevertheless obtained many spirit guardians and mastered many *wakĥáŋ* techniques. Frequently, those individuals were the *iháŋĉhanpi* or chiefs of the Dream Societies.

throughout their lives. Some practitioners specialized in one or two methods, while others were proficient in many.



There was great diversity and specialization in terms of the methods, practice, and techniques of nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists.¹⁷⁸ As Deloria (n.d.:6) explains, “Not all wak’á men were healers of the sick, necessarily. Some were diviners; some simply demonstrated their supernatural power to avoid being punished for denying it; and worked miracles that provoked the wonder and admiration of the tribe.” Too many scholars have attempted to oversimplify the distinctions among practitioners, categorizing them in strict and rigid groupings that neither hold up to ethnohistorical research and scrutiny nor reflect indigenous categories and perspectives.

The following classification consists of permeable, non-mutually exclusive categories based on ability, method, practice, and technique. These categories are generalized and crosscut the previous classification based on other-than-human power source. In each case I have used Lakota sources and terms whenever possible and have attempted to present the data from Lakota perspectives, providing an indigenous classification of ritual specialists. Each category is associated with specific attributes or characteristics and functions. It must be remembered that some individuals transcended these categories, mastering the techniques of multiple types, while others became incredibly effective in just one or two methods.

¹⁷⁸ In fact, I believe the decline in diversity of practitioner types and the gradual generalization in terms of method and practice, as well as ideology, throughout the twentieth century is one of the major forces for change in contemporary Lakota religion and ritual. These changes reflect the political and social structural processes of the present and have created new and fascinating (re)interpretations and (re)articulations of past traditions in the present.

If an individual had “medicine”—that is, other-than-human assistance and mystical or occult power—he was considered holy, capable of magnificent and unnatural feats and imbued with mysterious power. This power manifested itself in numerous ways and could be used for either good or evil; to create, maintain, and perpetuate life movement or to destroy, disrupt, and terminate it; for the benefit or to the detriment of the people. The following is a list of attributes, methods, techniques, and practices of nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists. This list is not exhaustive, but provides a wide variety of common ritual characteristics and procedures. It must be remembered that these abilities are cumulative, permeable, and not mutually exclusive.

5.1 Animal Calling

Certain types of dreamers had special kinship relationships with their “totem” animal spirit guardian. In such cases frequently the dreamer had the ability to ritually call that animal, luring it close to the camp, so hunters could easily kill it during times of famine and scarcity. For instance, Buffalo dreamers had the ability to call the buffalo close to hunters or to the village. “Apparently it was always a Buffalo Dreamer who assisted with regard to buffalo,” explains Hassrick (1964:293), “for it was his rapport with the Buffalo Nation which enabled him to supplicate these animals for his people’s good.”

Deloria provides a vivid description of the practices of a buffalo caller. These rituals are exceptionally ancient, evoking prehistoric circumpolar traditions dating back thousands of years, well before the adoption of the horse, when the people could accomplish little by way of physical force and instead often resorted to magical processes to procure their food. According to Deloria’s interlocutor His Shield:

In the tribe, the man who “T‘at‘ák-ihąb.la”--dreamed the buffalo-spirit--was the one who acted mystically and sang to call the buffalo--and they came, it is said. . . .

Now when there was need for food, and a hunt was planned, the buffalo-dreamer would begin his mystical act, during which time, the people formed a large circle. They set up these dog travois like little tripods, or tipi-frames, and these were set close together, with a single opening towards the north.

Now the holy man would be very powerful, and his song would be most potent to attract the buffalo, who would now draw near in a herd, compelled by the song. During this time, the women and children took their places behind the travois, and each one had a stick in his hand. The rhythm with which they beat on the travois sticks with their sticks helped to call the buffalo. The men of the tribe took their places behind the circle of women and children, and set their arrows to the bow, and aimed carefully from behind them.

Now the herd entered the ring and began to go round and round inside, and to seem not to try to escape. So whenever a very fat cow went by, or a bull, one man would shoot at it and perhaps kill it. The people’s supply of good arrows with effective points was very scarce; therefore they aimed very carefully in an effort to make every shot count.

All the while the holy man continued to sing and the women and children continued to drum and the buffaloes continued to go round and round, and the men behind the women and children shot and killed one here and there.

And now when a certain number were killed, and in the opinion of the chief men it was enough, then the singer would stop, and the drummers would stop and the remaining buffalo would leave the improvised surround and go away. [Deloria n.d.:40–42]

The men then found a suitable place away from the kill site and laid the finest bull, cow, and calf from the harvest in a line with their heads facing north. The head man then asked the buffalo caller for a piece of buffalo for the people’s offering, and the practitioner proceeded to cut off small pieces of the tips of the tongues of the three sacrificial animals, tying them up in a piece of skin painted with red clay. This bundle was then offered back to the spirits as a thank-offering (*wóphila*) (Deloria n.d.:42). Deloria’s account is perhaps the best on the topic, illustrating the practices and significance of animal callers in nineteenth-century Lakota culture.

5.2 Weather Control and Manipulation

Some Lakota practitioners possessed the ability to manipulate and control the weather. This ability is sometimes referred to as atmokinesis, the psychic or occult ability to control or manipulate the weather or atmosphere with the mind at will. The practice of atmokinesis could cause changes in weather patterns and the formation of freak weather conditions. Practitioners possessing this ability could control, generate, or manipulate any type of natural weather condition, such as fog, rain, thunder, lightning, hail, snow, or blizzards, either intensifying or diminishing weather conditions and phenomena.

A form of atmokinesis common in accounts of nineteenth-century Lakota practitioners was known as cloud busting, the dissipation or splitting of clouds through mental concentration and focusing of the *thawáčhiŋ* (intellect; will) (cf. Melton 2001:1:303). The ability to cloud bust was particularly associated with Thunder dreamers. Another common form of atmokinesis was the creation of fog to confuse and blind enemies. The scout Big Turkey, for instance, was known to possess the ability to create fog to obscure his movements (Standing Bear 2006b:134). Wolf dreamers were particularly adept at this form of weather manipulation. For this reason a Wolf dreamer was an indispensable component of a war party. If one was available he was asked to perform certain ceremonies while on the warpath. Before going on the warpath a Wolf dreamer often consecrated a fresh wolf hide, attaching various medicines to it and ritually painting it. According to Wissler:

He sings, whistles are heard to make a noise without being blown, the wolf hides move about, and wolf tracks can be seen. When the ceremony is over the shaman announces that they are to go on the warpath. A black

pipe is wrapped in buckskin and placed in charge of a young man . . . Then the war party moves forward toward the enemy's camp. As they draw near, the shaman takes the black pipe and the medicine on the back of the wolf hide and holding the pipe chews some of the medicine and blows it out into the air to make it misty and dense (a wolf's day). Thus, they approach the enemy unseen and take the horses away. The enemy goes out to look for the horses and will be killed. [Wissler 1912:91]

Charging Thunder, a Densmore interlocutor and Wolf dreamer, had a vision in which he came to a wolf den and found pups with no mother or father to protect them. The pups taught him their song of helplessness, and then the old wolf returned with a buffalo calf behind him. According to Charging Thunder, the wolf instructed him on how to make a pipe, "telling me to smoke it when I was on the warpath and saying that the smell of the pipe would be so strong that the enemy would not detect my approach and thus I would be able to steal their horses. The old wolf said that by the aid of this pipe I would be able to outwit the wisest and craftiest of my enemies" (Densmore 2001:181–183; see also Hassrick 1964:77).

The theme of causing confusion amongst one's enemies by means of the smoke from a war pipe, wind, fog, or mist was a common trait associated with the wolf in Lakota culture, and oftentimes a Wolf dreamer possessed the power to perform ceremonies that caused such an effect.¹⁷⁹ A war party desired bad weather, specifically fog, wind, and a drizzling rain, to cover their attack on an enemy camp or to aid them in raiding enemy horses (Brown 1997:26; Densmore 2001:348). Accordingly, as Densmore (2001:348) explains, a Wolf dreamer sprinkled water on a wolf hide, sang his personal song, and offered a prayer, "saying that the warriors wished for a storm in which to attack

¹⁷⁹ The wolf, as a carrion eater, is a mediating figure between herbivorous animals and beasts of prey, just as mist mediates between sky and earth (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:224–226).

their enemies. It is said that a storm usually followed this procedure on the part of a medicine-man." This ritual secured a "wolf's day," ideal for an attack.

The origin of this phenomenon is noted in a myth recorded by Dorsey, in which a man comes across a den full of wolf cubs. He would have killed them, but the father of the cubs intervened:

Then the wolf sang a beautiful song, "O man, pity my children, and I will instruct you in one of my arts." He ended with a howl, causing a fog. When the wolf howled again the fog disappeared. Then the man thought, "These animals have mysterious gifts," and he tore up his red blanket into small pieces, which he put as necklaces on the cubs, whom he painted with Indian red, restoring them to their place in the den. Then the grateful father exclaimed, "When you go to war hereafter, I will accompany you, and bring to pass whatever you wish." So they parted as friends. In the course of time the man went on the war path. As he came in sight of a village of the enemy, a large wolf met him, saying, "By and by I will sing and you shall steal their horses when they least suspect danger." So they stopped on a hill close to the village, and the wolf sang. After this he howled, making a high wind arise. The horses fled to the forest, many stopping on the hillside. When the wolf had howled again, the wind died away, and a mist arose; so the man took as many horses as he pleased. [Dorsey 1894:478-479]

Another common form of Lakota atmokinesis was the prayer for a "blue day" made by a practitioner before a ceremony. This ensured pleasant weather devoid of clouds or storms so that the ceremony could progress uninhibited by inclement weather. As Walker (1917:158) explains, "The prayer here is for a blue day. Ordinarily, a blue day means a cloudless or successful day. When a Shaman formally prays for a blue day, it means an enjoyable day and an effective performance of a ceremony."

In 1931 Black Elk took his son Benjamin and the poet John G. Neihardt to Harney Peak in the Black Hills for an impromptu ceremony to consecrate the important work

they were doing recording the interviews that would become *Black Elk Speaks*. “Before reaching the top of the peak,” writes Neihardt, “Black Elk told his son, Ben, that if he still had power with the spirits that it would rain a little sprinkle when he gave this ceremony. It did rain out of a perfectly bright sky and then it cleared up immediately afterward” (DeMallie 1984:296).

In the 1950s and 1960s George Poor Thunder was known as one of the most powerful practitioners at Pine Ridge, reportedly having the power to manipulate the weather. According to George Flesh (in Fugle 1966:19), another practitioner and contemporary of Poor Thunder’s, “Poor Thunder used to be the most powerful Yuwipi doctor. Today some say that he has lost much of his power. If it was a hot day with no rain or clouds you could pour water on Poor Thunder and it would rain. As you poured the water you would say, ‘We want rain.’”

To this day affecting the weather is a clear sign of spiritual power from Lakota perspectives. One Oglala practitioner was on the hill for his *Hanbléčheyapi* (Vision Quest) the night of the infamous 1972 Black Hills flood that devastated Rapid City, South Dakota. This coincidence was interpreted by the practitioner’s mentor as a sure sign that his young apprentice would become a powerful and influential spiritual leader among his people. In the supplicant’s vision malevolent spirits attempted to break through the tobacco-tie fence demarcating the sacred space where the ritual was taking place. Through steadfast prayer and offering the pipe to the four directions the evil spirits were denied access to the sacred space and sent away. The flood and consequent death and destruction were interpreted as the evil spirits’ retaliation (Posthumus 2008-2014).

I witnessed a ceremony in the Black Hills near Mount Baldy in the summer of 2013. A well-known *Sičháŋǵu* practitioner offered a closing prayer before the terminal feast. Before we had reached the cook tent after the prayer a violent storm ripped through the camp, producing rain, thunder, lightning, and golf-ball sized hail. The onlookers dashed for shelter and covered their heads as best they could. Everyone smiled to themselves and whispered under their breath to each other of the mysterious power of the practitioner to summon such a storm out of a clear blue sky (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Paradoxically, swift changes in weather may also be used in the opposite way to critique and criticize the practices of one group by another. From this perspective violent shifts in weather serve as bad omens. At a Sun Dance at Pine Ridge in the summer of 2014 I overheard some folks discussing how a terrible storm had devastated the Sun Dance camp of another group near the Black Hills. Evidently, a tornado had touched down and a number of tipis had been blown away and the Sweat Lodge fire had gone out, a definite breach of ritual etiquette. The victims were known as neo-traditionalists who allow too many outsiders into their Sun Dance and had been accused of openly profiting financially from the Sun Dance, among other ritual and sociocultural transgressions. “Maybe they’ll finally get the message and stop having their Sun Dance now,” some said, nodding their heads and raising their eyebrows knowingly (Posthumus 2008-2014). The ability to control and manipulate the weather continues to be a tangible reflection of an individual’s spiritual or magico-ritual power in Lakota Country today.

5.3 *Pěžúta Wakháŋpi* (Mysterious Medicines): Amulets, Charms, and Talismans

The ability to produce charms and talismans for a variety of purposes continues to be an important aspect of a ritual specialist’s practice. In the nineteenth century holy men and

conjurers produced various charms for their families and followers. Love charms (*wiičhuwa*) were produced to magically gain the affection and attraction of a member of the opposite sex. Frequently, these charms contained a lock of hair or a sample of the menstrual flow of the target. Elk dreamers and Bone Keepers were particularly renowned for the powerful love medicines they concocted (Fletcher 1884b; Walker 1991:161–163).

Aside from ritual organization, performance, and treatment another major responsibility of practitioners was the creation and consecration of ceremonial bundles for their followers. The type and quality of the bundles that a particular practitioner was able to create depended on his power source and other-than-human spirit guardian. The bundles could be personal bundles for individuals, luck charms, hunting medicines, love medicines, potent flutes, or *wóthawe* (war medicines), such as armor, shields, and weapons that magically protected men in battle, rendering them bulletproof or particularly deadly warriors or effective horse raiders (Hassrick 1964:198, 231).¹⁸⁰

Wóthawe was a common and significant category, taking the form of a special symbolic design painted on the body or face before battle, a consecrated shield that could turn arrows and bullets, a charmed bow and quiver of arrows, a powerful stone tied in the hair or rubbed with the hands, or a particular type of dirt or herb rubbed on the body or on one's horse before battle. *Wóthawe* could render an individual invincible, invisible, fleet of foot, stealthy, brave, provide protection from wounds, assure the securing of sustenance on the warpath or of killing an enemy or stealing a horse, or simply guarantee

¹⁸⁰ Illustrating the contemporary trend towards generalization and uniformity in Lakota religious belief and magico-medico-ritual practice, today it is generally believed that all practitioners can create and consecrate both love and war medicine, regardless of their spiritual power source or ritual methods. However, love and war medicines are not produced as frequently as they were in the past, although some Lakota soldiers procure war medicine before going overseas to fight in the wars of the United States (Posthumus 2008-2014).

one success in warfare or horse raiding. A *wóthawe* empowered an individual to act bravely and fearlessly. Calling on and identifying with one's *wóthawe* in the heat of battle was believed to ensure bravery and success. Wolf dreamers were particularly renowned for their war medicines, which were greatly sought after and highly valued (DeMallie 1984:203, 340–341; Walker 1917:195, 199; Walker 1991:92, 274, 303 n 8).

Writing of the Eastern Sioux Lynd (1889:161–162) explains that a *wóthawe* was usually produced and consecrated by a powerful, old, and established practitioner, often a *zuyá wakháŋ* (sacred war leader). The *wóthawe* was conceived of as sacred armor, usually consisting of a spear, an arrow, and a small bundle of consecrated paint. Collectively, the *wóthawe* was dedicated to and associated with a particular tutelary spirit being.

Many successful warriors kept a *wóthawe*, obtained through their own Vision Quest or purchased from a religious practitioner.¹⁸¹ A man's *wóthawe* might consist of bows, arrows, knives, spears, shields, firearms, or other weapons or objects symbolic of transcendent experiences of the spirit realm and consecrated by religious practitioners, who infused them with *wakháŋ* potency. The stuffed skin of a bird or animal from a vision might also be kept in a *wóthawe*, which the owner wore into battle or tied to his horse to give him confidence and resolve, making him fearless and pitiless toward his enemies. A man's *wóthawe* was closely tied to his identity and power as a warrior. As Bushotter writes, “every man according to his power struggles to kill” (Bushotter

¹⁸¹ Today, the *wóthawe* has reached a more general audience and is arguably the most common type of ceremonial bundle obtained by an individual. The warfare symbolism of the nineteenth-century *wóthawe* has dulled and shifted to focus more generally on its protective attributes, worn or carried by individuals for good luck and general protection. Again, we must note the possessive root of *wóthawe*, the pronoun and stative verb *tháwa* (his, hers, its; it or something belongs to him, her, it), which underscores the intensely personal nature of medicines and bundles among the Lakotas, which are deeply ingrained in one's identity, often playing a determinative role (Posthumus 2008-2014).

1937:Story 211). *Wóthawe* were kept carefully wrapped in consecrated skins or cloths, perhaps painted with sacred *wasé* (red paint), and stowed away in a secure place or suspended from poles in a soldier's lodge or in the man's half of the tipi (Bushotter 1937:Story 211).

As Bushotter explains:

Certain men who wanted very much to be terrific in battle, had their personal gods whom they obeyed and honored, and that is why they were successful in this; and they treated such matters in a mysterious manner. And a man might command his personal god to do him some favor, and he will vow to do something in return; then he remembers that promise to his god, and when it is time, he fulfills it completely without hesitation, what ever [*sic*] it may be. Even if in the fulfillment of it, his death might come, nevertheless, he had promised it to his god, and if so, he is determined to carry it out. [Bushotter 1937:Story 211]

Before going on the warpath bundle owners often sponsored a *wóthawe wóhanpi* (war medicine feast) to invoke, activate, and manifest the power of the bundle. As is the case regarding Lakota religion and ritual in general there was some room for innovation and individual variation in these matters, but generally, first the bundle was incensed with sage and sweetgrass. Then the men in attendance wept (*chéya*) and sang (*lowánj*), praying and pleading with the spirits through the medium of the *wóthawe* for the chance to kill an enemy, earn war honors and social prestige, or steal horses. As Bushotter explains:

. . . in all such meetings, the *wót'awe* is handled and regarded as something mysterious and sacred, and nobody treats it lightly or mockingly, for a man who does that is in truth treating himself lightly and mockingly, which manifests itself in his own body, when at war, he is either killed, or scalped, or wounded, that is, that he has sinned or violated himself. They say that is the dire consequence to anyone's disrespect of a fetish; and too it may be that a man might be killed too easily, as another

form of retribution from the fetish, for disrespecting it. Therefore as many as attend a wót'awe-feast regard it all as very solemn, something mysterious, and they never would be frivolous over such a feast. When they weep or sing they are earnestly weeping for the enemy (to be available, so that they may distinguish themselves in battle.) And through their singing they are making petitions which they want the Something Holy to hear, that is why they sing regarding it. [Bushotter 1937:Story 211]

The bundle containing the “potent object” was carefully and reverently unwrapped before battle. Young men approached it to audibly voice their wishes for success in war or to strengthen their courage and solidify their resolve.¹⁸² A man had to remain vigilant lest his *wóthawe* cross paths with a menstruating woman, in which case its power was disrupted and possibly negated, causing the bundle owner’s nose to bleed continuously or some other misfortune (Bushotter 1937:Story 211).

An individual’s *wóthawe* endowed him with other-than-human power beyond himself. Arnold Iron Shell, Hassrick’s *Sičhánǵu* (Brulé) interlocutor, also reports on Lakota customs pertaining to war medicine. Before going to battle, explains Iron Shell (in Hassrick 1964:86), “Each man prepared his wotawe or amulet, and panted himself and his horse according to wotawe’s sacred formulae. Those who owned war bonnets put them on and while all bonnets were not wotawes, the power of the eagle endowed any bonnet with a certain protective quality.” Before an attack on the Shoshonis to avenge the death of Holy Circle Iron Shell and a group of warriors led their horses to a butte about a mile from the enemy village:

¹⁸² “In olden times,” explains Deloria (n.d.:15), “it was believed that a verbal statement, or audible wish for the misfortune of another, was sure to come true.” This insight is also relevant to sorcery/witchcraft, examined below, and underscores the dynamic and generative potency of the spoken word from Lakota perspectives.

Just before dawn each man took from the pouch on his wotawe a pinch of medicine, offering it first to the Four Winds, the Sky and the Earth, he then placed a pinch in his horse's mouth and nose to make him long-winded. He then rubbed medicine in the eyes and forehead of his horse and down his mane to the tip of his tail. If the prescription called for it, he placed a pinch in his own mouth, around his eyes, in his nose or in his hair. [Hassrick 1964:87]

A *wóthawe* was a mystical or spiritual medicine, a physical bundle containing various objects and pharmacopeia imbued with occult potency, and a figurative bundle of symbolic meanings and associations, accompanied by sacred prescriptions and proscriptions (Hassrick 1964:231).

Stone dreamers were also renowned for their war medicines. As Tyon explains, “The man who was the Rock dreamer could not be shot even by a bullet, they thought, it is said. And this they believed, it is said. So the men who could not be shot made war medicine (*wotawe*)” (Walker 1991:155). One's *wóthawe* was his personal ceremonial bundle or consecrated regalia carried or worn into battle and relied upon for guidance and aid. The concept of the *wóthawe* is very similar, if not identical to, the *wašičuŋ*, so that today when an individual obtains or attains medicine it is often called *wóthawe*, whether or not it is used for war (Posthumus 2008-2014; Walker 1991:264, 268). Apparently, the *wóthawe*, like the *wašičuŋ*, contains the *šičúŋ* or familiar spirit of an individual and thus is infused with *thúŋ* (potency). According to Tyon, “that which they trusted in, . . . the *wotawe*, . . . and whatever is the *waxicun* (war bundle) are really the same” (Walker 1991:264).

As Standing Bear recalls:

There was no tribal charm that worked safety for all the people, nor did every warrior have a medicine. However, before going on the war path, many of the warriors went to a medicine-man and got a *wotahe* [*wóthawe*], a charm in which he could have faith for his protection. Some of the warriors made their own charms and planted them in the earth as an offering to the Great Mystery. These offerings were little sticks sharpened at one end so they could be stuck in the ground, to the tops of which were fastened little buckskin bags filled with tobacco and an eagle feather or, perhaps, a *wacinhin* or hair-feather. As the warrior planted his offering, he often prayed, 'Grandfather, help me.' [Standing Bear 2006b:154]

Other types of charms were manufactured to repel malevolent influences and spirit beings or to provide good luck in games, gambling, or hunting. A charm called the *čhekpá ognáke* (navel-cord amulet) was made from the umbilical cord of a baby, carefully wrapped in buffalo wool, and placed in a beaded or quilled buckskin bag shaped into the likeness of a turtle for young girls or a lizard for young boys. This amulet was kept by the mother until the appropriate age when it was given to its owner as a good-luck charm (Standing Bear 2006b:154).

Wičháša wakháŋpi (holy men) produced and consecrated *wašičuŋpi* (ceremonial bundles) for other practitioners and for the common people, infusing them with the *šičúŋ* of a *wakháŋ* being and carefully wrapping the consecrated object in an insulating layer of hide or other material. Holy men also manufactured the ritual songs and formulae accompanying a ceremonial bundle, without which the bundle was powerless. Finally, holy men procured medicines for herbalists to use in their practice, again producing the container for the medicines, as well as the appropriate ceremonial songs and prayers to activate their potencies. The production of amulets, bundles, and talismans was a key practice used to index and categorize Lakota religious practitioners.

5.4 *Wičhákhiŋlapi*: Banishing

Ritual practitioners used a variety of methods to expel malignant influences (*thunwáŋpi*) and spirits to clear sacred space as a preliminary to ritual undertakings. Banishing, the “process of causing a spirit or nonphysical force to depart or withdraw from manifestation” (Greer 2003:57), is in some ways comparable to contemporary Western understandings of exorcism, although this comparison is problematic. From Lakota perspectives evil spirits could be driven out by other spirits, such as the familiar spirit guardian of a practitioner; by medicine, such as incensing a sacred space with sage (*pěžíhota*), which repels malevolent spirit beings who detest the herb’s aroma; or by extraction or exorcism, in the form of drumming, rattling, and singing or in the form of the ritualized expelling of spirits through ceremony. Through ritual and incantation holy men or shamans had the ability to identify which spirits were responsible for particular sicknesses and conditions (Walker 1991:123).

Banishing evil spirits and unwanted influences was and is an essential preliminal rite performed before any ritual or doctoring ceremony. At the close of many ceremonies the spirits invoked are sent back to the spirit world through song and ritual incantation, which might also be conceptualized as a form of banishment (Posthumus 2008-2014; Walker 1991:140). According to Walker (1991:242), both medicine men and holy men could exorcise evil influences, so it is probable that conjurors (*waphíya wičháša*) also had that ability. But more on the distinctions between various practitioner types in the next chapter.

5.5 *Wičhákičhopi*: Conjuring and Invocation

Nineteenth-century Lakota ritual specialists had the ability to conjure or invoke spirit beings. As Greer (2003:244) explains, invocation is “the act of bringing a deity or other spiritual power into the magician. It is distinguished from evocation, which is the process of summoning a spirit into some form of manifestation external to the magician.” In Lakota ritual invocation often involved the summoning or conjuring of an other-than-human person into a practitioner or, more generally, into a ceremonial space. Invocation, an important preliminal rite or constituent ritual element, was executed through fumigation or incensing (*wazílya*); prayer, incantations, or ritual formulae; song; or by offering a filled pipe to the four directions. This usually took place after banishment, which served to cleanse a space of unwanted or malevolent influences.

Among Lakota ritual practitioner types conjuring was particularly associated with the *waphíya wičháša* (conjuror, magician, doctor), but all practitioners called on and invoked spirits in ritual settings as a preliminal rite. Conjuring was specifically associated with benevolent practitioners extracting or sucking out sickness. This method is referred to either as *yaǵópa* or *yapǵá* and its practitioners are called *yaǵópa/yapǵá waphíya*, both of which will be examined in greater detail below.

5.6 *Wakǵán Káǵapi, Yuwákháŋpi*: Consecration

Lakota ritual specialists consecrated people, animals, ceremonial objects, and ritual spaces. Consecration is similar in some ways to evocation, involving the infusion of beings, objects, or spaces with sacrality, rendering things sacred and magically powerful or potent through ceremony, prayer, song, painting, and other methods. Consecration is the “process of charging an object with magical or spiritual energies, either to transform

it into a working tool or to empower it to perform some specific work of magic” (Greer 2003:112).

Lakota practitioners consecrated people through the painting of the hands and face with *wasé* (ceremonial red paint). People, places, and objects were consecrated through ritual incensing with sacred herbs, such as sweetgrass, sage, and cedar. Common objects consecrated by Lakota ritual specialists included but were not limited to ceremonial bundles, medicine bundles, pipes, clothing, regalia, ritual implements, weapons, charms, and talismans. From Lakota perspectives consecration may best be conceptualized as the dedication of something to a specific spirit being for a specific purpose (Walker 1917:104).

This category is not to be confused with the dreamer *káǵapi* (performances, imitations, [re]enactments) already discussed, although these cultural performances do serve to consecrate individuals, infusing them with *wakǵáŋ* potency and functioning as rites of passage.

5.7 Evocation: Infusing *Thúŋ* (Spiritual Potency or Essence)

Evocation, from the Latin *evocatio* (calling forth), is the “process of summoning a spirit into a manifestation external to the magician” or practitioner (Greer 2003:164). It is comparable semantically to magically imbuing or infusing an external object, person, or place with *wakǵáŋ* potency. In Lakota ritual practice evocation is most commonly associated with holy men or shamans who had the power to evoke the essence of a *wakǵáŋ* being—variously referred to as *šičúŋ*, *thúŋ*, or *thúŋwáŋ*—into people, external objects, and places. This ability to infuse other-than-human potency into objects

differentiated holy men from medicine men or herbalists. It is likely that some experienced conjurors also had this ability and skill.

5.8 *Thókečapi, Ič'ičhačapi*: Transformation

Recalling one's *wakǰáŋ* could render an individual invisible, enabling him to “vanish like a ghost” through the aid of his spirit guardian and escape captivity and danger. Bushotter explains, “he becomes as the wind, and even in full daylight nobody can see him” (Bushotter 1937:Story 245). The famous scout and Wolf dreamer Sorrel Horse was known for his ability to render himself invisible (Standing Bear 2006b:133–134). The general theme at issue here, transformation, is paramount to and pervasive in Lakota religious belief and ritual practice.

Focusing the mind or will (*thawáčhiŋ*) on one's other-than-human spirit guide not only enabled humans to disappear, transforming from the visible to the invisible, but also to take the physical or visible form of other beings, such as birds and other animals. Through the intervention of an individual's personal spirit guardian a human being became capable of the very same transformations that demarcated the *wakǰáŋ*. Through the focusing of the *thawáčhiŋ* (intellect; will) and symbolic identification, ritual transformations occurred in ceremonial contexts. It was common for the dreamer of a specific animal to ritually *become* (*áya*) that animal in ceremony. As physical and visible proof of this transformation a *káča* (imitator, performer) or a practitioner often produced the tracks of his spirit animal instead of human tracks¹⁸³ (Wissler 1912:88, 91).

¹⁸³ This production of visible proof of ritual efficacy played an important role in the generalized process of transference that occurred through ritual, a phenomenon in which the patient/victim and social group developed powerful feelings toward the practitioner, believing sincerely in his powers and in the

For instance, those who had supernatural contact with the Buffalo Spirit (*Tǎthǎŋka*) participated in the *Tǎthǎŋka wačhípi* (Buffalo dance), a cultural performance of religious significance. In this dance songs of power received from *Tǎthǎŋka* through the Vision Quest were sung, and events from visions of the *wakhǎŋ* realm were (re)enacted on earth, recreating sacred time and space and activating and intensifying *wakhǎŋ* powers.¹⁸⁴ Participants in the dance “enacted the Buffalo Spirit” by imitating the bison, bumping into one another, grunting, pawing the earth, and raising thick clouds of dust (Bushotter 1937:Story 70, 208; Densmore 2001:173, 285–293; Standing Bear 2006b:219).¹⁸⁵ According to Bushotter (1937:Story 70), “These men regarded themselves as mysterious and holy . . . they took the hide from a buffalo bull; and they sewed two of these together, and wore it over their head, and whenever there was a buffalo dance then, these men danced in it, and they declared themselves as being en rapport with the buffalo spirit.”

In these performances Buffalo dreamers were said to *become* (*áya*) bison, leaving buffalo tracks in their wake as proof of their efficacy and power, so that, according to Bushotter, “even their tracks are holy”¹⁸⁶ (Bushotter 1937:208; Deloria n.d.:52). Deloria

effectiveness of his techniques. The charisma of the practitioner was also significant in terms of transference, which generally functioned to build and maintain one’s social prestige and reputation.¹⁸⁴ The Buffalo dance was also associated with the Chiefs Society or Big Bellies, an organization of leading men and chiefs. The Chiefs Society was originally called the *Tǎthǎŋka Wapháha Úŋ* (Wearers of the Buffalo Headdress), and the Buffalo Spirit was its mythical founder and tutelary spirit guardian. The Buffalo dance, originally taught to a shaman in a vision, was sometimes called the “Dance of the Short Hairs,” referring to old bison bulls and the dancers wearing buffalo heads (Deloria n.d.:313; Wissler 1912:36–41).

¹⁸⁵ Brown (1997:xii) writes, “By dynamically acting out or dancing the inner, subjective experience, the power of the animal was intensified, and the larger social group was able to participate and benefit.”

¹⁸⁶ Bushotter (1937:208) claims that during the Buffalo dance the men enacting the Buffalo Spirit “have the acute sense of animals, for the time being,” and could sense which women were menstruating, so as to avoid them. As we have discussed in Lakota culture the creative forces of menstruation were considered powerful. Menstruating women were forbidden from participating in ritual activities because their feminine reproductive potency and potential could conflict with the powers of ritual practitioners. See Deloria (1998), DeMallie (1982), Powers (1982b:63–64), and Walker (1917:143).

describes the scene when a Buffalo dreamer first emerged from his tipi to begin the Buffalo Sing Ceremony:

Soon the buffalo-man came out of another tipi and parted the crowd as he advanced towards the ceremonial tipi. He was made to look like a buffalo; he wore horns on his head. He was painted, and looked fierce. His tail hung limply behind; he crawled on all fours, from his tipi, towards the ceremonial tipi. He was very wak'á. He growled as he advanced, and shook his head angrily from side to side, just like a bull. [Deloria n.d.:56]

As another Deloria (n.d.:50) interlocutor notes, “He didn't seem human.” In a harangue during another Buffalo performance the Buffalo dreamer declared to the young woman and spectators, “The buffalo horns are on my head and I speak for the Buffalo God. The buffalo tail is behind me and this makes my word sacred. I am now the buffalo bull and you are a young buffalo cow” (Walker 1917:147). Of particular interest here is the inference of symbolic identification and ritual transformation.

Bushotter (1937:Story 107) describes how once a group of Lakotas were held captive by whites, sure to be executed. One of the Lakotas suddenly “exclaimed, ‘My little holy thing (familiar spirit) [*Táku Wak'á-mit'àwala*] promised me that if I did as I was inclined at such a crisis as this, I should be saved thereby.’” The young man began mimicking a bear and he immediately vanished [*tók'ah'q c'aké*]. The other Lakotas met their death, but the young man in league with the Bear Spirit survived to live another day. Later in life the man told of his exploits, his Holy Things, and how he possessed them [*Táku Wak'á wic'áyuha*]. Interestingly, the animate plural object marker *wičha-* is used, indicating that, from Lakota ontological perspectives, the sacred powers were animate, other-than-human persons. Bushotter concludes, “He himself did not know just how he

got away nor by what route, only that when he came to his senses he was standing far away from the scene. . . . my Holy Things [*Táku Wak 'q-mit 'awa*] which I keep saved my life [*nimákiyape*].” Again, it is clear that sacred things were conceptualized in very personal and possessive terms.

The dreamers of specific animals were believed to ritually *become* those animals through symbolic identification and ritual transformation in ceremonial (re)enactments of vision experiences. But holy men were particularly renowned for their abilities to produce *wakháŋ* transformations, infusing objects with other-than-human potency and transforming the common (*ikčéka*) into the sacred or transcendent (*wakháŋ*); the visible (*thúŋthúnyan*) into the invisible (*thúŋthúŋšniyan*); sickness (*wičhókhuže*) into wellness (*wičhózani*).¹⁸⁷ But malevolent practitioners, those who sought power and relationship with malignant spirits, could also produce transformations. These individuals were feared and hated by the common people. Evil practitioners were associated with *Íya* (Cannibal, the Giant Eater), the chief of the malevolent *wakháŋ* beings (*Wakháŋ Šiča*), patron spirit of all manner of magic used for evil purposes, and *Ínyan* (Rock), the patron spirit of destruction (Walker 1991:187). As Short Feather explains, “A shaman who has *Iya* for his councilor is a bad shaman. The people all fear such a shaman. He can make people into animals. He can kill people by incantations. He can make bad medicines” (Walker 1991:116).

The ability to transform physical forms or transmogrify, particularly the ability to transform the visible into the invisible, and the reverse, demarcated those who had *wakháŋ* power from those who did not. As Powers explains:

¹⁸⁷ Potency or *thúŋ* is what ultimately caused transformations, rendering medicines effective and doctoring of all kinds possible.

To the Oglalas, the totality of natural and cultural phenomena are capable of undergoing transformations which require that behavior toward these phenomena be altered, or somewhat modified. The causes of these transformations and the Oglala explanation for concomitant changes in behavior are subsumed under the concept of *taku wakan* ‘sacred thing(s)’. The phenomena which are regarded as *taku wakan* may be temporarily or permanently transformed. Those which are permanently transformed are regarded collectively as *Wakantanka* . . . [Powers 1982b:45]

Powers further contextualizes the significance of transformation in Lakota religious and magico-medico-ritual contexts:

The universe is composed of a finite amount of energy; good and evil are thus two aspects of the same energy. The good aspects of energy are controlled by *Wakantanka*; evil aspects are controlled by *wakan šica* (evil sacred). Man may harness good energy toward his own ends by propitiating *Wakantanka*; he may harness evil energy by propitiating *wakan šica*. *Wakan šica* is subordinate to *Wakantanka*, and man is subordinate to both. Energy has two aspects: visible and invisible. The potential to transform visible energy into invisible energy, and the reverse, is called *tun*. The *tun* of every invisible aspect is its visible aspect. The transformation from visible to invisible, and the reverse is called *wakan*, as is the resultant state. Invisible aspects are to be feared. Life and death are both *wakan* because in the former an invisible aspect is transformed into a visible one and in the latter the reverse takes place. The Lakota term for birth, creation is *tunpi* . . . [Powers 1982b:51–52]

We must bear in mind the significance of transformation; the fact that good and evil were considered aspects of the same ambiguous, universal, and impersonal power; and that through propitiation and sacrifice human beings could harness and wield that power for good or for evil.

Another sense of ritual transformation was conceptualized in terms of a spirit “wearing” a human being. *Akhóyaka* (to wear) was a significant ritual term contributing

to the foundations of Lakota belief. *Akǰóyaka* frequently appears in Lakota texts describing visions or other religious experiences in which a spirit being works through or manipulates a human being, “wearing” the human. Interestingly, the person marker infixed in the verb nearly always occurs as the passive *ma* (me), indicating that the spirit being wore, influenced, or used the human being, not the reverse. In these scenarios the other-than-human person had the agency, ability, and potency in its interaction with humans. The human being was merely a medium or conduit for *wakǰáŋ* power.

Densmore, who recorded many ceremonial and vision songs and texts, reports that the idea of *akǰóyaka* is that the spirit powers “possess or wear the man who has dreamed of them and has not yet enacted his dream, even as a medicine-man wears an object, or the symbol of an object, which is subject to his commands” (Densmore 2001:1–2, 120–121 n 1). Accordingly, *akǰóyaka* may also be used in reference to a practitioner’s personal ritual objects—his *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye*—and perhaps also to a warrior’s *wóthawe* (war medicine). The failure to enact one’s vision or acknowledge and act upon one’s vision obligations or vows was a recipe for disaster captured by the Lakota term *wówaǰtani* (spiritual wrongdoing; misfortune resulting from a violation or transgression of a taboo or tribal custom).¹⁸⁸ According to Sword, “When one seeks a vision and receives a communication he must obey as he is told to do. If he does not, all the superior beings will be against him” (Walker 1991:85).

Densmore recorded vision songs from *Išnála Wičhá* (Lone Man), *Šiyáka* (Teal Duck), and others containing phrases such as *táku wakǰáŋ kǰómáyake ló* (something sacred wears me); *čhaŋléška waŋ kǰómáyake ló* (a hoop [rainbow] wears me); and *tháté*

¹⁸⁸ This term was used by Christian missionaries to express the Western concept of sin.

wan kǎomáyake ló (a wind wears me) (Densmore 2001:168–169, 295–296). Lone Man shared some Kettle Dance songs with Densmore that Thunder dreamers sang at the *Heyókǎ kágapi* (Heyoka imitation/performance) containing the term *akǎóyaka*. In one of the songs the various symbols or *akíčhita* (messengers, representatives, intermediaries) of the Thunder Beings of the west “wore” the singer or dreamer in succession: first wind, then hail, then lightning, and finally clouds. According to Densmore:

From the time of a dream until the time when the dreamer has fulfilled its requirements he regards himself as belonging to the elements and under an obligation of obedience to them. A medicine man may wear the head of a bird as a sign of his power, indicating that bird to be subject to his commands. So in this song, the elements are said to be “wearing” the singer, who has not yet fulfilled his obligations to them. [Densmore 2001:168–169]

Hence, apparently *akǎóyaka* was used in two major senses: (1) as a spirit being “wearing” a dreamer who has yet to enacted his vision obligations; a kind of metaphysical cloud representing one’s unfulfilled vision obligation(s); and (2) as a representation of a power or spiritual potency obtained through the Vision Quest or from a practitioner, such as a stuffed animal or bird skin of some kind, a rock, or a particular design painted on one’s face, horse, or tipi.¹⁸⁹ Frequently, sacred regalia or ornaments were worn (*kǎóyaka*) in the hair and believed to channel, (re)enact, or manifest *wakǎán* power on earth. The second sense was also connected to the common Lakota practice of wearing a wolf, kit fox, bear, or buffalo skin as a representation of that spirit. The belief was that through wearing and manifesting a given animal its abilities and traits were

¹⁸⁹ However, Densmore (2001:214 n 2) notes that “The carrying of a sacred stone in order to secure a benefit from its presence is, in the mind of the Sioux, on an entirely different plane from the wearing of a ‘charm’ (*wóthahe* [*wóthawe*]).”

ritually transferred to the wearer (Buechel 1978:173; Densmore 2001:168–170, 177–180, 314–316; Fletcher 1884a:263 n 8; Walker 1991:157–159). It must be understood, however, that representations of *wakǰáŋ* powers were believed to actually *be* those powers or manifestations of them. In any case it is clear that humans were often the passive conduits for the active *wakǰáŋ* spirits and powers of the universe. The ability to wear and manipulate human beings, transforming them into conduits and instruments of *wakǰáŋ* energy and obligating them to perform their visions, are just two examples illustrating why Lakota spirit beings were considered powerful and dangerous. This ability is also illustrative of the centrality of transformation in Lakota ritual contexts.

5.9 *Lowáŋpi*: Singing

As music and song are essential to Lakota culture and religious and magico-medico-ritual life, so singing is an important ability and technique utilized by nearly all practitioner types. From Lakota perspectives song and prayer appear to be nearly indistinguishable, functioning in very similar ways. Songs and the spoken word had a real inherent magical, spiritual, generative, and transformative power. The song of a Thunder dreamer, for instance, could part the clouds and induce good weather. The song of a Buffalo dreamer could call the buffalo closer to camp in times of famine. The song of an Elk dreamer could attract or bewitch the opposite sex. The songs of healers and ritual practitioners aided in the treatment of the sick and activated the potencies of medicines and ceremonial bundles (Standing Bear 2006b:207, 213, 255). As *Sičháŋǵu* (Brulé) Lakota educator and linguist Albert White Hat, Sr. explains, ceremonial songs “are treasured by the Lakota people who sing them with respect and love. They are prayer songs to the Great Spirit, the Spirits of the Four Directions and Grandmother Earth. The Spirits of these directions

have compassion and love for the people. For that reason, if an individual uses these songs with faith of heart and mind, he or she will receive help from the Spirits” (White Hat in Around Him 1983:8).

There were and are many genres of songs, including dreamer songs, pipe songs, calling or inviting songs, prayer songs, curing or healing songs, quitting songs, and songs pertaining to specific ceremonies and identified accordingly. Additionally, there were many categories within these genres, so that there were *Mathó olówan* (Bear songs), *Iktómi olówan* (Spider songs), *Yuwípi olówan* (Yuwípi songs), *Haṅbléčheyapi olówan* (Vison Quest songs), and *Wiwányang Wačhípi olówan* (Sun Dance songs).

Lowáŋpi may also be used as a conventional gloss for ceremony, particularly those in which singing predominates. Songs were and continue to be essential to every phase of Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice. Songs are sung in the preliminal phases of ritual (*opáǵipi olówan* [filling-the-pipe song]; *čhaṅnúŋpa olówan* [pipe song]) and for invocation or to call the spirits (*wičhákičhópi olówan* [calling or inviting song] or *thátópakiya olówan* [four winds song, which invites the spirits to enter a sacred space and attend a ritual]); in the liminal phases in prayer (*wóčhekiye olówan* [prayer song]), to activate vision powers and ceremonial bundles, to locate lost or stolen articles (*okíle olówan* [hunting or searching song]), and to doctor, treat, and heal patients/victims (*waphíye olówan* [curing song]); and in the postliminal phases for thanksgiving (*wóphila olówan* [thanksgiving song]), to send the spirits back to the other world (*wanáǵi khiglápi* [(the spirits depart); going on or going away song]), and to close the ceremony (*enákiyapi olówan* [quitting song]) (Around Him 1983; Powers 1986:201–219; Shields 1998). Nearly every Lakota ritual includes singing, and *lowáŋpi* figures prominently in the

Lakota names of numerous rites, such as the *Huŋká Lowáŋpi* (Making of Relatives, *Huŋká* Sing), the *Išnáthi Awíčhalowaŋpi*, the puberty rites of a young woman in which the people sing over her, and the *Yuwípi Lowáŋpi* (*Yuwípi* Sing).

At Pine Ridge today *lowáŋpi* is also a conventional gloss for a common healing ceremony referred to in English as a “sing.” This ceremony is nearly identical to the *Yuwípi* Ceremony, except the practitioner is not bound or tied up in the *Lowáŋpi*. In essence, as in name, *Lowáŋpi* is an attenuated form of the *Yuwípi Lowáŋpi* (Powers 1986:219). People come together in a ritual setting and sing for healing, guidance, good luck, protection, or anything else that might be burdening their hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. Ritual specialists lead in this collective singing, often drumming in accompaniment, while their helpers drum and sing along with them. There are healing songs, calling songs that invoke spirit beings, Dream and Warrior Society songs, banishing songs that send spirits back to the other realm, and others.

When a practitioner sings at the conclusion of a ceremony it is a form of thanksgiving (*wóphila*), an expression of gratitude to the other-than-human persons and powers who aid the practitioner in his ceremonies (Walker 1991:252). In ceremonial contexts Lakotas sing songs of praise, thanksgiving, need, want, lamentation, mourning, and countless other songs expressing a broad spectrum of emotion and religious expression.

5.10 *Pěžúta K’úpi*: The Administration of Medicine

Administering medicine and herbal remedies was a significant liminal aspect of treatment carried out by all types of ritual specialists. But the giving of medicine was most closely associated with the medicine man or herbalist (*pěžúta wičháša*), who specialized in

herbal medicines used to treat the sick. The medicine man was comparable to the ethnobotanist and medical doctor of nineteenth-century Lakota society, having great knowledge of the environment, flora, fauna, and human and animal physiology. The medicine man treated the physical and physiological ailments of his people using scientific methods based on trial and error and extensive ecological knowledge.

Medicine men “brewed” various medicines and concoctions for various purposes. One important category of medicines related to conception and child-birthing. Apparently, there was no medicine for pain in this context historically, but there was a medicine that aided in the expulsion of the fetus from the womb (Deloria n.d.:16). Some medicines were used for contraception and abortion. While Deloria (n.d.:3) claims she “knew of no magical precautions against conception,” Lakota practitioners nonetheless knew “how to brew the right medicine” for abortions, although this type of treatment was apparently rare and not discussed openly or held in high regard among the people.¹⁹⁰ Fertility was highly valued among the Lakotas, so consequently there were few cases of attempts to prevent conception, abortion, and infanticide. From Lakota perspectives barrenness was a curse. Although fertility was indirectly petitioned for in various rites, Deloria (n.d.:4) notes, “There is no method of invoking barrenness or fertility.” She continues (n.d.:4), “I never heard of any family engaging a medicine man to magically prevent a birth or a conception or to terminate a pregnancy. The general attitude towards such a medicine man would be very unfavorable. ‘Human life is of ultimate value’ is the usual saying.”

¹⁹⁰ There are a few contemporary Oglalas who still claim to have knowledge of herbal medicines that can effectively terminate a pregnancy, but the matter is rather taboo and not openly discussed (Posthumus 2008-2014).

According to Skudder Mekeel, who conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge in the early 1930s, Jim No Water was known far and wide for his expertise as a practitioner who administered to women during childbirth. No Water, chief of the Badger Eater band, was renowned among both his people and nonnatives from the surrounding communities for his exceptional abilities in obstetrics. His medicines and applications of them were proven to be effective in solving complications or altering problematic outcomes involving labor and childbirth. Consequently, people from all over the region sought his assistance. No Water used four herbs in his doctoring, and when white medical doctors at Pine Ridge asked him what they were he said he would only reveal them for a cool sum of \$1000 per herb, an exorbitant amount for 1930! Even the other practitioners at the time, Little and Walks Out, would turn to the civil leader No Water when faced with “difficult cases” involving labor (Mekeel 1930:11, 22–23).

Holy men and conjurors also administered medicines, but their practices tended to be more focused on the psychological, mystico-spiritual, or magico-ritual end of the treatment continuum. In any case a practitioner’s bundle often included a variety of herbal medications and pharmacopeia that were administered as part of his treatment of the sick. Nineteenth-century Lakota practitioners had vast medical knowledge of sicknesses and their respective treatments, and the giving of medicines was an essential aspect of one’s practice.

5.11 *Ĥmúnǵapi*: Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft

Ĥmúnǵa refers to magic generally, but also to magical or occult attack, commonly referred to as sorcery and witchcraft. These concepts were already examined above in the section on glossing magico-medico-ritual terms, but a recapitulation is presented here.

Magic, the active side of occult practice, is a social and historical category consisting of coherent bodies of theory and practice often dealing with conceptions of cause and effect. It is a functional art seeking to accomplish tangible results. Magic has been defined in the Western world as “the science and art of causing change in conformity with will” and as a “set of traditions . . . directed toward shaping the world of human experience through contact with nonphysical powers” (Greer 2003:287–290; Melton 2001:2:957–958). From anthropological perspectives magic may be defined as “the art of influencing the course of events through occult means” (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:340).

Sorcery may be generally understood as the use of magical, occult, paranormal, or parapsychological powers, often obtained through malevolent spirit beings or forces. As Melton (2001:2:1437) explains, sorcery commonly refers to “the practice of malevolent magic, or black magic, most commonly the use of supposed supernatural power by the agency of evil spirits called forth by spells by any person with a desire for malice, often motivated out of envy or revenge. . . . [Sorcery also] connotes the use of special charms, potions, or rituals to cast a particular spell.”

Witchcraft is semantically similar to sorcery but may occur without the conscious agency of the practitioner. It may be generally defined as the use of sorcery or magic;¹⁹¹ the use of destructive methods and magical or occult powers, especially those obtained from evil spirits; or the craft or acts practiced and performed by individuals believed to have such powers and abilities. The social nature of witchcraft is underscored by the primary force it gives to totalizing human agency. As Kapferer (2003:7) explains,

¹⁹¹ As we have seen the definitional problems with the various terms used herein continue, in that one concept is often used to define another.

“human agency is the factor which brings otherwise independently caused events into conjunction.”

Sorcery and witchcraft are frequently lumped together semantically and sometimes used interchangeably. Indeed, some anthropologists have challenged the validity of the distinction between the two terms, describing them instead as different aspects of a concern with human agency (see Turner 1964; Kapferer 1997; 2003:10). Sorcery is generally considered more impersonal, amoral, ambiguous, conscious, and socially marginal (outside/without), characterized by overt magical manipulation, while witchcraft is seen as more personal, immoral, unconscious, and socially integral (inside/within), with less overt magical manipulation. Both are considered transgressive, creative, and generative (Kapferer 2003:10–14). Definitional and categorical difficulties abound, and in some contexts both sorcery and witchcraft may be generally glossed simply as magic.

For Evans-Pritchard it is the unconscious, totalizing dimension of witchcraft that distinguishes it from sorcery, which is motivated by conscious intent, although this distinction does not seem to hold among the Lakotas (Greer 2003:518; Kapferer 2003:7; Melton 2001:2:1437, 1678–1682; Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:563). In essence, explains Willis, “‘witchcraft’ is an inherited ability to cause occult injury to others which, at least for the Zande, can be exercised unconsciously by its possessor. ‘Sorcery’ is a conscious activity associated with the skilled manipulation of certain substances, with the intention of causing harm” (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:562). Although the witchcraft/sorcery distinction has been widely reported in many cultures throughout the world it does not hold universally in ethnographic investigations of the complexities and

intricacies of cross-cultural magico-medico-ritual belief and practice (Evans-Pritchard 1937:69–70; Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:562–564).

Sorcery/witchcraft often represent strategies for explaining the inexplicable, controlling the uncontrollable, and accounting for the problem of evil.¹⁹² As Anne Akeroyd (in Kuper 1996:913) explains, “By attributing unmerited misfortune or unwonted success to the illicit use of occult powers and substances by human beings motivated by malice, greed or envy, the beliefs help to explain, not simply how something happened, but *why* it happened as it did and, thus, to provide moral and psychological theories of causation.”

Frequently, sorcery/witchcraft is linked to divination, as recourse to diviners is often necessary before accusations can be leveled. For example, Walks Out and Frank Goings explained to Donald Collier at Pine Ridge in early 1939 that sorcerers and acts of sorcery were discovered through the intervention of a diviner, which Collier denoted as *wiǰháša wakǰáŋ* (holy man).¹⁹³ These powerful practitioners were also able to undue or nullify nefarious acts of sorcery/witchcraft through the proper prayers, songs, and rituals. Through the interpreter Frank Goings, Walks Out related an occurrence when the *akíǰhita* (camp police), acting on the complaint of an injured party, forced a man practicing sorcery to pay indemnity his victim. “If the accused sorcerer denied his guilt,” wrote Collier (1939:28), “then the police called in two diviners (gave them presents to act) to pass on the guilt. If the diviners agree on the man’s guilt, the police force him to

¹⁹² Interestingly, these are similar to the attributes and functions of religion as outlined by Geertz in his famous essay “Religion as a Cultural System” (Geertz 1973:87–125).

¹⁹³ Collier (1939:28) notes that diviners also had the ability to identify thieves and locate lost objects.

pay indemnity and promise to stop practicing sorcery.” Apparently, sorcery was considered quite common in Lakota culture and society.

Collier (1939:28) presents a hypothetical case of the relationship between sorcerer/witch and diviner that is instructive and revealing. An individual (A) has visions informing him that another individual (B) is trying to get rid of him through sorcery. A consults one or more diviners, and if they discover that B is indeed practicing sorcery against A, A goes to B and asks him to cease his nefarious practices. If B denies his guilt or refuses to desist, A appeals to the *akíčhita* to intervene. Collier (1939:28) writes, “I have heard of cases in which a sorcerer was responsible for the death of his victim. The police backed up the victim’s relatives in demanding indemnity. There were fights between sorcerers; and sometimes a sorcerer’s victim enlisted the aid of another medicine man to fight back by means of counter sorcery.” Collier’s use of the term “medicine man” is no doubt conventional, it being more likely that the practitioner enlisted to inflict counter sorcery was a conjuror (*waphíya wičháša*), another sorcerer (*h̄mún̄ḡa wičháša*), or a holy man (*wičháša wakh̄án*). Frequently, sorcery depends principally on context and perspective, so that one individual’s or group’s sorcerer (malevolent practitioner causing sickness) is another’s conjuror (benevolent practitioner curing sickness) and vice-versa.¹⁹⁴ But more on this relationship and practitioner categories later. For now we must again focus our attention on sorcery/witchcraft and its practitioners as analytical categories.

Although generalizing definitions have proven to be problematic from cross-cultural perspectives scholars have nonetheless attempted to distinguish the witch,

¹⁹⁴ This also explains our usage of patient/victim.

possessor of an innate, mystical power, from the sorcerer, who employs technical, external means to gain his or her nefarious ends, such as black or destructive magic (Akeroyd in Kuper 1996:913). Distinguishing witches from sorcerers based on means or techniques, mystico-spiritual or techno-scientific respectively, corresponds to our classificatory distinction posited between sickness types and practitioner techniques from nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives. In any case some scholars have stressed that witchcraft powers and acts are wholly cerebral and therefore practically unverifiable outside the sociocultural setting in which they occur. In cultures that believe in witches this belief is seen as perfectly common-sensical, rational, and logical. Kapferer (2003:12–17) notes that sorcery and witchcraft are not mutually exclusive, highlighting the social embeddedness of such processes. He views the anti-rationalism of sorcery/witchcraft in terms of its modernity, fomented in contemporary discourses of (post-)colonialism, encapsulating the violence and destructive force of power in emergent class, economic, and political fears and struggles.¹⁹⁵

Sorcery/witchcraft tends to encompass competition, conflict, and political opposition between individuals and social groups, often contesting over land, resources, and prestige or social standing. Many ethnographic studies of sorcery/witchcraft have revealed the role of micropolitics and social-structural factors in accusations and instances of sorcery/witchcraft. As Akeroyd (in Kuper 1996:913) explains, “the sociology of the beliefs (the patterns of allegations, accusations and confessions) shows the selection of targets (whether witch or victim) to be the outcome of quarrels, grudges and strained relations between suspect, accuser and victim. These charges are mainly made

¹⁹⁵ Michael Taussig also points to these connections in his book *The Magic of the State* (1997).

about and between people who are not separated by any great social, structural or spatial distance.” In the social sciences studies of sorcery/witchcraft have been productively approached from structural-functional, cognitive, symbolic, semantic, and rationalist perspectives. Recent analyses have highlighted the role of sorcery/witchcraft in the wider context of social-control systems (Akeroyd in Kuper 1996:913–914).

In anthropology specifically magic, sorcery, and witchcraft have been of central importance since the discipline’s inception. Tylor and Frazer first examined magic from evolutionary perspectives. Frazer (1911; 1998) posits that magic could be reduced to two basic principles: that like produces like, which he labeled homeopathic or imitative magic, and that things that were once in contact continue to act on each other at a distance, after separation, which he labeled contagious magic. Frazer classifies both types under the general heading of sympathetic magic, because “both assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether”¹⁹⁶ (Frazer 1911).

Malinowski (1954; 1965) and Evans-Pritchard (1937) posited some of the most influential early theories of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. For Malinowski, magic coordinates chaotic and inexplicable actions and events for which controls are lacking and thus is utilized in exceedingly dangerous situations, functioning as a psychological buffer against anxiety and providing a sense of confidence and control. Evans-Pritchard argues that from indigenous perspectives magic forms a logical and coherent belief

¹⁹⁶ As we will see among the Lakotas this mysterious force is apparently sound waves, believed to be the mechanism through which sorcery/witchcraft operates and is transmitted (Powers 1986:203). This revelation also speaks to the transformative power of the spoken word and speech acts in Lakota ritual contexts.

system. He emphasizes the connections between magic, witchcraft, and divination in the explanation and secondary rationalization of otherwise inexplicable and unfortunate events (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:340–343).

Belief and efficacy are central to cultural conceptions of magic and sorcery/witchcraft. Lévi-Strauss makes an important point in describing the doubtless efficacy of certain magical practices in terms of both psychology and physiology:

. . . the efficacy of magic implies a belief in magic. The latter has three complementary aspects: first, the sorcerer's belief in the effectiveness of his techniques; second, the patient's or victim's belief in the sorcerer's power; and, finally, the faith and expectations of the group, which constantly act as a sort of gravitational field within which the relationship between sorcerer and bewitched is located and defined. [Lévi-Strauss 1963:168]

In all discussions herein of magico-medico-ritual operations we must bear in mind the tripartite significance of the roles of the practitioner, the patient/victim, and the social group.

Kapferer has produced some of the most influential recent anthropological work on magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. He notes, “Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are at the epistemological centre of anthropology. . . . at the outset, the anthropology of magic and sorcery dealt with weighty issues – the foundations of religion, the underlying features of the human psyche and, indeed, the very nature of science” (Kapferer 2003:1). Kapferer, along with Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), Hanegraaff (2005), Meyer and Pels (2003), and Taussig (1980, 1997), has been at the vanguard of a renewed anthropological interest in magic and sorcery. Building on the work of Evans-Pritchard, Max Gluckman, and Mary Douglas, Kapferer (2003:6) insists that “Magical practice is akin to . . . the ‘natural

attitude' and is grounded in ordinary experience mediated through cultural categories.”

For nineteenth-century Lakotas, as for the Azande, sorcery/witchcraft was simply part of routine sociocultural expectations. Kapferer writes:

To the Azande, magic, sorcery, and especially witchcraft are not concerned with the extraordinary in the sense conveyed by the term ‘occult’ . . . The comparison between Azande and Western scientific rationalism is a false family resemblance . . . and . . . achieves an inaccurate opposition that denies a unity or similarity with diverse practices elsewhere as a formation of common sense founded in different historical and cultural constructions of reality. [Kapferer 2003:6]

Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are deeply ingrained in scholarly discourses concerning rationality and in comparisons of magic, religion, and science. Importantly, conceptions of practical reason are grounded in the social, an insight first explored by Durkheim and Mauss. The social character of reason plays a significant role in the psychological dimensions of magical experience, especially in regard to witchcraft. It is only through the complexities and specificities of social practice and process that the cultural logic of magic and sorcery/witchcraft are revealed (Kapferer 2003:6–8; Tambiah 1990).

Among nineteenth-century Lakotas sorcery/witchcraft related to influencing, attracting, bewitching, or hexing people through occult or parapsychological (hidden or invisible [*thúŋthúŋšniyaŋ*]) means and was particularly associated with causing sickness or death through the shooting or introduction of disease-objects or “bad medicine,” even at great distances. Hence, sorcery/witchcraft was perceived as antisocial and

malevolent.¹⁹⁷ Although not always used for evil or antisocial purposes sorcery/witchcraft often had negative connotations, being generally associated with malevolent spirits and the disruption of life movement. But more on this later.

In Lakota, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are all usually translated using some form of the stem *ħmúnǵa* (to cause sickness or death, bewitch, poison, hex, cast a spell on, enchant, use bad medicine on; to do witchcraft). Powers (1986:181) suggests that the stem *ħmúnǵa* “probably comes from the belief that a person’s will, behavior, or life can be influenced or controlled over long distances by transmitting thoughts over sound waves. . . . but it has become synonymous with a person who exercises control over another, sometimes for pay from a client, which results in the patient becoming ill, depressed, or dying.”

Semantic relatives of *ħmúnǵa* include *wahmúnǵa* (to do witchcraft, bewitch people, poison, use bad medicine) and *wičháħmunǵa* (magic, sorcery, witchcraft; a magician, sorcerer, witch). As previously noted the classical distinction between sorcery and witchcraft—forms of magical attack or manifestations of magic—does not seem to hold among the Lakotas, as there does not appear to be a sharp distinction between the two concepts. Both are considered *wakħáñ* in that they transcend human understanding and explain otherwise inexplicable events. Both may be translated using some form of the stem *ħmúnǵa*. Apparently, both sorcery and witchcraft were associated with a particular

¹⁹⁷ Herein the terms “malevolent,” “bad,” and “evil” are used basically interchangeably to refer to practices and individuals who promote the hindrance and termination of life movement. The terms “benevolent” and “good,” on the contrary, refer to practices and individuals who promote the preservation, maintenance, and perpetuation of life movement. This dichotomy may also be used in reference to a practitioner’s other-than-human power source.

type of potency, influence, or medicine called *wiḥmuṅge* (witch medicine; a spell; literally, ‘something used to bewitch someone with’).

Fugle (1966:24–25, 29 n 1) conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge in 1959, living with the well-known *Yuwípi* practitioner George Flesh and his wife Kate in the Wolf Creek community, Wakpamni District. Fugle uses the generic term witchcraft to classify all manifestations of the Lakota sorcery/witchcraft complex. He claims the Lakotas at that time believed in only two major forms of witchcraft, which he labels frenzy witchcraft and sorcery.¹⁹⁸ Frenzy witchcraft refers to the practice of magically influencing the minds and emotions of others, while Fugle’s sorcery fits our general definition of sorcery/witchcraft described above. However, Fugle’s hypothesis is lacking and overly simplistic. One might add the category of curse objects as well, referring to a type of witchcraft involving the injection or introduction of cursed objects into people or things, which we have generally labelled disease-object intrusion. Elements of sympathetic magic also figure prominently in Lakota sorcery/witchcraft belief and practice, both the imitative or homeopathic and contagious varieties.

Standing Bear describes *ḥmúṅga* in a discussion of a *wínyan wakḥáŋ* (holy woman) he knew as a child. “With her magic power she could hurt us if she willed,” he writes (Standing Bear 2006b:141), “and we had no defense, for her power was invisible. This was called *hmunha*.” The stem of *ḥmúṅga* apparently is *ḥmún*, meaning to buzz or hum, as sorcery/witchcraft is believed to be transported over sound waves, invisible to the human eye (Powers 1986:203). Alternately, the buzzing, humming, or whistling

¹⁹⁸ For more on frenzy witchcraft among the Navajo see Levy et al. (1995).

sound implied by the stem *ǎmúŋ* could be in reference to shooting medicine and associated conceptions of disease-object intrusion.

Magic and its manifestation sorcery/witchcraft may also be translated simply as *wakháŋ* (mysterious, sacred), as in *wakháŋ ečhúŋ* (magical or sacred doings) and *wakháŋǎ'ay* (magic; to perform mysterious acts, to make a miracle, to do magic, to do sacred things, to perform ceremonies).¹⁹⁹ Apparently, from Lakota perspectives magic was amoral and ambiguous in its latent or pure form, covering the gamut from benevolence to malevolence, as were the spirits and indeed all energy. It was the objective of the practitioner or wielder of magical force that determined whether a magical operation was moral or immoral, social or antisocial, rendering otherwise ambivalent power or force benevolent or malevolent. From Lakota perspectives then, magic might generally be defined and understood as the employment of any hidden or invisible (*thúŋthúŋšniyaŋ*) power or force that is purposefully and willfully directed by a human or other-than-human person for purposes of good or evil. This directed occult or parapsychological force may be conceptualized as channeled by the will (*tháwáchiŋ*) of a practitioner, highlighting the centrality of human agency and intentionality in magical operations and attacks.²⁰⁰ *ǎmúŋǎ* took varied forms in lived reality, functioning to amaze, astonish, bewitch, coerce, control, hypnotize, sicken, or kill people.

¹⁹⁹ *Wakháŋǎ'ay* is likely Densmore's *wakháŋhaŋ* (2001:245), a term she uses in reference to the most potent practitioners who controlled the sacred stones and directed the major ceremonies. We will examine this topic in greater detail below.

²⁰⁰ From the standpoint of human agency Lakota conceptions of sorcery/witchcraft are more akin to standard anthropological definitions of sorcery. However, Lakota sorcery/witchcraft runs the gamut from techno-scientific (sorcery) to mystico-spiritual (witchcraft) in terms of means or techniques, again rendering a strict and decisive distinction problematic and defying neat categorization (see Kapferer 2003:10–14).

Illustrating the underlying ambivalence of magical or *wakḥáŋ* power or force (*wówaš'ake*) *ḥmúnǵa* could be used either to cause or inflict misfortune (*wówaḥtani*) or sickness (*wówayazaŋ*), hampering life movement, or to locate and expel sickness, perpetuating life movement. This complimentary contradiction expresses an antagonism that normally remains vague, imprecise, and unconscious, interrelating the opposite and opposing culturally constituted poles of good and bad, right and wrong, social and antisocial, and demonstrating the coherence of the psychic universe, which is a projection and expression of the social universe (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:182). Although magic and its expression sorcery/witchcraft tended to have negative connotations they could also be used for good.

Practitioners of *ḥmúnǵa* were conventionally glossed as bewitchers, (evil) magicians, sorcerers, sorceresses, witches, or wizards and were relatively common historically. According to Sword, it was often *wičháša wakḥáŋ* (holy men) who had gone astray, deviating from sociocultural norms and ideals, or had been punished by the *akíčhita* (camp police) who became practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft. These unfortunate and wicked individuals, once publically reprimanded, punished, and ridiculed, were no longer considered holy men by the people and were often driven by envy, revenge, or hatred (Walker 1991:80). It was generally believed that practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft employed the powers of evil spirits, particularly patronizing, doing the bidding of, and performing the ceremonies of *Íya* (Cannibal, Giant Eater), *Íŋyaŋ* (Rock), *Gnaškíŋyaŋ* (Crazy Buffalo), and other entities comprising *Wakḥáŋ Šíča* (Malevolent *Wakḥáŋ*)²⁰¹ (Walker 1991:94). For this reason sorcerers/wizards and sorceresses/witches

²⁰¹ Although *Íŋyaŋ* (Rock) was considered the oldest deity, ancestor of all things, and classed among the sixteen manifestations of *Wakḥáŋ Tháŋka*, *Íŋyaŋ* was also associated with darkness, night, and destruction.

were feared and detested by the common people as powerful, malevolent individuals who utilized other-than-human means to negatively impact life movement, causing misfortune (*wówahtani*, *wóakhiphá*, *wóthehi*), sickness, and even death. In Sword's words, "A magician can cause disease by his mysterious powers" (Walker 1991:91).

Sword discusses a malevolent breed of magicians, whom he refers to as *wakan skan wicasa*,²⁰² magicians who cause sickness. From Sword's description it is likely that these individuals were practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft. An evil magician, explains Sword, "treats the sick secretly and no one knows what he does. He makes charms and philters and he may make very deadly potions. He is in league with the great evil one. He can do mysterious things to anyone, either present or far away. The things he does or makes are not medicines. He makes charms to win games or to kill enemies, or to win the love of men and women" (Walker 1991:92).

Lakota practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft were particularly noted for producing and consecrating powerful charms and concocting potions used to entice or enchant the

Ínyan fathered *Iktómi* and *Íya*, two malevolent mythological characters who delighted in the suffering, misfortune, and destruction of human beings and the obstruction of life movement (Walker 1917:82). This connection between *Ínyan*, stones, darkness, and destruction is particularly intriguing in connection with the *Yuwípi* Ceremony.

²⁰² This term is a bit of a mystery. It could refer to *Táku Škaṅškáṅ* (The Moving Deity, Sky), sometimes referred to as *Wakháṅ Škaṅškáṅ* or simply *Škáṅ* in the language of the shamans (Walker 1991:3, 35, 118, 302 n 42). According to Walker (1991:37), "While it is clear to me that in using the term 'Skan' the shamans' conception was of a force, that is, the power that moves everything that moves, but it was also of a distinct being, a supreme spirit." Possibly *wakan skan wicasa* indicates a man who invokes and evokes the power or force of *Táku Škaṅškáṅ* or *Škáṅ*, using it for malevolent ends. As Walker's interlocutors explain, "The *ton* of *Skan* is the most powerful and it can be imparted only by very wise shamans and with a great deal of ceremony. No one but a very wise shaman should have a *sicun* with the *ton* of *Skan*. . . . The *ton* of *Tate*, *Tatob* and *Yumni* is the same as that of *Skan*. These four always go together" (Walker 1991:95). According to Ringing Shield, *Táku Škaṅškáṅ* is "the spirit or power which causes things to vanish like smoke or clouds that fade away" (Walker 1991:112). *Wakan skan wicasa* may refer generally to those individuals who participate in *wakháṅ* doings, or it may refer to those who cause things to happen and move via other-than-human or *wakháṅ* means. Some nineteenth-century Lakota used the term *škáṅ* (variously translated as 'sky,' 'movement,' 'energy,' and 'force') in a specific way to refer to movement in a ceremonial manner. This is tied to conceptions of causality and agency, ritually imbuing objects and people with the ability and power to act and move in a *wakháṅ* manner (see Walker 1991:303 n 8).

opposite sex (*wiíčhuwa* [love medicines]) or hypnotize, control, hex, sicken, and even kill (Collier 1939:28; Walker 1917:86). Sword adds that if a malevolent magician caused a sickness it could not be cured by medicines alone. In these dire cases *pěžúta wičháša* (herbalists) were powerless and only a benevolent magician (*waphíya wičháša* [conjuror]) or a holy man (*wičháša wakǎń*) could successfully treat the patient (Walker 1991:92). Walker (1917:89–90) elaborates, writing, “The potency of a Malignant God can be imparted to a material by a *wicasa hmunga*, or wizard. The material thing is thereby made potent to do that which the God can do and is subservient to its possessor. A Shaman can invoke the potency of either, or of all the Malevolent Gods, and make it operative or impotent.” Walker’s testimony reveals a general principle of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice: both individuals and articles imbued with the potency (*thún*) of a spirit being took on the abilities, powers (*wówaš’akapi*), and characteristics of that particular spirit. This is precisely why a *wašičun* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundle) was considered as equivalent to and revered in the same manner as the spirit being whose *šičún* and *thún* it contained. This is also yet another example of ritual transformation—and its prerequisite, symbolic identification—in Lakota religious belief and magico-ritual practice.

Apparently, along with association with a malevolent spirit being, another major identifying factor of Lakota practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft was their ability to shoot (*iyéya*) or introduce foreign objects or projectiles into others through magical or occult means, even from great distances.²⁰³ For instance, the term *wičháǎmunǎ* may refer to the

²⁰³ As a general rule malevolent magicians (*ǎmúnǎgapi* [sorcerers, sorceresses, wizards, witches]) tended to shoot in, introduce, or inflict sickness, while benevolent magicians (*waphíya wičhášapi* [conjurors, curers, healers]) tended to draw out or extract it, a prerequisite to the healing process. Another general rule is that

act of shooting or sending something into another by magical or miraculous means, such as a knife, nail, or bullet. More commonly, *wičháħmuŋǵa*—and the related term *wičháħmuŋǵes 'a*—referred to magicians or individuals who practiced such shooting or disease-object introduction. A practitioner could also employ his malevolent spirit helper in magical attacks or acts of sorcery/witchcraft. For instance, a spirit helper was capable of bewildering one's enemies, giving an individual the upper hand in warfare or raiding. Speaking of these magical powers, Bushotter writes, "These men's gods seem to exist in the invisible, but they accompany them none the less, and in a very fierce and fearful manner" (Bushotter 1937:Story 245). Bewitching one's enemies in battle was an example of a culturally sanctioned usage of sorcery/witchcraft—a double negative, so to speak—that was considered benevolent and just, illustrating the ambivalence of magical attack embedded in a sociocultural framework.

Buechel (1978:205–207) records an example of Lakota sorcery/witchcraft related to him by Brave Dog in July 1915 and transcribed by Ivan Stars. Around 1870, Brave Dog witnessed two practitioners publicly demonstrate their potency, a ritual genre noted by Deloria (n.d.:69–70) called *wakǵáŋ ótháŋiŋyaŋpi* or *wakǵáŋ yutháŋiŋpi* (to publicly manifest *wakǵáŋ* power). An announcement was made that two practitioners would publicly bewitch each other from afar. One of the practitioners donned a red-tail deer mask, ritually transforming into a deer. The two practitioners proceeded to shoot medicine at one another, when it was revealed that one of them was in fact a woman. This astonished the onlookers, some of whom were bewitched and mesmerized by the performance.

sorcery/witchcraft was usually performed *against* someone or something, while conjuring was usually performed *for* someone or something.

At one point a knife was thrust into the back of one of the practitioners, blood flowing freely from the wound. A female virgin was instructed to pull out the knife. After doing so the wound disappeared (*tǎ́keča šni*) and was healed. By this time a crowd of bewitched onlookers had gathered around the practitioners, who proceeded to cure them of various ailments, such as heart-sickness, through the magical extraction of various objects. In each case the practitioner took the patient/victim by the hand and tapped him on the back of the head or neck, inducing a bloody object to fall from the patient/victim's mouth into the practitioner's hand. The objects extracted, symbolic of various sicknesses, included a grasshopper, a small cactus, a large cocklebur, and a cricket. After this miraculous performance the *éyapaha* (village crier) announced to the crowd that the people would soon believe in the practitioners' power and potency and would be cured (Buechel 1978:205–207). Brave Dog's account illustrates the amoral and ambiguous character of Lakota sorcery/witchcraft, encompassing both the extraction and treatment of sickness, on one hand, and the introduction and cause of it, on the other.

Deloria includes her discussion of sorcery/witchcraft under the general heading of *waphíyapi* (conjuring, doctoring) practice, which will inform a hypothesis developed later in the chapter on practitioner types. Deloria highlights the strong connection between Lakota sorcery/witchcraft and the practice of shooting medicine or potency in the form of projectiles or poison into others, an association that recurs repeatedly throughout the literature. She explains that “certain men were endowed with the skill of sending projectiles into someone far away. There were challenges from one skilled in witch-craft to another; and before an audience, they would demonstrate, acting on each other” (Deloria n.d.:65).

Fugle's interlocutor Flesh also connects sorcery/witchcraft to shooting medicine, clarifying some important details: "A person shoots the medicine at you from a fairly close distance without you seeing him. He puts some medicine in his hand. Some say horse hair was used. He simply blows it in your direction. This is the reason the person is doctored by sucking and blowing" (Flesh in Fugle 1966:25). The cause of sickness, conceptualized as an object shot or otherwise introduced into the human body, must be extracted as a prerequisite to the healing process, explaining why blowing or sucking sickness out of a patient/victim was a common treatment form among the Lakotas.²⁰⁴

Sorcery/witchcraft was most often associated with malevolent practitioners²⁰⁵ and bad medicine. Wizards/sorcerers (*wičháħmuŋǵa, ħmúŋǵa wičháša*) and witches/sorceresses (*wiħmuŋǵa, ħmúŋǵa wiŋyaŋ*) generally derived their powers for the soul purpose of doing harm to others and were therefore feared and detested. These "evil-doers" reportedly used owls to divine the future and were rarely if ever identified personally as the cause or culprit of calamity. They represent a subcategory of practitioners regarded and exploited as an antisocial "other" or scapegoat blamed in secondary rationalizations of disaster, misfortune, sickness, injury, death, and other impediments to life movement (Posthumus 2008-2014; Powers 1986:188).

Sorcery/witchcraft, conceived of generally as the shooting of projectiles and influence through occult means into others, was commonly used as a secondary

²⁰⁴ The belief that sickness, conceptualized in terms of disease-object intrusion, could be either blown into or out of an individual is also likely connected to the seemingly contradictory notion that sickness could be both introduced and expelled through the action of wind or sudden atmospheric changes. In particular, evil influences were believed to circulate through the air (see Walker 1991:123). These seeming contradictions, however, fade as our understanding of Lakota disease theory expands.

²⁰⁵ However, we must remember that malevolence and benevolence are culturally and socially relative: a malevolent practitioner from the perspective of one tribe, band, family, or individual might be benevolent to another and vice-versa.

rationalization to explain inexplicable, unfortunate, and unforeseeable events outside the bounds of human control and understanding; to order chaos, interpret, and explain the incomprehensible and uncontrollable. In this vein Deloria writes:

. . . when a person is ill and nobody seems to know why, someone says, “Perhaps someone has thrown a projectile of poison into him.” And sometimes it is said to be an animal, a mole usually, who has done this. Then a skilled doctor comes in and draws the offending piece usually a tufted bit of something said to be very potent, from the body of the patient. The object is said to be sucked out, from anywhere it is lodged, by the mere touch of the doctor’s lips on the body, and a quick intake of breath.

Songs accompany this, and other rites, ordained by the particular doctor; and all based on his own vision. My grandfather was an expert doctor; and also a wonderful diviner. But his method and his ceremony was entirely different from that of anyone else. And so it went; and so it is impossible to find one type of this. Songs were essential; fire sometimes; most always, I should say. Then a careful checkup lest a menstruating woman be present to mar the proceedings. But beyond that, no two doctorings were exactly alike. [Deloria n.d.:65–66]

Deloria notes that there is very little material on Lakota sorcery/witchcraft.

Magical attacks in the form of shooting projectiles were rare, viewed by the group as horrible crimes against the society as a whole. “Witchcraft was practiced so rarely,” explains Deloria, “that people did not seem to regard it as having a fixed place in the tribe” (Deloria n.d.:65). But Deloria is quick to qualify her statement on the relative scarcity of sorcery/witchcraft, writing, “Witchcraft is almost unheard of now; and even as a child I didn’t hear it much; but it may have played a big part in tribal life longer ago than that. I should not make such a sweeping statement and dismiss it like that” (Deloria n.d.:70 n). More frequently, it seems, magical attack in the form of projectile poisoning, shooting, or disease-object intrusion was unleashed on the horses or dogs of one’s enemies. Deloria claims that shooting projectiles was only a demonstration of an

individual's power and abilities and did not permanently injure the victim. For example, once a man was shot by a mole in the leg with a projectile. According to Deloria, "a very clever medicine man²⁰⁶ extracted the projectile which, as in every case I know of, was a feather rolled into a stick-like position." If the mole had shot the man in the neck scrofula would have developed, which, according to Deloria, no Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioner had a cure for (Deloria n.d.:10–11).

Deloria notes:

The medicine men were as a general thing trusted and looked up to. They were not feared, as men who had the power and would, if provoked, do harm. It was possible to bewitch someone through hatred.²⁰⁷ But it was regarded as horrible, and nobody could really pin such an act on any wak'á man. "It is said that he did it"—etc. one hears, but without proof. I know that now and again there were demonstrations of power in order for men to judge who had a greater abundance of supernatural help. But these were the only occasions on which the projectile was used.

The real projectile throwers were believed to be the moles,²⁰⁸ animals that were feared, as being irrational creatures who might, on any

²⁰⁶ Deloria tends to use the term "medicine man" rather indiscriminately as a general gloss for all types of practitioners. It is more likely that the practitioner she is describing here was in actuality a *waphíya wíčháša* or conjuror, practitioners associated with removing disease-object intrusions and sucking out sickness.

²⁰⁷ Beede and his Northern Lakota interlocutors saw this belief as an Eastern Sioux influence. Beede (Western Sioux Cosmology 1912:49) emphasizes individuality and freedom among the Lakotas, writing, "Over and above certain fixed community customs there was freedom. The Western Sioux did not believe that a man, by the evil use of acquired mental powers, could cause the sickness or death of another person; but the Santee Sioux (who had long been in contact with both white men and eastern Indians), did believe this." However, Walker's Oglala interlocutors did believe that malevolent practitioners could cause misfortune, sickness, and death, specifically noting the evil practices of evil magicians and the dreaded *Huhúyuhapi* (Bone Keepers), a society of religious practitioners who worked secretly, hiding their knowledge and doings from the common people, because, "What they do is very bad" (Walker 1991:161). Certainly, today there is a relatively well-established belief that misfortune, sickness, and death—in other words, the hindrance and cessation of life movement—can be caused by malevolent occult force directed by individuals and human agency. Perhaps this belief was more widespread at an earlier time among the Southern Lakotas, such as the Oglalas and Brulés, before it took hold among the Northern Lakotas whom Beede interviewed.

²⁰⁸ Apparently, the natural and spirit worlds were often models for Lakota culture, society, religious belief, and philosophy and provided the sources for some ritual taboos. For instance, snakes and many mythical characters, such as *Uŋktéŋi* (Spirit of the Waters, Water Monster), *Čhaŋóthila* (Tree Dwellers), and *Wiwíla* (Water Sprites) were believed to have the ability to hurl poison at human beings. Mice, on the other hand, were believed to possess the power to bewitch people, but only if they were able to obtain a specimen of

occasion, whimsically as it were, and without warning to the subject, hurl poison at him. It is thinkable that a man might be endowed by supernatural power in his vision, thru the mole, in which case he would be irrational as they, and hurl his projectiles without warning or choice. He would then be a pest and an object of fear as long as he was around.²⁰⁹ [Deloria n.d.:10]

Clearly practitioners who employed evil spirits—and hence were malevolent and impeded life movement—were feared and detested, while those who employed benevolent spirits—and hence were considered good and sustained and perpetuated life movement—were beloved, trusted, and respected.

Deloria points to a significant and common theme in Lakota cases of sorcery/witchcraft: accusations of sorcery/witchcraft were rarely leveled publically, usually circulating as whispered rumors, frequently among the followers of competing—and possibly mutually hostile—ritual practitioners. Lakota sorcerers and sorceresses were apparently rarely accused and tried publically, as were bewitchers among other tribes,

one's hair. Apparently, this belief originated in an Oglala man's vision in which he was taken to a spirit tipi containing a council of men, who were actually spirit mice. They had obtained piles of human hair in rings and were determining what sorts of suffering and death they could inflict on the owners. Capturing an individual's hair was equivalent to capturing his life. This belief can be compared to the Ghost Keeping Ceremony, in which the spirit of the dead, represented by a lock of his or her hair, was kept (Deloria n.d.:11–15). Because of this, Deloria writes (n.d.:11–12), "The Dakotas were religiously careful not to leave a single strand of hair lying about. If a mouse got hold of it he abused it, and used it for a nest. And then brought on poison through the root left vacant by that one hair, and caused headaches to the patient. In those days, women always carefully wrapped their combings into a ring on their finger and saved it till one day they burned the entire collection and then started it again." A connected belief was that if human hair was left lying around on the ground and not burned and disposed of properly it would turn into little snakes and cause headaches for the person whose hair was not burned (Deloria n.d.:16). This belief concerning the power of mice to bewitch those whose hair they attained can be tied to conceptions of contagious magic. In particular, a newborn's umbilical cord and a young woman's first menstrual bundle were carefully guarded and disposed of through the proper prescribed ritual channels, lest some creature or spirit obtain and desecrate it, causing misfortune, sickness, madness, changes in personality, and even death. Deloria (n.d.:16), describing beliefs surrounding the proper disposal of a newborn's umbilical cord, writes, "There is a feeling that some harm may come to a child whose cord is left about to be devoured by animals or to be desecrated by strangers. This feeling extends also to the disposal of other parts of the body of a human being, the hair; the teeth, etc. Not fingernails." Clearly, certain body parts and personal effects were believed to still carry the spiritual essence, residue, or potency that remained connected to the individual and could be used to his or her detriment, if not properly disposed of in the prescribed ritual manner.

²⁰⁹ In a February 1950 letter to Joseph Balmer John Colhoff of Pine Ridge wrote of a category of practitioner and variety of doctoring ritual called "Pis-piza wapiye" (*pisptza waphíye*) or prairie dog doctoring (Colhoff to Balmer 1948-1953:February 1, 1950).

such as the Zuni (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:172–175). If sorcery/witchcraft accusations were made publically they were likely very indistinct, vague, and anonymous, such as the harangue of the famous twentieth-century Sun Dance leader Frank Fools Crow at a ceremony in the mid-1970s, at which he publically and tearfully lamented perceived operations of witchcraft (*h̄mún̄ḡa*). This avoidance of public accusations of sorcery/witchcraft is similar to the reluctance of *Lowáŋpi* and *Yuwípi* practitioners to publically reveal the identity of individuals guilty of theft or the destruction of property. In ceremonies, spirit helpers often reveal the location of lost or stolen objects, but rarely is the identity of the guilty party revealed (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Old Man Walking Elk described an episode to Buechel in a *Heh̄áka káḡapi* (Elk performance), a rite of passage through which an Elk dreamer became a practitioner. In a sequence of visions an individual first sees a man, then an *uŋph̄áŋ* (female elk), who turns into a man, and tells the visionary what medicines to use and how to administer them.²¹⁰ In the third vision the individual again sees a man, and in the fourth an *uŋph̄áŋ*. In this particular case, despite the man's visions, the people refused to believe him and recognize his power because he saw the female instead of the male elk. For this reason the man decided to perform the *Heh̄áka káḡapi* or *Heh̄ákala*. If he was successful and had

²¹⁰ In a prospective religious practitioner's vision, Curtis explains, "a spirit comes to him, sometimes in human form, and commands him to look in certain directions where he will behold *wówash'ake*, power; and there in each place he sees a man standing. As he gazes they vanish, and in their places are certain plants, which he now knows are, for him, medicine. This *pezhúta*, grass-roots, he will use as medicinal remedies, but never are they considered as other than a part of his *waká*" strength. When the dreamer or faster turns about after beholding these powers, he finds that his visitor has vanished, so far as human form goes, and is walking away in the shape of some animal – a buffalo, perhaps, or an elk, or a bear. From the animal he receives certain prayers and songs, which will always remain the same in different ceremonies. The songs and prayers of two medicine-men taught by the same animal vary somewhat, though all bear resemblance to one another" (Curtis 1908:62–63).

luck in his endeavor he would henceforth be *wakǰáŋ* and considered holy (*wakǰáŋla*) and powerful by his people (Buechel n.d.:19).

During the performance, reports Buechel (n.d.:20), other Elk dreamers and members of the Elk Society selected “a little ‘medicine’ (e.g., a little piece of rock, or a finger- or toenail, etc., anything), roll it into something, hold it in their hands—shaking it—and then throw it away. Now the test comes”: “The would-be medicine man will have to vomit (*hiyúk ‘iyiŋkte*) these same medicines while the others watch him. The vomited medicine they call *ǰmúnǰe* (verb = to bewitch; *ǰmúnǰa*, adj. = stinking).²¹¹ If he does, he proves to be *wak ‘áŋ*, a *wic ‘ása wak ‘áŋ*,²¹² and is recognized as such; if not, he is not *wak ‘áŋ*.” Again, we see that *ǰmúnǰa* described the ability to astonish and amaze through magical operations; to cause *wakǰáŋ* transformations that defied and transcended common ordinary reality.

Frequently, Lakota sorcery/witchcraft involved what has been termed contagious magic, or the belief that things that were once in contact can have an influence over each other after physical separation (Barnard and Spencer 1996:599). For example, one magical process noted historically at Pine Ridge is a system of sorcery/witchcraft known as “They Pull out the Human Hair” or *Wičǰáphǰehiŋ Yužúnpi*. This magical operation was performed in the dark and functioned as a secondary rationalization for headaches,

²¹¹ Kapferer and Kari G. Telle discuss the theme of smell and the dynamics of disgust common to sorcery/witchcraft practice in terms of transgression. As ambiguous potencies disclosing destructive agencies within communities, smell and disgust force community boundaries while actively engaging in their ritual reconstruction (see Kapferer 2003:26, 105–128 and Telle in Kapferer 2003:75–104).

²¹² Both medicine man and holy man, opposite ends of the continuum from disease/techno-scientific to illness/mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual, are sometimes used as general terms for any type of practitioner, having achieved typological status (see Powers 1986:164–165). Medicine man is the conventional gloss in English, despite its inherent shortcomings, and in general all practitioners may be considered to have some *wakǰáŋ* power, and hence can be generally referred to as holy men. This discrepancy often undermines analysis, making any classification of practitioners, especially those based on texts written in English, exceedingly difficult.

nosebleeds, and other ailments. Deloria elaborates, writing, “The hair is precious; linked with [the] life of the person.²¹³ If you note carefully, the root of a hair has a little bit of white on it, like a ball. That is part of the actually living individual from whom the hair was extracted” (Deloria n.d.:12). Apparently, an Oglala from Pine Ridge first had a vision that taught the people how precious hair is and how life depended upon it (Deloria n.d.:14–15).

In *Wičhápĥehin Yužúŋpi* it was believed that a practitioner of sorcery/witchcraft could extract a single hair by its root from a person, even at a great distance. The result of the extraction was continued headaches until the hair was returned. Only a very few practitioners had this power and were capable of this type of magical procedure, and it was only carried out reluctantly and for a hefty fee and many gifts (*wíši* [payment]). As a rule the practitioner was willing to serve, unless he was asked to harm one of his relatives. If a practitioner harmed a member of one faction of a feud through such sorcery/witchcraft he would not dare help the other side for fear of confusing his spirit guardians and weakening their power, and hence endangering his own efficacy (Deloria n.d.:12–14).

Deloria describes this form of sorcery/witchcraft in detail:

If he [the practitioner] agreed to help . . . he would smoke the pipe [offered to him] to the dregs, and then he would take a slender stick, a foot long, and no bigger than a person’s littlest finger.²¹⁴ He had it all ready. It was whittled to a point at one end.

²¹³ See Hildebeitel and Miller (1998) for comparative perspectives on the cultural and religious significance of hair.

²¹⁴ Each person had such a stick, which was called a *pĥeyázan-ipàza*, an instrument for parting the hair (Deloria n.d.:15).

This he handed to the visitor and instructed him to hold it in his left hand while he clenched his right into a knot and placed it at his forehead and sit concentrating.

And the holy man sang over his songs softly, invoking his power-aids through his song. As he sang, the lights were extinguished and they sat in darkness. After a time, the medicine man said, "Now, make light!" And when the light was on, the man looked at the stick and saw a long strand of hair carefully wound around it, at the sharpened end.

It was the hair of the person with whom he was at enmity. The man might be miles away from the scene. But by a mysterious power, the supernatural helper of the wak'á man, the hair had been extracted and wound around the stick, without the holder of it being aware of the process. Now the effect of the loss of hair is manifest at the other end. For no accountable reason, the victim has a nosebleed. This continues as long as the secret enemy holds his hair in his custody. It might be for so long that at last the victim dies of loss of blood.

Generally, however, the man inflicting the pain got a change of heart. "That's enough, I really do not want to cause a man to die," he says to himself. So he reports to the wak'á man who again orders lights out, and causes him to hold the stick with the wrapped hair on it while he sings his mystery songs. At the close, he orders the lights put on, and lo, the spiral of hair is now gone and it is supposed that the helpers of the mystery man came and took the hair without the holder's feeling any sensations.

The hair is there but is unwound. So now a messenger is sent with it to the injured man. Subtly, he embraces him in sympathy for his illness, supposedly, and leaves the hair on his head. Not replanted, of course, but in contact. It has come home. Then if the victim's hair is combed, that hair along with other loose combings would be disposed of properly. When the hair is returned, the victim recovers from the nosebleeds it is said. [Deloria n.d.:13-14]

As Deloria's account demonstrates the actions of sorcerers and sorceresses, wizards and witches, could be done and undone, executed and annulled, and hence were not entirely antisocial. Magic and sorcery/witchcraft could be used for good or for evil; to treat and cure or to cause misfortune, disease, and death; to sustain or hinder life movement. In many cases, as has been noted, magic was a means to publically test the legitimacy and power of individuals (re)enacting vision experiences (DeMallie 1984:241 n 15). Generally, Lakota sorcery/witchcraft, like religion in general, functioned as a

system of social control. There was also a social-regulating belief that if a practitioner did not adhere to the fundamental values of Lakota culture and society his power would deteriorate. Deloria (n.d.:3–4) writes, “There was a belief that a man’s power leaked if he was dishonest.” For these and other reasons benevolent practitioners were much more common than their malevolent counterparts. However, the latter rationalized and necessitated the former’s existence and practice, generating an endless cycle of magical attack and defense, shooting in and drawing out, sorcery/witchcraft and conjuring/doctoring, an insight which we will develop further below.

The ability to *h̄mún̄ḡa* or practice magical attacks, shooting invisible potency, force, or projectiles into others, was a subcategory that crosscut all other categories discussed herein. Nearly any type of dreamer or practitioner could utilize magic in the form of sorcery/witchcraft in his practice. However, certain types of practitioners, such as Heyokas (Thunder dreamers) and Elk and Black-Tail Deer dreamers,²¹⁵ were more frequently associated with this method than others. If a practitioner was perennially suspected, accused, or convicted of utilizing sorcery/witchcraft the people might begin to identify him as a *wiĉháh̄mun̄ḡa* (sorcerer, wizard; male practitioner of sorcery/witchcraft) or a *wiĉmun̄ḡa* (sorceress, witch; female practitioner of sorcery/witchcraft), emphasizing that aspect of the individual’s power and repertoire over other attributes.

Although tending to be associated with particular dreamer types the ability to *h̄mún̄ḡa* or bewitch, astonish, and amaze was a potential power of all *waphiya wiĉháša*

²¹⁵ Elk and Black-Tail Deer dreamers were known for using mirrors and other reflective objects, symbolic of eyes, to catch the glance of bystanders, stupefying them into a trance-like state, and thus capturing their spirit and attaining some kind of psychological or spiritual control over them (Wissler 1912:90). Wolf dreamers were also known for shooting medicine. According to Wissler (1912:90), at *Šuṅgmánituth̄aṅka káḡapi* (Wolf imitations, Wolf performances) the Wolf dreamers carried “an imitation snake from which they shoot wakan influence. When members are shot, they spit out bird claws, sage and bugs, supposed to have been shot into the victims.”

(conjurers) and *wičháša wakháŋ* (holy men). The lyrics of an Elk dreamer's song circa 1915 illustrate this point:

Wakháŋ h'áŋpi wóečhuŋ. [Sacred ceremonies.]
Wičháŋmuŋğa tóna wakháŋpi owás'iy.
[All those who are holy bewitch them (the people).] [Buechel n.d.:21]

While there were many practitioner categories that possessed the ability to *hmuŋğa* there were also many varieties or different types of *hmuŋğa*, each with distinct characteristics and functions.



Magic and its manifestations sorcery/witchcraft are social phenomena that have often been described as more secretive and isolated in comparison to religion and religious phenomena (Leacock 1954; Lévi-Strauss 1987; Mauss 1972). This concealment is perhaps due to the fact that the things done by practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft in secret were often considered malevolent by the common people or, alternately, to protect and preserve esoteric occult traditions. Again, however, the Lakota case complicates attempts at generalized, neat, universal classifications. While magic and sorcery/witchcraft tended to be more secretive and isolated than the great rituals, such as the Sun Dance and *Huŋká* (Making of Relatives), magic was performed publically as part of many ceremonials. These public magical performances often took the form of sorcery/witchcraft battles or duels between various practitioners or members of Dream Societies in which magical power and occult potency were demonstrated and tested. Standing Bear (2006b:141) describes one such magical duel, writing, “I have seen a medicine-woman play with a medicine-man, each throwing invisible missiles at the other and each trying to ward off

the blows. While we could not see what went through the air, I have seen the injured one evidence great pain, and suffer until relieved by his or her own powers of magic.”

The *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* (Mystery or Medicine Dance; sometimes written in Lakota as *Wačhípi Wakǰáŋ*) is a case in point. The Mystery Dance was a rather public ritual in which magical duals took center stage. Practitioners shot projectiles or medicine into each other, testing each other’s *wakǰáŋ* powers and abilities. During the exhilarating ritual drama some individuals were wounded and fell to the ground as if dead, spitting blood, only to be revived before the watchful eyes of the people through the ritual extraction of various objects symbolic of sickness. So, in the Mystery Dance we have an example of a public ritual in which typically secretive practices predominated.

The *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi*, more prominent among the Eastern Sioux and reminiscent of the Ojibwe Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society), was apparently a very ancient ritual among the Lakotas, predating the coming of White Buffalo Woman and the gift of the Sacred Pipe, along with what would become the seven (or four, depending on the source) most sacred rites of the Western Sioux. Perhaps the Medicine Lodge was the mechanism through which older Eastern Sioux religious symbols and themes were preserved and survive in Western Sioux cosmology and religious belief and thought.²¹⁶

Uŋktéǰi (Spirit of the Waters, Water Monster, One Who Kills) originally gave the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* to the people in mythical times. *Uŋktéǰi* was considered a malevolent *wakǰáŋ* being, presiding over floods, drowning, and all accidents pertaining to water. His lodge was under the waters, and he was the *wakǰáŋ* and ultimate power of the waters,

²¹⁶ This hypothesis may also explain the transmission and perpetuation of sorcery/witchcraft beliefs and practice among the Lakotas. Nearly all of Buechel’s terms relating to sorcery/witchcraft come directly from Reverend Stephen R. Riggs’s *A Dakota-English Dictionary* (1992).

defiling them and making them unfit for human use. *Uḡktéḡhi* was in perpetual conflict with *Wakínyan* (Winged, Thunder Being), the terrifying and destructive celestial deity responsible for thunder and lightning. The power of the *Uḡktéḡhi*, who resembled a large reptile, was in its massive horns and tail, which it manipulated to create waves and general devastation. The *Uḡktéḡhi* lurked near the shores of bodies of water, seeking to capture children. They were also known to take adults into captivity or transmogrify them into water animals (Dorsey 1894:440; Walker 1917:89, 162, 179; Walker 1991:72, 108, 112, 118, 122–123). According to Walker (1917:89), “A Shaman whose fetish is of the highest potency can subdue the *Unktehi* and drive them away and can undo their magic deeds.”

As Walker’s interlocutors explain:

Unktehi are like animals. They stay in the waters and live in swampy places. They have four legs and horns which they can draw in or extend them to the skies. They have long hair on the neck and the head which is *wakan*. Their tails are strong and they can shoot or strike with them, and they use their tails as men use their hands. They are always at war with the *Wakinyan*. When they move they make the waves and they destroy all living things they can get hold of. [Walker 1991:108]

The Mystery Dance, given to the people by *Uḡktéḡhi*, functioned as an initiation ritual for religious practitioners in which they learned the ways of the holy men, Lakota mythology and history, and how to perform and direct the major ceremonies.

Normatively, a holy man also received his *wašičuḡ* (ceremonial bundle) in the Mystery Dance. Accounts differ as to whether *Uḡktéḡhi* or *Táku Škaḡškáḡ*, the patron spirit of locomotion, first instructed the people about the *wašičuḡ*, sometimes referred to as *wóphiye* (“the place where good is”). According to Ringing Shield, an elderly Oglala

shaman and Walker interlocutor, it is *Uḡktéḡhi* who “gives the *wakan* medicine bag. This must be made of the skin of an animal or bird, as it is shown in the vision. It must contain something of an animal and of a bird and of a reptile and of the vegetables” (Walker 1991:112). In any case established holy men consecrated and rendered a neophyte holy man’s bundle *wakḡáḡ* through the Mystery Dance ritual. As Ringing Shield notes, the construction of a *wašičuḡ* depended on the vision of its owner, containing within it a *šičúḡ*, the essence (*thúḡ*) and power (*wówaš’ake*) of a spirit. Additionally, the sacred language of the shamans was only taught to those individuals who participated in the *Wakḡáḡ Wačhípi* (Walker 1991:30, 117–118, 136–137). In this way the Mystery Dance prepared a holy man for his vocation and publically presented him to the tribe in his new social role as a religious leader and spiritual healer.

The *Wakḡáḡ Wačhípi* was also, in a sense, an adoption ritual in which new members were adopted into the ritual society and fraternity or order of holy men.²¹⁷ During the actual ritual performance participants demonstrated and contested their powers, shooting medicine at and bewitching (*ḡmúḡḡa*) one another. Inexplicable and magnificent magical feats were performed in the Mystery Dance. According to Starr Frazier, a Santee and Deloria interlocutor, “all members of Wak’á-wac’ipi were dreamers; but not all dreamers were members of Wak’á-wac’ipi” (Deloria n.d.:8). He continues, “All members of Wak’á-wac’ipi were Dreamers or Wak’á-men or women. That means that through dreams or some other means of communication, the individuals had gained power from the supernatural and were in harmonious relation with it” (Deloria n.d.:7–8). The prerequisites of membership were both mystico-spiritual and

²¹⁷ While it is likely that the majority of Mystery Dance society members (*Wačhípi Wakḡáḡ ópḡa[pi]*) were male, Deloria notes that females were also known to become members (Deloria n.d.:7).

moral: that one had “medicine” or communication with the spirits and that one was honorable and decent (Deloria n.d.:11–16).

At one point in the ritual the candidate for membership was struck forcibly on the back and “a Something fell from his lips.” “I never saw the Something,” Frazier (Deloria n.d.:22) says, “But I learned that it was a *wam.núh’*a (something like a snail-shell . . . a spiral thin-shelled object).” According to a contemporary Oglala the sacred fire (*phéta wakháŋ*)²¹⁸ figured prominently in the *Wakháŋ Wačhípi*, which was held in a *thiháŋska* (long lodge), reminiscent of the Ojibwe medicine lodge. The Mystery Dance was a powerful ceremony comprised of powerful individuals. Practitioners remained in the long lodge for as long as six or seven days without food or water. Some say these shamans went into trance or other states of consciousness, their eyes rolling back in their heads, glazing over, and even transforming into the eyes of animals or other spirit helpers.

²¹⁸ According to some contemporary Oglalas the *phéta wakháŋ* (sacred fire) was the ultimate Lakota religious symbol and focus of ceremonial life before the coming of White Buffalo Woman and the gift of the Sacred Pipe. It was believed that when the Lakotas emerged from the earth through Wind Cave (*Wašúŋ Wakháŋ* [Sacred Hole]) the sacred fire was with them, guarded carefully and reverently so that it never went out. According to Standing Bear (2006b:139), “the wise, or holy men, carried the sacred fire and performed the religious duties of prayer and meditation.” Perhaps this sacred fire was connected to the concept of the *phéta owihankešni* (fire with no end), which was kindled to the east of the sweat lodge during the Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance, and other ceremonies (Brown 1989:48). It was this sacred fire, carefully carried by the wise, holy men and symbolic of the Sioux as a unified nation, that was divided into what later became known as the *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ* (Seven Council Fires), the political organization of the Lakotas into seven tribes, consisting of the *Sisíthunŋwaŋ* (Sisseton), *Bdewákhaŋthunŋwaŋ* (Mdewakanton), *Wahpékhute* (Wahpekute), *Wahpéthunŋwaŋ* (Wahpeton), *Ihánkthunŋwaŋ* (Yankton), *Ihánkthunŋwaŋna* (Yanktonai), and *Thíthunŋwaŋ* (Teton, Lakota) (Posthumus 2008-2014). The centrality of the *phéta wakháŋ* in historical religion appears to be a rather contemporary idea. While there is little documentation of the sacred fire as a key Lakota religious symbol in the nineteenth century, my discussion here is based on the historical record, collaboration with contemporary Oglalas, and memory ethnography (Posthumus 2008-2014). According to some scholars the term *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ* is a rather recent political moniker, first appearing in the mid-1800s. However, many contemporary Lakotas accept the *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ*, as well as the *phéta wakháŋ*, as historical fact, claiming it first appeared in the historical record in the mid-1500s (DeMallie 2006; Posthumus 2008-2014). In any case the concepts of the sacred fire and Seven Council Fires have become ingrained as cultural realities throughout the twentieth century. These symbols unite the Lakota people and figure prominently in expressions of individual and ethnic identity.

Apparently, the last *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* was held in secret at Pine Ridge inside a cave in the Badlands in the 1940s (Posthumus 2008-2014).

As with most nineteenth-century Lakota rituals the performance itself was closely linked to, perhaps even inseparable from, a society or religious organization (*okǰólakičhiye*),²¹⁹ a gathering of individuals united by a common (or rather uncommon) vision or power attained or obtained from an other-than-human person. Specific society songs (*olówan*) were also associated with societies. The *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* was sponsored, organized, and performed by members of the secretive *Wakǰáŋ okǰólakičhiye* (Mystery society). Whenever the Mystery Dance was to be held a society member supplied the feast, and the members (*ópǰá* or *mničiyapi*) quietly notified each other of the ceremony's date and location, as opposed to having the *éyapaha* (village crier) announce the event publically, which was the protocol for other less secretive societies. When the time came the society members donned their sacred symbolic regalia (*wakǰáŋ-thawokǰoyake*) and met at the prescribed location, usually outside in the elements in the pre- and early reservation period. Spectators also gathered, as they did at other society performances or dances (Bushotter 1937:Story 198). Again, in the Mystery Dance we are faced with the amalgamation of the public (religious) and the secretive (magical).

As a young man Bushotter often attended Mystery Dances as a spectator. He provides a fascinating eye-witness account: "It was always in the dark of night [*hǰhépi-oiyokpaza*] that they danced. In that way their faces were not visible [*ité kǰ t'ǰǰipisni*], but

²¹⁹ We will examine Dream Societies below. The decline of religious societies of all kinds among the Oglalas since the early reservation period is another example of change and adaptation in the religious and ritual domains. Although societies at Pine Ridge today are largely defunct and no longer closely associated with specific ceremonies, dances, or cultural performances, this shift in religious and social organization has led to new and interesting innovations and other unique developments.

even so they took no chances but completely masked their faces [*ité átaya akáhpekit 'yipi*]” (Bushotter 1937:Story 198). Bushotter goes on to describe the dance, which was the main focus of the performance, and the regalia of the participants, emphasizing the great measures they took to conceal their identities from the spectators. Both men and women were members of the Mystery Society, but membership was a secretive affair. Bushotter notes, “It was middle-aged men and women [*wic 'ása-t 'qka nq wíyq-t 'qka*] who belonged [*óp 'api*] to these holy society-groups [*wak 'á-ok 'olakic 'iye*]; and such groups were organized in various places; and occasionally these all came together for a grand reunion [*hená oyás 'i k 'iwítayapi*]” (Bushotter 1937:Story 198).

Bushotter continues, writing:

The principals at these dances were those who possessed supernatural powers [*Lená tuwáwa wak 'á yuhápi kǐ éepi c 'a it 'ác 'qyq él wac 'ípi*]; a man, claiming that he possessed a familiar spirit to work for him, would on the strength of the claim, join this society [*Wic 'ása wqǐ t 'awásicu yuk 'á keyǐ našna él óp 'a*]. Those things were called “Something in perpetual motion,” [*Táku Škqšká*] by the men and women who claimed to possess them. And those who made such claims [*hená táku wak 'á yuhápi*], always regarded themselves as special, and holy [*wak 'á-ic 'ilapi*]. So it was men and women, meeting together [*mníciyapi*], who danced quietly with their blankets up over their heads [*oyás 'i áinilašna p 'ámahel wac 'ípi*]. As for others, they used only feathers to cover their faces [*ité-nakihmapí*]. . . . whatever they possessed as having supernatural potency, that they always treated with great reverence and respect [*táku wak 'á yuhápi kǐ yuwák 'qyq ahóp 'eya k 'uwápi s 'a* ‘to treat something reverently with due respect’]. [Deloria 1937:Story 198]

Some evidence connects the *Wakháŋ Wačhípi* to the more characteristically Teton Ghost Keeping Ceremony or *Wanáǵi Yuhápi*. Ringing Shield explains that the “Shadow Lodge is erected to” *Uŋktéhi* (Walker 1991:112). Frazier describes the way in which new members were only initiated into the *Wakháŋ Wačhípi* upon the death of a member. The

spirit of the deceased member was kept by his or her relatives, and while the spirit was kept, the leaders and prominent members of the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* decided who they would select to replace the deceased, a man for a man and a woman for a woman. The ghost of the deceased member, represented by a stake driven into the ground from which hung a ghost bundle containing a lock of the deceased's hair, was a prominent symbol in the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* ritual as described by Frazier. The initiation of new members into the society was akin to an adoption and coincided with the releasing of the ghost, whom the new member would replace, figuratively and literally, as if the spirit of the deceased was transferred to the initiate (Deloria n.d.:11–16).

At the conclusion of the Santee *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* there was a great giveaway, similar to the giveaway concluding the Ghost Keeping ceremony. Frazier explains:

. . . the bundle of things was unwrapped, and the beautiful articles which had accumulated were all disposed of in a grand redistribution; and the innermost object, the hair of the deceased wrapped in a band of woven wool of bright colors was now bestowed upon the new member. He kept it “like a picture”²²⁰ of his predecessor, in whose stead he now stood; and at the end of the year, then it was buried reverently and with due ceremony. [Deloria n.d.:22]

²²⁰ Deloria contextualizes this phrase, writing, “That means something very special in Dakota. The likeness of the dead is or was believed to have something of the essence of the person about it. To look at a dead person's picture was a very solemn act” (Deloria n.d.:31). Deloria continues, “In my Teton material I have ‘pictures’, representations, made of the personalities of the dead for whom a ghost keeping ceremony was held. The women were represented with a certain diagrammatic drawing on an oblong piece of skin tacked to a stick, and the stick was nailed into the ground in the ghost-lodge. The men by another. But they did not look like the faces of the dead; they were in no sense an attempt to represent the faces. It was enough that they represented the dead and to that extent, those representations were treated with awe and reverence, quite as much as if the dead were lying in the tipi. This idea is prevalent” (Deloria n.d.:31). This custom highlights the significance of representation in Lakota religious belief and can be productively compared to drawing pictures of ghosts and spirits and many other Lakota beliefs. The drawing or making of figures or representations of human or other-than-human beings is in essence an act of manifestation of those beings. In the same way that an image, drawing, or photograph was believed to contain the essence or spirit (*naǰí*) of an individual, so too was it believed that the hair of the deceased contained his essence or spirit.

In a final gesture of symbolic identification, transference, and unity the deceased member's *wak'háŋ čhaŋtóžuha* (sacred tobacco bag) was given to the new initiate. From that day on the new member kept the tobacco bag as the most sacred and potent object in his possession. In this way no member of the *Wak'háŋ Wačhípi* chose his own sacred animal or other-than-human power source but inherited it from his predecessor, who inherited it from his, and so on. A feast provided by the initiate's new family concluded the ceremony (Deloria n.d.:22–25).

This extended tangent dealing with the Mystery Dance was intended to illustrate the tendency for Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice to problematize and complicate generalizing theoretical classifications. Clearly, *h'mínŋa* (magic, magical attack, sorcery/witchcraft) was practiced publically in the Mystery Dance and showcased for onlookers, despite the wearing of masks and other means of identity concealment by members. In nineteenth-century Lakota culture the boundary between magic and religion or spirituality, like that between sorcery and witchcraft, was indistinct, defying rigid demarcation. Equally clear is the significance of the ability to unleash magical attacks or practice sorcery/witchcraft as an essential classificatory feature of Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners.

5.12 *Wak'híŋyapi, Waátuŋwanpi*: Divination and Prophecy - “Going Into the Mysterious”

Another notable ability and power of Lakota practitioners was that of divination, prophetic gifts, or clairvoyance. The gifted practitioners who could divine the future through various means might receive their initial vision and power from any other-than-human source and may also utilize additional methods and techniques in their practice,

such as *yağópa/yaphá* (drawing out, extracting), *yuwípi* (binding up),²²¹ and others.

Again, we must remember that these categories are cumulative or processual, permeable, and not mutually exclusive.

Divination is the art and science that seeks to obtain knowledge and information of the hidden, unknown, and unseen and to foresee or foretell future events, usually by the interpretation of omens, signs, or by the aid of and communicating with other-than-human persons or occult or parapsychological powers. As it often involves direct communication between other-than-human and human persons, divination is viewed as the receptive side of occult practice, whereas magic is the active side. Divination is common cross-culturally, representing an ancient form of obtaining knowledge. There are many types or systems of divination, such as omen divination, pattern divination, symbol divination, and trance divination. Trance divination, hydromancy (water divination), blood divination, and divination by dreams and visions were and are particularly common among American Indian peoples (Greer 2003:134–135; Melton 2001:1:426–429).

From anthropological perspectives divination, or mantic operations, may be defined as “culturally sanctioned methods of arriving at a judgment of the unknown through a consideration of incomplete evidence” (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:163). Divination may be usefully distinguished between two common cognitive modes that may or may not be utilized simultaneously: logico-deductive and intuitive-interpretive. Diviners employ a number of techniques to achieve an altered state of

²²¹ Because divination was so closely associated with both the *yuwípi* method and the *Yuwípi* Ceremony, the three concepts will be considered together in this section. However, it must be remembered that *Yuwípi* was both a method and a Ceremony proper and could be conducted with or without elements of divination, despite the common correlation between them. Among some contemporary practitioners, for instance, *Yuwípi* Ceremonies are performed in which there is no divinatory aspects.

consciousness or trance state, such as hallucinogenic or psychoactive drugs, music, prayer, fasting, sensory deprivation and overload, and physical exhaustion. Divinatory methods often seek to predict future events; locate lost objects, sickness, people, or animals; and reveal, interpret, and explain the hidden causes of misfortune, sickness, death, and other disruptions of life movement. The latter blame-allocating divinatory methods help to secondarily rationalize misfortune and order chaos in human life. Once viewed as an irrational way of knowing or philosophy many anthropologists today see divination as manifesting an unusual, synchronistic, supra-rational form of knowing that provides privileged access to normally hidden information²²² (Willis in Barnard and Spencer 1996:163–165).

²²² Kapferer (2003:15–16) sees sorcery/witchcraft as outside the bounds of reason and rationality all together. He highlights the importance of psychoanalytic interpretations of sorcery/witchcraft and other occultic phenomena, noting their imaginal character and importance as formative forces of the social and political. He writes, “sorcery is that imaginal formation of force and power that is to be expected in social circumstances that are disjunctive or in some sense discontinuous. Its concept in many different ethnographic contexts revolves around its magical capacity to work with the very potencies of difference, differentiation, division, opposition, contradiction and transgression. It gathers the force of such potencies, harnessing them to the purpose of destruction or to conjunction. Sorcery makes the disjunctive conjunctive, the discontinuous continuous, the weak powerful” (Kapferer 2003:14). Kapferer points out that sorcery/witchcraft creates its own “phantasmagoric space, an imaginal field whose force derives not so much by what it is representative of external to itself, but in the potentialities, generative forces, linkages and redirections that it opens up within itself” (Kapferer 2003:22). He concludes by applying the Deleuzian concept of virtuality to magic and sorcery/witchcraft, “not to be seen as modular or representational of external realities but rather as a reality all its own, a dynamic space entirely to itself and subject to its own emergent logics. The cosmology in which its inner praxis is articulated has no necessary connection to realities external to it and no necessary internal consistency. Indeed, the imagery of what I call the phantasmagoric (virtual) space of magic and sorcery (and, also, much ritual) is likely to build out of numerous sources, both personal and historical (including that of other rites from the past and present). What I stress is that the potency of much magical practice is in this virtuality, which stands outside of all reason - even, perhaps, its own. As such it contains its own ‘truth’, which is not subject to any kind of falsification that exists independently of it. Furthermore, the potency of such phantasmagoric space, and of its practices, lies in its very irreducibility to externalities, which is achieved and effected through its imaginal formation” (Kapferer 2003:23). Kapferer’s theory of sorcery/witchcraft may also be applied to divination. Taking his insights on the imaginal, phantasmagoric, and virtual nature of occultic phenomena as outside all reason and rationality, I suggest that these constructs and social processes are also highly affective, and may be productively compared to Weber’s types of social action, particularly in terms of the relation between affectual action and occultic phenomena, such as magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and divination. See Weber (1946:56–57) and Kalberg (1980).

In English, divination is similar to conceptions of foretelling, foreseeing, prophecy, or predicting the future. Practitioners of divination may be referred to as seers, soothsayers, clairvoyants, mediums, or psychics. In Lakota, various forms are used to refer to the process of divination, such as: (1) *waáyata*, a verb meaning to prophesy things, to have the ability to prophesy or predict, to foretell, or to be a prophet or an oracle; (2) *waátuŋwaŋ*, a verb meaning to observe or a noun meaning an observer; (3) *wakǰíŋya*, from *wakǰán* (sacred, mysterious) and *iyá* (to speak); a verb meaning to say something that comes true, to foretell, to divine, to talk mystically, or to be in communication with the spirits or other-than-human persons;²²³ (4) *waátanyan*, a verb meaning to divine the future;²²⁴ and finally (5) *wókčan wičháša*, a noun meaning a prophet, seer, diviner, or oracle that does not appear to be analyzable and remains rather mysterious. Buechel defines *wókčan* as a noun meaning a seer and as a verb meaning to see for one's self with one's own eyes.

A variety of abilities or powers were subsumed under the title of diviner, most commonly encountered in Lakota as *waátuŋwe* (diviner, prophet, one who sees magically), including foreseeing events pertaining to war, hunting, and the weather; locating lost articles, people, animals, or the cause of sickness; and discovering thieves and practitioners of sorcery/witchcraft (Colhoff to Balmer 1948-1953:Letter 17; Posthumus 2008-2014). But perhaps the most significant aspect of a diviner's abilities was the capacity to "speak mystically" (*wakǰíŋya* [to foretell], from *wakǰán* [mysterious, sacred, holy] and *iyá* [to speak]). By speaking in a sacred manner a human being was able

²²³ According to Buechel (1970:530–531), *wakǰíŋya* is the Teton or Western Sioux form for divination, while *waáyata* is the Santee or Eastern Sioux form.

²²⁴ This form was elicited from a contemporary Oglala ritual practitioner and does not appear in any Lakota dictionaries. It may be a mispronunciation of *waáyata*.

to interact and communicate—establish relationship through purification, prayer (*čhéya* [to cry to/for]), and sacrifice—with the spirits in the other realm, obtaining great knowledge, wisdom, and information pertaining to future events. Without the ability to understand the sacred language communication with the spirits, and hence divination in general, was impossible.

The *wakǎ́ŋ iyá* was apparently taught as a rite of passage only to those advanced practitioners who participated in the Mystery Dance, and hence the ability to converse in the sacred language indicated a higher status or position in the Lakota religious and magico-medico-ritual hierarchy. “Speaking mystically” enabled a practitioner to communicate with spirits and interpret their words and wishes for the people, literally opening up another world (*uŋmá wičhóni*) of knowledge and possibilities. Speaking of diviners, Deloria writes:

But because a man had the power, the assistance of supernatural powers, he did not necessarily have the information and help on tap but had to get into the proper state with a sincere heart²²⁵ in order to derive it. So a man could be potentially the greatest diviner; but if before a certain battle, nobody staged the occasion for entreating him or desiring him to go into communication, he did not do so. And battles could be and were lost that way. Time and again I have stories saying, “Okíc’ize it’ókap wak’íyek’iyapi šk’e,” (Before the battle they caused him to talk mystically, it is said.) [*wakǎ́ŋ + iyé + khiyápi = wakǎ́ŋiyekhiyapi*] That is, they formally requested him, carrying out all the requisite rites connected with appealing to a holy man to tap his reserve of power. [Deloria n.d.:35]

²²⁵ Beede’s Northern Lakota interlocutors also mentioned sincerity of mind, body, and spirit as a necessary prerequisite to any successful ritual undertaking. They described it as *čhaŋté imáhel ečhíyataŋ wóowoŋaŋla* (full-hearted sincerity) (Beede Western Sioux Cosmology 1912:11). This also helps to explain the dangers of skepticism and why spirits often strike, harass, or otherwise deride perceived disbelievers in ceremonial contexts, a relatively common ritual occurrence.

This variety of pre-battle divination was likely carried out by a *zuyá wakháŋ* (sacred war leader) and constituted part of the dances for warfare and ceremonies of the warriors (Lynd 1889:161; Neill 1890; Walker 1991:67, 75).

Bushotter describes a variety of methods and attributes of nineteenth-century Lakota diviners. “Certain men could divine things,” he explains (Bushotter 1937:Story 67), “talking mystically. When the enemy were coming, they knew it; and where they were stopping on route, that also they knew. So they knew what day the enemy would charge into their camp.” The practitioners endowed with mystical power then “held a holy feast, and took a pipe there, and they sat in the dark, and were singing.” “Something Holy” or *Táku Wakháŋ* revealed the future to the holy men, but without explaining why. Bushotter continues, writing:

Now that is the way they used to foreknow such things, it is said. Also they always knew what kind of winter it was to be, and where buffalo would abound they could tell. . . . And when there was a communal hunt, all faith was placed with those who could talk mystically; and each night these would hold a holy feast. And if a man should steal, these were able to find and bring him to light. And if a man told a lie, they knew it; and they could prophesy anything and by their utterance, bring it to pass, so they were held in reverence. [Bushotter 1937:Story 67]

Apparently, divination and prophecy were abilities only mastered by the most powerful and *wakháŋ* practitioners among the Lakotas. It was highly unlikely that the average medicine man or herbalist (*phežúta wičháša*) or young conjuror (*waphíya wičháša*) had the ability to foresee the future. It was usually only the experienced holy men (*wičháša wakháŋ*), the wise, elder practitioners who accumulated many spirit powers and mastered many techniques through numerous Vision Quests and years of

participation and experience, who were able to divine the future, speak mystically, locate lost or stolen articles, and identify acts of sorcery/witchcraft. These were the powerful individuals who participated in the *Wakǰán Wačhípi* (Mystery Dance), received consecrated *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundles), and were instructed in the mythology and history of the people, the performance and direction of the great ceremonials, and the *wakǰán iyá* (sacred language).

Sitting Bull and Wooden Cup were two historical figures who had the gift of prophecy. Sitting Bull famously foresaw the defeat of Custer at the Little Bighorn in his vision at the great Sun Dance encampment of 1876 in the mountains of Montana (DeMallie 1993). A bird also told him that he would be killed at the hands of his own people (Utley 1993; Vestal 1957). Black Elk describes a famous Lakota diviner and holy man named Wooden Cup or Drinks Water. Wooden Cup prophesied the coming of the whites long before their arrival in Lakota Country, the disappearance of the buffalo, the expansion of the railroads, and the general destruction of the people's sacred hoop and traditional way of life (DeMallie 1984:73, 337–341).

The historical literature is full of examples of other less eminent diviners and their exploits. For instance, Bushotter's stepfather Good Road derived the gift of prophecy through the Vision Quest. His guardian spirit helpers enabled him to locate lost objects, gave him knowledge of events he did not actually witness, and the ability to distinguish whether a person was lying or telling the truth (Bushotter 1937:Story 254). Red Leaf, a Yankton, was a great warrior and diviner of pending events and battles and their results. Other diviners, such as Saswéna Deloria, the grandfather of Ella Deloria, could find

anything that was lost, whether it was an object, a horse, or a human being (Deloria n.d.:16, 41). Deloria vividly describes her grandfather's grueling preparatory regimen:

. . . each time he was asked to divine something he felt the obligation keenly, left his three wives' beds, and spent a whole night fasting and singing spiritual songs, learned in his dream, and calculated to bring the Supernatural to him. Then the next morning men would come to tie him up. And he always came out free after gazing into a mirrored pool which was the world, in which he saw what he was told to find. He took his preparation so seriously, that each occasion took an awful toll out of him, they say. [Deloria n.d.:67]

Standing Bear describes a famous holy woman (*wiŋyaŋ wak'háŋ*) who was both a healer and a diviner:

The great powers possessed by the Holy Woman had been received in a vision, and when she went to cure she carried with her a *hanpospu hoksicala* [*hanpóšpu hokšičala*], a doll made of buffalo hide and filled with the wool of the buffalo;²²⁶ also she had her own medicine songs. *Wiyán Wakan* could ward away evil, cure the sick, prophesy events both good and bad, knew medicinal plants from harmful ones, knew the edible from poisonous fruits, could bring the rain, and was the only woman allowed to make and decorate war shields for the warriors. [Standing Bear 2006b:140]

In the early 1840s Tahtunga-egoniska [possibly *Thátháŋka Igniska*], a head chief of a Brulé village, described the exploits of a Brulé diviner to the fur trader Rufus B. Sage. The Pawnees had earned a decisive victory in battle against a group of Brulé warriors, killing 16 of them. It was during the winter months, and the camp was filled with the moans and wails of those in mourning. Finally, a "medicine-chief" decided to

²²⁶ This is likely an example of imitative or homeopathic magic based on the principle that like produces like, similar to beliefs associated with so-called voodoo dolls of popular culture.

“consult the Good Spirit” in an attempt to “wipe out” the disgrace of the defeat. The practitioner retired to his lodge and fasted there alone for four days and nights, after which time he called to some young men in the village, instructing them to bring him meat, water, and a new buffalo robe. The people gathered as the practitioner folded the robe and sat upon it, breaking his fast and partaking of the meat and water (Sage 1857:131–132). As Tahtunga-egoniska explained to Sage:

After eating he arose, and six large snakes, crawling from the robe one after another, sprang to his shoulder, and, whispering in his ear, vanished from sight. The last snake had just told his message when the chief began:

“The Good Spirit wills it, that we remove from hence. Three moons being dead, let three hundred warriors return, and their hearts shall be made glad with medicine-dogs and the scalps of enemies.”

The village left, and, at the time appointed, the warriors returned. They met the enemy,—fought, and were victorious. Sixty-three scalps and one hundred medicine-dogs were the fruits of their success. [Sage 1857:132]

Generally, diviners did not attain their power; it was innate, meaning that they obtained it and were seen as in league and having a special relationship with the spirits; as marked and specially gifted in the *wakḥáŋ*. Sage discussed this topic with the Brulé chief Tahtunga-egoniska. “These men are regarded as the peculiar favorites of the Great Spirit,” explained the chief, “to whom is imparted a more than ordinary share of His power and wisdom. We respect them, therefore, in proportion to the abilities they receive, even as we reverence the Great Spirit” (Sage 1857:131). Clearly, reputation, social standing, and prestige—reflected in fear, reverence, and respect—were functions of efficacy and perceived powers obtained from other-than-human sources, which were both self-ascribed and ascribed by others in interaction.

Oftentimes diviners were dreamers of *T̥h̥uŋkán̥* (Rock, Stone, Venerable One) or *Táku Škaŋškán̥* (Sky, Pebbles, Force [automotive things]) and practiced the *yuwípi* (binding) and/or *lowán̥pi* (singing) techniques. As noted by Ringing Shield there was a definite functional and symbolic connection between Lakota diviners, *T̥h̥uŋkán̥*, and *Táku Škaŋškán̥*: “*Tunkan* is the spirit which fell from the sky. It is a stone. It knows all things which are secret. It can tell where things are when they are lost or stolen. It is the friend (*kola*) of *Taku Skanskan* (the spirit or power which causes things to vanish like smoke or clouds that fade away)” (Walker 1991:112). *Táku Škaŋškán̥*, the moving deity, was symbolized by the boulder and lived in the four winds. *Táku Škaŋškán̥* was considered the most powerful of the Lakota spirits and the one to be feared and propitiated the most, because it influenced human life and life movement more so than any other (Densmore 2001:205–206; Dorsey 1894:445).

T̥h̥uŋkán̥ was the name for Rock or Stone (*Íŋyaŋ*) in the sacred language, referring to the Rock as a spiritual entity. *T̥h̥uŋkán̥* was synonymous with *yuwípi wašíčuŋ*, the stones utilized in the *Yuwípi* Ceremony that provided the practitioner with power, insight, and knowledge. According to Buechel, who cites Leo Hawk Man and Densmore, “in the sacred language, [*t̥h̥uŋkán̥* refers to] a sacred stone supposed to have great power and used in the oinikage tipi [*oínikaŋe thípi* (sweat lodge)]. This stone is also called the *yuwípi waśicu¹*.” Defining *yuwípi*, Buechel explains it is a noun meaning “Transparent stones, usually found on ant hills and used in the *waka¹ wicoh’a¹* called *yuwípi*, which consists in one being tied all round and being loosed by magic.” A *yuwípi wašíčuŋ*, Buechel writes, is “A sacred round hard stone that is supposed to have power in the hands of those who have dreamed.” Lakota practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s apparently

continued to recognize the connection between *t̥h̥uŋkán/yuwípi wašíc̥uŋ* and the Sweat Lodge Ceremony, one holy man insisting that *t̥h̥uŋkán yatáŋpika* designates sweat lodge stones (Walker 1991:72, 298 n 6).

Dorsey (1894:447–448) and Lynd (1889) point to the association of *T̥h̥uŋkán* with the Hindu lingam and male creative energy and virility. The Lakotas, according to Dorsey and Lynd, venerated *T̥h̥uŋkán*—the spirit that dwells in rocks or stones and symbol of the greatest terrestrial power on dry land—above all other deities as the oldest and hardest.²²⁷ *T̥h̥uŋkán*—along with *Wakíŋyaŋ* (Thunder Being), the patron spirit of war also associated with the west and destruction—came to be the most common foci of daily veneration, supplication, and personifications of *wak̥hán* (Lynd 1889:168–169). “The most usual form of stone employed in worship is round,” explains Lynd (1889:169), “and about the size of the human head. The devout Dakota paints this *Tunkan* red, putting colored swan’s down upon it, and then falls down and worships the god which is supposed to dwell in it or hover near it.”²²⁸

Lynd elaborates, writing, “The *tunkan* is painted red as a sign of active worship” (Lynd 1889:170). “In cases of extremity,” he continues, “I have ever noticed that they appeal to their *Tunkan* (Stone God), first and last, and they do this even after the ceremonies of the Medicine Dance have been gone through with. All Sioux agree in

²²⁷ However, Lynd (1889:159) is quick to clarify that “No one deity is held by them all as a superior object of worship. Some deem one thing or deity as *iyotan wakan* [*iyótan wak̥hán* (most mysterious)], or the supreme object of worship, whilst others reject this and substitute a different one as the main god. Thus, those Dakotas who belong to the Medicine Dance, esteem Unktehi as the greatest divinity. The western tribes neglect that deity, and pay their main devotion to *Tunkan* (*Inyan*), the Stone God, or *Lingam*.” Although Lynd writes of the Dakotas or Eastern Sioux his words ring true in terms of the inherent diversity, lack of a strictly defined dogma, and significant role of innovation and adaptation in nineteenth-century Sioux religious belief and expression.

²²⁸ This type of Platonic notion of “idea” or “archetype” of which every being or object is the material expression is common in Lakota cosmological and philosophical thought. It is commonly expressed in Lakota by the concept *naǵila* and may be productively compared to Schopenhauer’s concept of will.

saying that the *Tunkan* is the main recipient of their prayers; and among the Titons, Mandans, Ianktons, and Western Dakotas, they pray to that and the spirit of the buffalo almost entirely” (Lynd 1889:173–174). Bushotter corroborates Lynd’s Eastern Sioux findings among the Lakotas, explaining, “Sometimes a stone, painted red all over, is laid within the lodge and hair is offered to it. In cases of sickness they pray to the stone, offering to it tobacco or various kinds of good things, and they think that the stone hears them when they sacrifice to it. As the steam arose when they made a fire on a stone, the Dakotas concluded that stones had life, the steam being their breath, and that it was impossible to kill them” (Bushotter in Dorsey 1894:448).

Densmore describes *thun̄kán̄*, apparently an abbreviation of *thun̄kášila* (grandfather, also a term used in reference to spirit beings),²²⁹ as sacred stones:

To dream of a small stone was regarded by the Teton Sioux as a sign of great import, indicating that the dreamer, by fulfilling the requirements of his dream, would become possessed of supernatural power, in the exercise of which he would use the sacred stones. This power would be shown in an ability to cure sickness, to predict future events, and to tell the location of objects beyond the range of his natural vision. The stones were the native brown sandstone, usually spherical in shape, though oval stones and stones slightly flattened were also used, the principal requirements being that they should be regular in outline and untouched by a tool. [Densmore 2001:204–205]

Densmore’s account highlights the significance of purity and purification in Lakota religious thought and ritual practice.

“The diviner who was prepared by tying,” explains Deloria (n.d.:65) in reference to *yuwípi* practice, “so that his supernatural rock-helpers might descend in the dark and

²²⁹ According to Riggs (1992), in the sacred language *thun̄kán̄* is also identified with the moon.

free him, and tell him what he needed to know, was very general. Here too, the ceremony varied with each individual; but the principle was the same.” In ceremonial settings practitioners utilized the sacred stones in rituals pertaining to the camp or community, the hunt, and warfare, sending them long distances to acquire desired information. When the stones returned from their errand they revealed information to the practitioner, who alone could understand and interpret what they said. The practitioner as intermediary then relayed the information to his client, patient, comrades, following, or congregation, earning his conventional appellation *iyéska* (interpreter), the term in the sacred language for religious practitioners.²³⁰ As Densmore’s interlocutor Brave Buffalo put it, the stones were the “intercessors” of the practitioner, while the practitioner was the intercessor of the common people. This pattern of hierarchical or structured levels of mediation was pervasive in nineteenth-century Lakota religious organization. Densmore explains, “This power of the sacred stones to move through the air is connected in the mind of the Sioux with *Ta’kuškaŋśkaŋ’*” (Densmore 2001:205–208).

Deloria also explores the connection between *Táku Škaŋśkáŋ* and small rocks or pebbles. The Rock people were a mythical race, and in the case of *wakǰáŋpi* or being holy, they generally served as messengers or *wašiču*, mysterious aids to certain types of practitioners, namely the diviners who could locate lost things.²³¹

²³⁰ The buffalo-calling stone (*ptewóyake*) also functioned in a similar way. Like a Mormon cricket, it was used to indicate in which direction the buffalo could be found (Buechel n.d.).

²³¹ Deloria (n.d.:23) describes the detailed way in which a *yuwípi wičháša* (*yuwípi* man) was tied so that he could not free himself. She also describes a classic *Yuwípi* Ceremony. Much ink has been spilled on this topic, and our presentation of it here is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive. For more on the *Yuwípi* Ceremony and its practitioners, see Feraca (1961; 1998), Fugel (1966), Grobsmith (1974), Hurt (1960), Hurt and Howard (1952), Kemnitzer (1969; 1970; 1976), Lewis (1990), Macgregor (1946), Mails and Fools Crow (1979), Powers (1982a), Ruby (1966; 2010; 2010), and Steinmetz (1990).

[There was a] belief that the mythical rock people in the guise of little stones which flash a blue brilliance are the helpers who come from nowhere into a séance, and whisper in the ear of the diviner the things he wishes to know.

They are whimsical little things, easily offended by the skepticism of an on-looker, and refusing to perform or be of service until that one is ejected from the room. If they give information in the ear of their interpreter, the man who has the power to employ them, relays it to the room. If the information so obtained is not accurate, the pebbles blame the skeptic, saying he disturbs them and complicates their work so that they are prevented from being concise. This the interpreter announces and everyone blames the man who doubted instead of the interpreter, who might have made a mistake himself. . . .

My feeling is that the pebble idea is not held in repute among the real medicine men. It may be of a spurious character. At any rate, it is in use among the Tetons . . .²³² [Deloria n.d.:20–21]

Deloria concurs that the *thunǰán/yuwípi wašičuŋ* would strike any skeptical onlooker or one who does not “hold believing thoughts.” A disbeliever could be struck in the chest by a stone, a rattle, or the rolled-up ball of thong or rope used to secure the practitioner in the darkened tipi or room.²³³ This focus on the negative effects of

²³² The famous twentieth-century *Yuwípi* practitioner Frank Fools Crow utilized 405 *yuwípi wašičuŋ* or stone spirit powers divided into four groups. Fools Crow referred to them as “Stone White Men helpers” (Mails and Fools Crow 1979:50–53). Each of the four groups of spirit powers rendered service in particular areas of practice. In some ceremonies all 405 Stone White Men were used by *Wakǰán Thánka*, while in others only one or a select few were present. Fools Crow’s pantheon or system of 405 spirit helpers organized into four functional groups appears to be relatively idiosyncratic, as no other practitioner in the literature claims to utilize that number of spirits or follow a comparable procedure. “These helpers are the entire 405 good spirits who serve *Wakan-Tanka* and Grandfather. These helper spirits belong to him,” explains Fools Crow (1979:50), “and if *Wakan-Tanka*, God, should take them from me, I will be just an ordinary man again.” Another twentieth-century *Yuwípi* practitioner, George Flesh, claimed to have seventy-five spirit helpers, each of which was represented by a *čhanlí wapháhta* (tobacco tie). In his ceremonies, however, no more than fourteen spirits were ever present at any one time. As Flesh explained to Fugle (1966:14), “Different spirits come into my meetings at different times. The spirits told me that I should have seventy-five *canli wapahta*.” Apparently, each stone used in Flesh’s meetings was associated with a number of “little men” spirits, similar to Fools Crow’s classification and interpretation. These spirits are to this day often described as hairy. Flesh referred to his little men spirits as Heyoka spirits who resided under a large boulder on top of a high hill (Fugle 1966:16–17). Deloria’s words also speak to the antiquity of the term interpreter, understood in the ritual context. Some Oglalas today see *wakǰán iyéska* (sacred interpreter) as a contemporary, neo-traditional term, but perhaps it is more ancient than it appears at first glance (Posthumus 2008-2014).

²³³ At the conclusion of some contemporary neo-traditional *Yuwípi* rituals it is common for a rattle to be hurled at the feet of a person who is attending a *Yuwípi* for the first time (Posthumus 2008-2014).

skepticism and doubting the *wakǰáŋ* serve to reinforce religious belief and the Lakota worldview. The people are taught to respect the medicines and spirits and to show practitioners deference or else they will lose their potencies and abilities to treat and cure the sick. The small, transparent stones produce audible voices and whistling sounds (*ǰmúŋ*) as the blue sparks dance and fly around the ceremonial lodge or room. A stone might fall with a thud on the altar at the honor spot on the west side of the lodge and remain there to be examined as proof of the practitioner's power. Sometimes faces are faintly visible on the stones. The stones dance when the people gather and sing for them (Deloria n.d.:23–24; Deloria Sacred Arrow n.d.:5–6).

The stones discussed by Deloria, *wašiču* or *wašičuŋ*, are generally defined by Buechel as “any person or thing that is waka^ŋ . . . a person or thing having or characterized by special powers resident in the universe and looked upon as a container or carrier of to^ŋ, i.e. that by which the person or thing is waka^ŋ; also, any object into which has been put to^ŋ by a person such as a wicaša waka^ŋ for his ceremonials and carried about by him in a bag, not the medicine bag.” Buechel tells of an old Lakota man named Makes Noise in the Woods (*Čhaŋkáhothŋŋpi*) who kept his *tǰuŋkáŋ* even after being baptized, illustrating the perennial significance of the sacred stones from Lakota perspectives. “Asking him finally if he still had a *t'oiŋkáŋ* he said he had, and showed it to me,” writes Buechel (n.d.:18), “and he believed in its power. It had cured many people, he said. At the end he sold it to me, but before he handed it to me he breathed on it,²³⁴ rubbed it next with both hands, and then ‘washed’ his face and chest and the upper side of his arms with the supposed water or whatever he had in mind. He did this solemnly.”

²³⁴ Perhaps blowing on the stone, uniting the human *niyá* with an objectification and manifestation of *wakǰáŋ*, served to activate or revivify the stone's potency.

Ṭḥuŋkán̄/yuwípi wašíčun̄ came only in the dark and tended to circulate around the ceiling of a room in which a ceremony was taking place, their voices often being heard talking excitedly and whistling like ghosts in the darkness. Others claim that *yuwípi wašíčun̄* were not actually pebbles, but rather particles of blue flame sparkling and moving about. These blue lights or sparks are referred to in Lakota as either *Táku Škaŋškán̄* directly, *yuilepi ṭhothóya*, or *iyéħyeğa* and came to individuals in visions, although not all men who dreamt of them dreamt alike. Individuals who dreamt of the *yuwípi wašíčun̄* were generally referred to as *Táku Škaŋškán̄ ihán̄blapi* (Buechel 1978:265; Deloria n.d.).

In any case according to most sources it was these spirit helpers who untied the bound practitioner in the darkness, one who “wants to go into the Mysterious” or “on the occasion of a man going into the Mysterious”; who sang the mystery songs with the practitioner; and who related to him various cures, the location of a lost article or sickness, and other esoteric knowledge. Clearly, there was a close connection between *ṭḥuŋkán̄* or *yuwípi/ṭḥuŋkán̄ wašíčun̄* and *Táku Škaŋškán̄*, both of which were believed to constantly circulate around the earth in continuous motion and knew all things on account of this omnipresence. Because of this omnipresence they were considered omniscient (Deloria n.d.:21–23). The close connection between *Ṭḥuŋkán̄*, *Táku Škaŋškán̄*, and *Yuwípi* is apparently not common knowledge among many Lakotas of the younger generations at Pine Ridge today.



One of the essential and characteristic methods utilized by diviners was hydromancy, or water divination. Divination in general was utilized as a preliminary means for

discovering the nature, severity, and location of sickness, often conceived of in terms of disease-object intrusion or soul-loss. Describing diviners, Deloria writes:

Their great requisite was a pool of water; a bowl of water in other words; and in recent times, a mirror instead, attached to the outside of the buffalo-robe in which they allowed themselves to be bound round and round like a mummy so that they could in no wise work it loose themselves.

The mirror was fastened to the spot opposite their forehead, where the mind could look through and see in the distance the thing taking place as it would in a little while, or see the lost horse or man, lying or standing as he would be found. [Deloria n.d.:42–43]

Curtis (1908:64) describes two distinct examples of hydromancy: “In treating disease the medicine-man locates the seat of the ailment by mixing his medicine in a bowl and obtaining the desired inspiration from some peculiarity of the shape it assumes. The affected spot he then sucks, and spits forth either blood or some sticky substance, ostensibly pus.” We will examine this treatment method in the next chapter. Later, Curtis (1908:63–64) describes an episode of hydromancy performed by a *Mathó iháŋbla* (Bear dreamer). Interestingly, in this case the practitioner resorted to hydromancy only if the patient responded positively to the initial treatment customary of Bear practitioners. In such cases the practitioner made an incense (*wazílya*) by burning sweetgrass, purified and consecrated his *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundle) by passing it through the smoke, then took some *phežúta* (herbal medicine) from the bundle and placed it in a bowl of water. “Next he repeats his own individual prayer,” explains Curtis (1908:64), “which is addressed to the bear and for the greater part is merely a description of the appearance of the animal that came to him in his vision, ending with a request that he ‘make his deed powerful.’ Then he gazes into the bowl, and from the fantastic shapes of living creatures

that the mixture, to his imagination, assumes, he predicts recovery.” The hydromancy could determine subsequent action, procedure, or the ultimate outcome of treatment.

Black Elk also utilized hydromancy in his doctoring practice, divining signs and procedures in a cup of water. Black Elk’s first doctoring ceremony took place when he was nineteen years old. After singing a sacred song, Black Elk explains, “I could feel something queer in my body and I wanted to cry. At first I was in doubt but I was in earnest now. After singing this song I walked toward the west where the cup of water was and I saw the little sick boy looking up and smiling at me. Then I knew that I had the power and that I would cure him” (DeMallie 1984:239).

Black Elk proceeded to suck the sickness out of the boy, putting his mouth on the pit of the youth’s stomach and drawing “the north wind through him. . . . I put a piece of white cloth on my mouth and I saw there was blood on it,” explains Black Elk, “showing that I had drawn something out of his body. Then I washed my mouth with some of the water of the cup. And I was now sure that I had power” (DeMallie 1984:239).

Apparently, the display of the blood, symbolic of sickness, had powerful reaffirming psychological effects not only on the patient, but also on the practitioner.²³⁵ Next, Black Elk powdered an herbal medicine (*p̄hežúta*) and sprinkled it into the cup of hot water, blowing some over the boy to the four directions and giving him the rest to drink. The boy recovered, and Black Elk’s reputation and future as a practitioner was secured.

“Always when I was doctoring I could tell whether or not I could cure the patient,” Black

²³⁵ The public display of a physical representation or manifestation of a symbolic illness is an important part of the transference process that occurred in Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice, through which the patient/victim and social group developed powerful feelings toward the practitioner and belief in his power and in the effectiveness of his techniques.

Elk said (DeMallie 1984:239), “for if I could cure him, I would always see him smiling in the cup of water.”

For Black Elk water was not only a tool for hydromancy and diagnosing sickness. In general, water was a potent symbol of health, fertility, and (re)generation. Water epitomized and encompassed the power to cleanse, heal, and rejuvenate. It was the source of healing power in medicinal roots and herbs, providing the potential for efficacy and the power to overcome and defeat draught, sterility, and other forms of barrenness and sickness (DeMallie 1984:123–124; Rice 1998:109).

Buechel, drawing on information he received from Old Mrs. Little Cloud and Old Man Calico, relates a doctoring ceremony performed by a “common curer” (*waphíyapi ikčéka*) in which hydromancy was used. This ceremony is strikingly similar to the previous one described by Black Elk. The practitioner, with his ceremonial regalia (consisting of a rattle [*wagmúha*], bags with “medicine,” and a tobacco pouch containing a tobacco-bark mixture called *čhaŋšáša*), entered the lodge of the patient:

He . . . moves about (stooping) and rattling and singing. Now he looks into a wooden dish filled with water. He pretends²³⁶ to see the sick man in there and his trouble. This done, he places his mouth upon the aching part of the body and sucks (*yap’á*),²³⁷ having declared he would draw out the sickness. To be sure, he takes a little particle of something from his mouth

²³⁶ Clearly, Buechel’s judgment of the ritual performance is biased by his own ethnocentrism, religious views, and skepticism of Lakota disease theory and treatment.

²³⁷ From the transitive verb *yaphá*, meaning “to take or hold in the mouth; hold between the jaws or lips.” A related term is *yaǵópa*, a transitive verb meaning “to suck; to sip something noisily, trying to get the remnants of a fluid; to slurp; to gobble; draw in one’s breath with a noise; suck up or draw up into the mouth.” *Yaǵób* is the equivalent of *yaǵópa* in the continuative aspect. Sucking out sickness was a common form of treatment and hence a common method utilized by practitioners. This variety of practitioner was generally referred to as a *waphíya wičháša/wiŋyaŋ* (conjurer [male/female]) or *waphíya (ikčéka)* ([common] conjurer) and specifically as a *yaphá* or *yaǵópa (yaǵób) waphíya*, a conjurer who treats the sick by sucking up, drawing out, and otherwise extracting sickness. We will examine this method and practitioner type in greater detail below. This treatment method is all but extinct at Pine Ridge today, its last practitioners apparently being Bear doctors who passed away in the mid-twentieth century (Posthumus 2008-2014).

and lays it in his hand to let everybody see it. That is the sickness.²³⁸ Then he throws it into the fire and rinses his mouth with the water that is ready in the above-mentioned dish. [Buechel n.d.:21]

After the hydromancy to locate the sickness and divine its nature, and the subsequent sucking out or extraction of the illness, the practitioner prepared and administered medicine to the patient while praying over him, saying:

Wakháŋthañka, úŋšimala yo! (Wakan Tanka, pity me!)
Khúže kiŋ lé, asníwayiŋ kte. (This one who is sick, I will cure him.)
Hó, héche ómakiya yo! (Behold, help me in this!)

After the performance the practitioner was paid for his services (*wíši k'úpi* [they give him pay]) before he departed (Buechel n.d.:21).

Reflective objects were especially common divinatory tools utilized by Lakota practitioners. Particularly, mirrors, symbolic of eyes, were often used to divine the future, a technique referred to today as catoptromancy or captromancy in English. A mirror or any reflective surface, perhaps a practical and portable adaptation of the pool or wooden dish of water, was a common ritual implement. Fletcher (1884b:277, 284) notes that the symbols of particular Dream Societies were either inscribed on mellowed-earth altars or else marked on some reflective surface. She reports that the mirror placed on the altar of an Elk dreamer in the 1880s represented light. Densmore's interlocutor Brave Buffalo,

²³⁸ As we read in the chapter on disease theory the sickness was conceptualized or manifested as the object, particle, or projectile; the introduced pollutant or foreign matter out of place. The public exhibition of the object was a common terminal element in doctoring rituals. The practitioner proved his efficacy to both the patient and the onlookers by displaying or showing the people the sickness, conceived of here in terms of disease-object intrusion, and visually and symbolically represented by the physical matter or projectile spat out by the practitioner. Comparable to the placebo effect this practice had powerful psychological and affective benefits and effects on the patient/victim, ensuring imminent recovery, which often translated into physical healing. As noted frequently above, for the Lakotas psychological healing and wellness were prerequisites to physical healing and wellness (Posthumus 2008-2014).

considered by his contemporaries as one of the most powerful practitioners at Standing Rock, used a small mirror in his doctoring practice. “I hold this mirror in front of the sick person and see his disease reflected in it;” explains Brave Buffalo (in Densmore 2001:249), “then I can cure the disease.” The mirror was inscribed with pictographs of a new moon and a star, individual power symbols evoking idiosyncratic vision experiences. “The new moon is my sign. I am strongest when the moon is full;” Brave Buffalo recalls, “I grow weaker as the moon wanes, and when the moon dies my strength is all gone until the moon comes back again” (Densmore 2001:249).²³⁹

Although a wooden bowl of water is still common at contemporary *Yuwípi* Ceremonies, the author has never witnessed hydromancy associated with it.²⁴⁰ Water continues to be a potent religious symbol in general, and a wooden dish filled with water is a prominent ritual staple, whether used for hydromancy or not. Fletcher (1884b:284 n 7) writes, “A wooden dish, often of peculiar form, is kept for religious ceremonies. . . . An Indian said of the water in the dish, ‘We must have water for our health so we put the water there as a prayer and the leaves were medicine to cure disease.’”²⁴¹ Frequently, a practitioner who extracted or sucked sickness out of his patients spit a visible

²³⁹ Mirrors and all shiny or reflective objects are forbidden at contemporary *Yuwípi* Ceremonies. According Richard Two Dogs, there are two reasons why reflective objects are forbidden: (1) the spirits do not like shiny objects; and (2) reflective objects attract lightning power (*wakǵángli*) (Posthumus 2008-2014).

²⁴⁰ Today, designs on and disturbances of the powdered mole dirt that comprises part of some practitioners’ ritual altars is read after the conclusion of the ceremony proper to divine future events. Further, spirits still reveal otherwise hidden information to practitioners through ritual.

²⁴¹ In the White Buffalo Ceremony of the Hunkpapa Lakotas a bowl of chokecherries and water was placed near a buffalo skull, because buffalo were fond of those things. At the conclusion of the ritual the chokecherries were eaten and the water was drunk so “that there may be no end of fruit and water with us” (Fletcher 1884a:271–272). These ritual elements are classic examples of imitative or homeopathic magic, based on the premise that like produces like. They also indicate the bipolarity of ritual symbols and their tendency to unite the natural or ecological order with the social and moral order.

representation or manifestation of the sickness into a wooden dish of water to prove the efficacy of his cure (see Densmore [2001:247–249]).

Black Elk received his indwelling spirit, a little blue man symbolic of a fish, by ingesting a bowl of water in his great vision:

. . . the second [northern] grandfather presented me with a cup of water, saying: “Behold this cup.” In this cup I saw a man painted blue and he had a bow and arrow and he was in distress. He wanted to get out of the water and get away, but I was told to drink it down. They said: “Make haste and drink your cup of water.” I took it and drank the man too. This blue spirit was a fish and I had drunk it down. From this I received strange power and whenever I was conjuring [*wapiya*] I could actually make this blue man come out and swim in the cup of water I used. (The fish represents the power of the water.) [Black Elk in DeMallie 1984:139]

A form of blood divination or hematomanancy also appears in the ethnographic literature on the Lakotas. The congealed blood of animals created a reflective surface, like a mirror, used to divine future events. As Tyon explains:

Whoever kills a badger takes out everything from the body cavity (*cuwi mahel*), leaving only the blood. And when the blood reflects well, like a mirror, then someone can see himself in it. If the man sees himself in the blood and his entire head is white, then he will become an old man, they believe. And if another looks long inside, and sees himself sick, he will die, they say. If someone sees a red head, then he will kill an enemy. [Walker 1991:170]

For this reason, among others, badgers were considered *wakháŋ*.

Aside from the ability to communicate with and interpret for the spirits in the *wakhíŋya* or sacred language; to divine the future and locate lost or stolen articles through the mediation of the sacred stones; and to utilize forms of water, mirror, and blood

divination, Lakota ritual specialists also regularly used other, more general divinatory techniques. Among them were narcomancy (divination through dreams), sciomancy (divination through contact with spirits), solaromancy (divination through the sun, sometimes occurring during the Sun Dance), and necromancy (divination through communication with the spirits of the dead, as practiced by *Wanáǵi iháŋblapi* [Ghost dreamers]). In any case it is clear that divination or the ability to divine and obtain unknown or hidden information through occult or parapsychological means was and continues to be a significant attribute in the categorization and classification of historical and contemporary Lakota practitioners. Next, we will examine another technique already alluded to in which practitioners extracted or drew out sickness through sucking with the mouth or through a hollow, tubular object. This technique was referred to as *yaǵópa* or *yapǰá* in Lakota.

5.13 *Yaǵópapi, Yapǰápi, Kiyáǰapi: Extracting Illness*

We have already encountered some accounts of this important method as described by Black Elk and Buechel, but there is much more that can be said about it. *Yaǵópa* or *yapǰá* was a specific treatment method in which a practitioner used his mouth, an eagle-wing bone, elk or buffalo horn, or other hollow, tubular object to suck and draw out (*yaǵópa ičú*) sickness, conceptualized as foreign matter, a projectile, or disease object, conceptualized as bad medicine or negativity, that was the root cause of symbolic and psychosomatic illness. The practitioner sucked and drew out the foreign matter, extracting the cause of sickness from the patient, and then spit out the evidence, publicly

displaying it in proof of his cure and efficacy.²⁴² The physical manifestation or representation of the sickness was often bloody and gelatinous, writhing around of its own accord (Posthumus 2008-2014). “When a skilled doctor drew forth the offending projectile from the patient’s body,” explains Deloria (n.d.:65), “he simply struck any part of the body; the shoulder, the temple; an arm, the back of the neck, etc., and in a second the object was in his hand, but, according to an eye-witness, there was no hole in the body where the projectile had come through.”

It seems that this method was quite common historically and often transcended the power-source or dreamer (*ihánbla*) category in the minds of the public, so that, similar to *yuwípi* and *lowáŋpi* today, a practitioner who regularly used this method was known generally as a *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́ wičháša* (*yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* man) or a *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́ waphíya* (*yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* conjuror, conventionally glossed as *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* doctor or healer). Even so, the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* technique was apparently more closely associated with certain other-than-human persons and classes of dreamers than others. For instance, Walker’s Oglala interlocutors linked bird dreamers to the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* method: “The

²⁴² As we know from the chapter on disease theory nineteenth-century Lakotas conceptualized of sickness largely as the result of the introduction of malevolent spirits (spirit intrusion) and foreign bodies or pollutants within the individual (disease-object intrusion). The notion of person was and is central to Lakota religious belief and magico-medico-ritual practice, particularly what may be termed the “permeable self,” whereby persons are continually open to intrusions and transgressions by outside or “other” agencies and forces (see Kapferer 1979; 2003:13). Misfortune (*wówahtani*) and sickness resulted from the failure to adhere to taboo restrictions, from disregarding prescribed ritual forms or breaches of ritual etiquette, from other ethical breaches, or from the evil influences of malevolent practitioners or spirits. The treatment and cure of sickness was directed first toward the location and removal of the cause. In cases of soul-loss the errant soul was located and coaxed to return to its vessel, reintegrating the noncorporeal with the corporeal body (see Hassrick 1964:288–289; cf. Hallowell 1935). A treatment technique related to *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* involved the use of a bone tube or hollow object to blow sickness out of a patient. Flesh describes this treatment type, which he witnessed near Kyle, South Dakota: the practitioner “simply blew the disease away through a large bone tube. He blew a couple of times on the back of the patient and then he said that he blew the pain out. After that the patient felt better” (Flesh in Fugle 1966:24–25). Documentation of this method is scanty, so we will simply acknowledge it here and proceed with our discussion of the more common extraction method through sucking or drawing out sickness. Fugle notes that the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* method is “nearly identical to the [practices of the] Ojibwe *kusabindugeyu* shaman” (Fugle 1966:25), an insight which calls for further development.

bird medicine men resorted to jugglery such as sucking through a bone and tricks of various kinds” (Walker 1991:105). Toad dreamers were also renowned for utilizing this particular method. Individuals who communed with the Toad (*Witápih’a*) during the Vision Quest became practitioners and were believed to be very *wakháŋ*. In fact, the Toad provided a model for the *yaǵópa* technique and yet another example of imitative or homeopathic magic and the bipolarity of ritual symbols in Lakota culture.²⁴³ As Tyon (in Walker 1991:161) explains, “Whatever these toads suck, they suck hard. So it is that a man who dreams of a toad is very *wakan*, they believe. From the time of his dream, he doctors people using his mouth. He takes all the bad blood out of the body. . . . Those who dream of the toad believe that it is their leader.” Tyon’s last sentence will be clarified in the section on Dream Societies and the close spiritual relationship between human beings and their other-than-human spirit guardians.

Practitioners of the *yaǵópa/yaphá* method who specialized in using a bone tube to extract sickness were generally called *hohú iyáphápi* (bone suckers). Powers (1986:203) defines *hohú iyáphá* as “To suck with a bone; lit., ‘to suck with a bone held in the mouth’; to draw out a source of pain through a bone tube; a person who performs this ceremony.” This general category is not to be confused with Tyon’s infamous *hohú yuhápi* (bone keepers), the evil practitioners known for concocting potions and inflicting misfortune and sickness (Walker 1991:161–163).

Some contemporary Oglalas claim the illness sucked out of patients through the *yaǵópa/yaphá* method was cancer. This treatment type was believed to be particularly onerous and detrimental to the practitioner. The sickness extracted from patients was

²⁴³ Today there are very few Lakota practitioners who still treat using the *yaǵópa* technique (Posthumus 2008-2014).

believed to cumulatively coagulate within the practitioner's spirit or body, causing violent aftereffects and serious gastrointestinal issues, along with other problems.

Practitioners of the *yaǵópa/yaphhá* method, along with some other practitioner types, were also associated with *wekákpa* or *kħaŋkákpa* (bloodletting), in which “bad blood” (*wéšiča*) was sucked out of patients. Veins in the head, arms, and legs were bled by tapping into them with bird-wing or -leg bones sharpened to a point. Bloodletting was a prominent technique among nineteenth-century practitioners (Posthumus 2008-2014). According to Standing Bear:

Bloodletting was practiced occasionally and considered a cure for spring fever and for headache. A slight cut was made in the temple and a little blood allowed to run for headache. For lassitude in the spring the veins in the crook of the arm opposite the elbow were cut, from which a small amount of blood was allowed to flow. Sometimes those who took part in the Sun Dance lost a quantity of blood, but the injured always recovered their normal health without treatment of any sort. Recovery was quick, without shock to the nerves and without blood-poisoning. [Standing Bear 2006b:62]

Sage (1857:131) provides an early account of a Lakota practitioner of the *yaǵópa/yaphhá* method named Tahtunga-mobellu. As a Brulé head chief, Tahtunga-egoniska, explained to Sage in the early 1840s, Tahtunga-mobellu was “a man of strong medicine. To him the Great Spirit has imparted the power of healing, by imbibing, at pleasure, the diseases of the sick, and discharging them from his eyes and nose in the form of live snakes.” Sage is quick to note that “Tahtunga-mobellu receives the averment of all his villagers in proof of this strange feat.”

Bushotter vividly describes a nineteenth-century example of the *yaǵópa/yaphhá* technique:

Now as regards certain men who consider themselves mysterious [wak'ápi] and who practice medicine [wap'íyapi (they treat the sick)], these go to a sick person, and from his chest or wherever the pain is, they place their lips (on it) [kiyáp'api (they lite on)] and draw in the breath, by sucking it in [yaǵóp icúpi (drawing something up into the mouth)]. Then he declared that he drew something forth from [kiyáǵopa] the body. When he drew on a part of the body of the sick and took out some blood or other matter, then somewhere convenient he spat it out [it'áǵoša].

Then the mother of the sick would examine it. And she would announce what it was, blood [wé-šica (bad blood)] or other matter, which had caused the ailment [táku c'á ú hé kakíza (what caused him to suffer)]. And the man would also announce whether the patient would live or not [ní naís t'í kta], and so he would warn [iwáhowic'aye] the family. By such means these men earned possessions [wakámnapi], and they were believed [wicáwic'alapi] in the things they did. [Bushotter 1937:Story 109]

From Bushotter's account it is clear that diagnosis and prescription were also common duties of nineteenth-century religious practitioners.

The wife of Standing Rock Indian agent James McLaughlin witnessed this treatment method at the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota, probably in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The practitioner, a Santee man named Šiptǵó (Beads), was summoned to treat a young boy suffering from hemorrhages of the lungs. The practitioner sat at the honor spot opposite the lodge door, beside the patient, as a fire with many red-hot coals pulsed in the center of the lodge. After a young girl brought Šiptǵó a dish of water:

. . . the conjuror rinsed his mouth, put a piece of root in his mouth, and chewed it. Removing a coal from the fire with a stick, he took it up in his hands and put it in his mouth. He then dropped on all fours and began to tear up the ground with his fingers and toes, as though they were claws. He made a cry like an animal and approached the boy as though he were a wild beast. With the coal still in his mouth he stooped over the boy's chest and sucked so violently that the blood came to the surface. Then he gave a

whistling, puffing sound . . . and spit into a dish which was partly filled with water. When this performance was completed he sat down in a dripping perspiration and immediately the boy had a hemorrhage from the lungs.

The same performance was enacted four times and after each time the boy had a hemorrhage. Then the boy complained that the treatment was making him worse, and the boy's father asked the conjuror not to work over the boy any longer. The boy's father gave the conjuror a horse, as it is the belief of the Santee that sickness will return if the "doctor" is not paid. [Densmore 2001:247]

A subcategory of the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ* technique incorporated the aid of an indwelling spirit (referred to variously in Lakota as *šičúŋ*, *wašičuŋ*, *táku wakǰáŋ*, or *wówakǰáŋ*), often in the form of a bird, snake, fish, or miniature human being (Posthumus 2008-2014). Curtis (1908:21) highlights the pervasiveness of the belief in indwelling spirits, connected to the human body and/or souls, among early twentieth-century Lakotas, which he associates with tutelary spirits. According to Curtis, an individual firmly believed that "the spirit or mystery-strength of the animal that appeared to him in vision entered his body and became a part of his *waká*ⁿ strength. He might fast many times and have many such tutelary spirits within his body."

The following quote from Bushotter is lengthy but as powerful as it is informative:

. . . the doctors [*wap'iyapi*] also stated that within their bodies [*c'uwimahel*] there resided [*úpi*] a small red hawk [*c'etáśala*], or perhaps a common wood-pecker [*t'oškála*], or a buffalo [*ptéhcaka*], a rattlesnake [*šjitéhla*], or perhaps a bear [*mat'ó*], for example. Such beings they had within themselves.

And so when one such a man was doctoring [*wap'iya*], the instant he stamped the ground with his foot [*ímak'a-nahtàka*] then at once inside his body something with a sweet tone [*hówašte*] gave forth a call or cry [*nahót'ut'ú*], they said. Because the cries or calls were so true to life they

were believed to be real; and the audience²⁴⁴ would stand round the tipi outside to listen for these sounds. It was said that those various birds or animals [*Hená táku c 'a*] which resided within the medicine-man's body were really the power behind him [*épihca c 'a wap 'iyapi c 'a táku okíhipi*]. When the doctor had been sucking upon the affected part [*yagópa*] without any result [*tákuni icúšni*] for a long time, then he would turn to [*awóglaka*] the holy being inside him [*táku wak 'á c 'uwimahel ú kǐ*] for aid, and that would reply by giving forth a cry or call [*hot 'út 'u*]; and then the doctoring became efficacious [*okíhi*], they say. It is said that the men did not treat the sick by their power alone; but they did it with the cooperation of the beings they had dreamed [*Hená iwíc 'ahqablapi c 'a óp wap 'iyapi sk 'é*].

There was once an exceptionally holy man [*wic 'áša wǎ iyótǎ wak 'á*] who was treating a patient [*wap 'iya*]; and they placed a dish of water before him. And when he vomited something forth [*glépiyeya*], it was a snake like the kind that live under water, they say. And the snake swam round in the dishful of water. And when once more the doctor placed his open mouth to the water the snake slowly went back into the man, they say.

In such typical ways the doings of holy men [*wap 'iya kǐ oh 'ápi*] are related about them and the things which mystically [*wak 'ák 'ayǎ*] lived within their bodies were believed in [*wicálapi*]; and by them, the men were regarded as endowed with supernatural power [*wak 'áwic 'alapi*].

Now, it was by such means as that that medicine men earned property [*kamnápi*].²⁴⁵ He who had the most mysterious supernatural

²⁴⁴ Bushotter's use of the term audience reinforces Hultkrantz's and Turner's notion of ritual drama as cultural performance (see Hultkrantz 1992; Turner 1974, 1979, 1986), in which there is, according to one Oglala individual, a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Posthumus 2008-2014). It seems that the indwelling spirit was called upon to heighten the intensity of the treatment at the zenith of the ritual drama in cases of severe illness especially difficult to cure. "A certain pattern of performance was also practiced," explains Hassrick (1964:290), "so that at the beginning of the session a measured dignity was in order but as the curing progressed, the intensity increased so that the shaman himself often reached a frenzied trance and ended the ceremony in a dramatic crescendo."

²⁴⁵ Black Elk addresses the issue of payment for treatment. As he explains to Neihardt, "The horse gift is not supposed to be accepted before four days are over, because by that time it will be known as to whether or not the person can be cured. When the people heard about my curing this boy, it got to be my business. I was very well-known by this time. The people all knew of me" (in DeMallie 1984:239). Deloria also openly discusses the issue of payment, a topic which is rather taboo in many contemporary Lakota religious and ritual circles. She writes, "Some men who were doctors used no medicine as such; but they went through a routine by which they drew out the harmful element in the patient; or they told the patient he must die and that doctoring is useless. Even so, the parents of the sick, or his relations gave gifts to the medicine man. As a matter of fact, they gave the things first as an excuse for their request for help. There was no 'If you do this, and that, then I'll give you thus-and-so.' No, it was the other way around; first the gift; then the favor. In that way it didn't seem as if you were buying favors; a nicer feeling, for it lifts the service and the pay out of the bargaining class, and puts it on a friendship or human basis, so they figure. A medicine man who claimed to cure someone, was not tempted to do so, by promises of reward. In other words, the things were his already, anyway; so what inducement would there be to pretend he could cure what is fatal?" (Deloria n.d.:42-43). Clearly, payment (*wíši*) was and is an essential terminal or concluding element of all Lakota ritual and treatment (see Buechel n.d.). *Wíši* still figures prominently in contemporary

power for his medicine was the one that they trusted most, and such a one consequently had the chance to earn many things [*Tuwá iyótą wak 'áya p 'ezúta yuhá c 'á hé lila wac 'iyapi kį héy waól 'ota kamná s 'a*]. So also men and women who were doctors of the sick vied with each other for supremacy in mysterious power; and by it they earned their living [*Wíya nakú wap 'iyapi ną lila wak 'áwic 'ak 'iyapi c 'á wawíc 'asipi naşna paháhayela waíglamnawic 'ak 'iyapi s 'a*]. [Bushotter 1937:Story 109]

Bushotter's account parallels Black Elk's description of his indwelling spirit helper, the "little blue man." Black Elk's experience also sheds light on the origin of these indwelling spirits as gifts from other-than-human persons in the Vision Quest. In *Black Elk Speaks* John G. Neihardt omits the gift of the grandfather representing the north in Black Elk's great vision, despite its supreme importance. The northern grandfather gave Black Elk a little blue man with a bow and arrow swimming in a cup of water, instructing him to swallow the man along with the water. DeMallie (1984:98) writes, "thereafter this spirit lived within him and helped him in his curing. Black Elk told Neihardt that he could make the man come up and swim around in a cup of water during his curing ceremonies. The ability to perform feats like this, calculated to induce trust in the healer's power, was a highly valued spiritual gift."

After Black Elk ingested and united with his spirit helper he knew his power to cure would come from the indwelling little blue man spirit within him. He was nineteen years old when he first used his power to treat the sick, and he described the experience to Neihardt. After praying, singing a sacred song, and drinking from a cup of water, Black Elk:

ritual, but there is a noted reluctance to speak of such things, despite the antiquity of the practice reflecting continuity with past traditions. See Amiotte and Först (1994).

. . . started toward where the sick boy was and I could feel something moving in my chest and I was sure that it was that little blue man and it made a different sound from anything else. Then I stamped the earth four times standing in front of the boy. Then I put my mouth on the pit of the boy's stomach and drew the north wind through him. At the same time the little blue man was also in my mouth, for I could feel him there. I put a piece of white cloth on my mouth and I saw there was blood on it, showing that I had drawn something out of his body. Then I washed my mouth with some of the water of the cup. And I was now sure that I had power. [DeMallie 1984:239]

Used-as-a-Shield was a Densmore interlocutor from Standing Rock whom Densmore reported was a "reliable informant" (Densmore 2001:247). He was treated by a practitioner of the *yaǵópa/yapǵhá* method who utilized an indwelling spirit. As the treatment began:

I could hear the sound of a red hawk; some who were there even said they could see the head of a red hawk coming out of his mouth. He bent over me and I expected that he would suck the poison from my body with his mouth, but instead I felt the beak of a bird over the place where the pain was. It penetrated so far that I could feel the feathers of the bird. The medicine-man kept perfectly still for a time; then he got up with a jerk to signify that he had gotten out the trouble. Still it was the beak of a bird which I felt. A boy stood near, holding a filled pipe. It was soon apparent that the medicine-man had swallowed the poison. He took four whiffs of the pipe. Then he must get rid of the poison. This part of the performance was marked by great activity and pounding of the drum. At times he kicked the bare ground in his effort to get rid of the poison; he paced back and forth, stamped his feet, and used both rattle and drum. Finally he ejected the poison into the wooden bowl. Then he told the people that he had sucked out all the poison, that none remained in my body, and that I would recover. [Densmore 2001:248]

Describing his treatment of the sick to Densmore Brave Buffalo reported that he "sucked out the disease" through a bone about five inches long and ejected it from his mouth into a bowl of water (Densmore 2001:248).

Contemporary practitioners and elders vividly remember the exploits of historical practitioners of the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* method and those individuals from the past who had indwelling spirits helpers within them, such as Samuel Rock, who had an indwelling bird spirit. These indwelling spirits helped practitioners treat the sick, and when these individuals passed away and began their journey on the spirit trail, countless witnesses reported observing the bird, snake, or other animal leave the body of the practitioner, usually exiting through the mouth. According to Richard Two Dogs and Wilmer Mesteth there are still some practitioners of the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ́* method who have indwelling spirits that aid them in their practice, but for the most part this technique has faded into memory, despite its frequency and significance in nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice (Posthumus 2008-2014). In the next chapter we will apply what we have discussed thus far to classify and describe three main types of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners.

6. TYPES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA MAGICO-MEDICO-RITUAL PRACTITIONERS

Many have oversimplified the classification of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners, while others attempt to impose implausible, definite distinctions among practitioner types, forcing a rigid structure on the data that does not reflect indigenous perspectives (see, for instance, Hassrick 1964 and Powers 1986:164–195). We have already described two significant and intersecting levels of practitioner classification, viz., classification via spirit guardian or other-than-human power source and classification based on ability, method, practice, and technique. We have also stressed that these categories are cumulative, permeable, often overlapping, and not mutually exclusive. The classification of nineteenth-century Lakota practitioners involves a vast array of determinants and is extremely complex, defying simplistic and neat categorization. Although the urge to categorize practitioners may appear to be a futile Western impulse, we must remember that classification is one of the prime and fundamental concerns of both anthropology and culture (cf. Needham in Durkheim and Mauss 1963:viii).

Building largely on the work of Benedict (1922), DeMallie (1984), Densmore (2001), Fugle (1966), Walker (1917, 1991), and Wissler (1912), and guided by numerous interviews and conversations with contemporary Oglala practitioners, this chapter is an attempt to rearticulate the organization and classification of nineteenth-century Lakota religious and magico-medico-ritual specialists. It must be understood that within each of the three major categories explored herein there is great variation, innovation, and numerous subcategories. Additionally, as per the dreamer and method categories, the types posited and explored below are cumulative, the boundaries between them being indistinct, permeable, and not mutually exclusive. Finally, the human propensity for good

or evil and the dreamer (*iháŋbla*) classification crosscut all other categories based on ability, method, practice, technique, or type.

As a point of departure I provide the following quote from the journal of the French scientist Joseph N. Nicollet, who travelled and lived among the Dakotas inhabiting the land between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in 1838-1839. This very early account of the religious organization of the Sioux people distinguishes between three major practitioner types—which we will subsequently analyze and develop below—and provides a baseline for this chapter. Nicollet lists the following practitioner types in his journal:

Wichashta wakan [*Wičháša wakháŋ*] — man of the medicine society,²⁴⁶ not a doctor but a diviner, a juggler [or conjuror].

Wichashta waka[n] wapiya [*Wičháša wakháŋ waphíya*] — the medicine man who is a doctor, practicing medicine in his nation. *Wapiya* [*Waphíya*] — name of a doctor who treats a sick person, who does ceremonies for him, the word means he mends, he restores, he treats.

Pejuta witchashta [*Pěžúta wičháša*] — man of roots, he is of the medicine, doctor, surgeon (of the whites). [Nicollet in Bray and Bray 1976:269]

As we will see Nicollet's classification is astute both in terms of practitioner type and function. Based on Nicollet's observations and the following categorization of nineteenth-century Lakota practitioners it will become increasingly clear that Western Sioux religious organization evidences great continuity with past traditions. The first distinction that must be made is between *wičháša wakháŋ* (shaman; literally, 'holy man') and *pěžúta wičháša* (herbalist; literally, 'medicine man').

²⁴⁶ Nicollet is referring to the *Wachípi Wakháŋ* or Mystery Dance.

6.1 *Wičháša Wakháŋ* (Holy Man, Shaman)

Densmore (2001:245) lists three methods of treating the sick among the Lakotas: (1) by means of the sacred stones (*t̥h̥uŋkáŋ, yuwípi wašičuŋ*); (2) conjuring; and (3) the giving of herbs. Treatment through use of the sacred stones, she explains, might be administered by a *wakháŋhan*,²⁴⁷ which she describes as a term “applied to the highest type of medicine-men—those qualified to command the sacred stones, to bring fair weather, or to fill such important ceremonial positions as that of Intercessor in the Sun dance” (Densmore 2001:245). Densmore is clearly referring to the *wičháša wakháŋ* (holy man) category, those whom Fletcher (1884b:282 n 4; 1884a) refers to as “priest” or “priest of the higher class,” and Walker (1917, 1991) refers to generally as “shaman” or “holy man.”²⁴⁸ Deloria (in Bushotter 1937:Story 82) labels the ritual leader of a given ceremony as “high priest,” and Colhoff uses the same language (Colhoff to Balmer 1948-1953:Letters 7, 19). As Walker (1991:73) explains, “A *wicasa wakan* (*wakan* man, shaman) is so called

²⁴⁷ *Wakháŋhan* could be an idiosyncratic term used or once used by Northern Lakotas from the Standing Rock Reservation or a combination of *wakháŋ* and the continuative suffix *-han*, meaning someone who continually or habitually does or is engaged in *wakháŋ* things or doings. But, more plausibly, it is *wakháŋh’an*, a verb meaning to perform mysterious acts, to do magic, to do sacred things, to perform ceremonies. The verb is likely also used nominatively in reference to practitioners.

²⁴⁸ Holy men are sometimes referred to as shamans or priests in the literature. In anthropology, priests are usually distinguished from shamans according to a number of criteria, such as the attainment of trance states and status as full- or part-time practitioners. See Klass (1995:63–71) and Powers (1986:164–173). Shamans occupy a central position in religious belief and ritual practice, serving as mediators between the human and other-than-human world and between the living and the dead. A shaman is often endowed with clairvoyance, divinatory powers, and helper spirits and fills many social and religious roles. Shamans are particularly known for attaining trance states and leaving their bodies to commune with spirits in the other-than-human realm. A shaman may play an offensive or defensive role in the protection of his group against the aggressive actions of other shamans or malevolent spirits (DuBois 2009; D’Anglure in Barnard and Spencer 1996:504–505; Jakobsen 1999). Shamanism is a hotly debated and contested concept in anthropology today (see Atkinson 1992; Geertz 1973:122; and Taussig 1986). Neither shaman nor priest is completely adequate in the Lakota case. Practitioners seem to inhabit an intermediate, overlapping space between classical anthropological definitions of priest and shaman. While contemporary Lakota religious leaders are increasingly full-time practitioners, they also clearly utilize helper spirits, mediate between worlds, and are believed to leave their bodies and enter into trance states. Labeling Lakota ritual practitioners as shamans has met with some resistance and criticism, but I believe there is substantial evidence supporting the notion that Lakota ritual practitioners may be better understood as shamans as opposed to priests.

because he has marvelous power and wisdom so that he can speak and do as the *Wakan* do.”

Densmore’s *wakǰáŋhaŋ* is whom Sword generally calls “holy man,” “priest,” or “priest of the old religion” (Walker 1917:152–153; 1991:91–92). *Wičháša wakǰáŋpi* (holy men) were those old, wise men who accumulated many spirit guardians, abilities, powers, and methods throughout their lives. They obtained or attained visions of the most powerful other-than-human persons, usually the celestial or sky deities, such as the Sun, Wind, and the Moving Deity (*Škáŋ*). Being a holy man or shaman came with great responsibility to one’s people. The great distinguishing characteristic of a shaman was wisdom (Walker 1917:72, 199; 1991:38, 43).

The rigorous training of holy men distinguished them from other practitioner categories. One did not usually become a shaman overnight. Through the master-apprentice model it took years to learn the ways of the shamans and how to perform the rituals of the Lakotas. The training of a holy man involved a series of initiation rites, such as the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhipi* (Mystery Dance) and the Sun Dance, as well as the mastering of Lakota social customs, philosophy, myth, ritual, songs, techniques, and the esoteric languages of the spirits and holy men. Only shamans could train and produce new shamans. As Walker (1917:92) explains, “The practices of a Shaman must be learned by association with other Shamans.”

Becoming a holy man often required more than just one successful Vision Quest. Most neophytes were required to dance a particularly trying form of the Sun Dance as a prerequisite to becoming a holy man (Walker 1991:95). As Little Wound, American Horse, and Lone Star explained to Walker in 1896, “If one wishes to become a shaman of

the highest order, he should dance the Sun Dance suspended from the pole so that his feet will not touch the ground” (Walker 1991:181–182).²⁴⁹ Those who danced the Sun Dance to become holy men usually led the other dancers as well. Before the ritual began a wise holy man harangued his apprentice and candidate for holy-man status, instilling in him the worldview, values, expectations, and responsibilities of a Lakota shaman. Walker reports that the candidate:

. . . should be informed that as a Shaman the people will consider that he is endowed with a knowledge of the laws and customs of the Lakota and supernatural wisdom; that he can communicate with supernatural beings and interpret Their wills; that he will have supervisory authority over all ceremonies; and that if he knows the will of a supernatural being to be that any law, customs, or ceremony be altered or prohibited, he should act according to such will. He should also be informed that the people will hold him to strict account for his action as a Shaman, and if they find that he exercises his authority only to gratify his own desires, the *akicita*, or marshals of the camp, may adjudge and punish him according to his offense, even to the taking of his life. If, in the exercise of his authority or attributes as a Shaman he wrongfully injures another, the one injured may exact from him a satisfaction for the injury, which might be to take his life. [Walker 1917:72]

Although it was not absolutely necessary to dance the Sun Dance to become a shaman, those who did dance the fourth and most trying grade, suspended from the *čhaŋwákħaŋ* (sacred tree), were held in higher public esteem and hence acquired more prestige than those who did not. Only shamans could mentor someone who wished to dance the Sun Dance to become a shaman, another example of the master-apprentice model. Clearly, holy men or shamans were the masters in the master-apprentice model: they were frequently the leaders of the Dream Societies atop the religious hierarchy,

²⁴⁹ This prerequisite is apparently still a rite of passage for would-be holy men among most ritual groups at Pine Ridge today (Posthumus 2008-2014).

having few people above them dictating what they should or should not do (Buechel n.d.:31; Walker 1917:58, 62–66; 1991:104). As Hassrick (1964:288) explains, “Shamans formed a kind of priesthood and were granted almost theocratic authority in periods of religious observance and during times of national crisis.”

Becoming a holy man required years of experience, observation, participation, and training with an older, wiser, more experienced and established holy man. I have labeled this method the master-apprentice model for transmitting sacred, religious, and ritual knowledge from one individual to another and from one generation to the next. As Sword explains:

Wicasa wakan (holy man, or shaman) is made by other shamans by ceremony and teaching that which a shaman should know. He is made holy by the ceremony so that he can communicate with *Wakan Tanka*, and the ceremony also prepares his outfit and gives to it supernatural powers. This outfit may be anything that has a spirit imparted to it so that it will have all the powers of the spirit and all that are used to cover and keep it in. This outfit is his *wasicun* (ceremonial implement) and it is very holy, and should be considered as a God. It must be prayed [over] for its power. A shaman governs all the ceremonies of the Lakota, so he must know them. He must know *iyé wakan* (holy language, or the language of the shamans), and *hanbłogłaka* (spirit language). He must know all the laws and customs of the Lakotas, for he may prohibit or change any of them. But if he does this it must be because it is the will of *Wakan Tanka*. He is entitled to sit in any council, but he should not speak on any subject, except to tell the will of *Wakan Tanka*. He is feared by all the people, but if it is found that he deceives the people he may be punished by the *akicita* (marshals) in any manner they see fit, even to killing him.

When a shaman has been punished by the marshals he is no longer regarded as a holy man. Maybe he will then become *wicasa hmunga* (wizard). The oldest or wisest shamans are the most respected. A shaman should conduct the larger ceremonies, but anyone may perform the smaller. A shaman may prohibit anyone from performing anyone or more of the ceremonies. A shaman can make anything taboo to anyone, or he can lift any taboo. There are many diseases that only a shaman can cure. He does this with his *wasicun* and not with medicines. [Walker 1991:79–80]

Wičháša wakháŋpi were inaugurated not only through dancing the fourth Sun Dance grade, but also through another terminal rite of passage, the *Wakháŋ Wačhípi* (Mystery Dance). Membership in this selective society was strictly limited: only the most successful, prestigious, proven, and powerful practitioners were invited to participate in the Mystery Dance. Frazier asserts that “all members of Wak’á-wac’ipi were dreamers; but not all dreamers were members of Wak’á-wac’ipi” (in Deloria n.d.:8):

. . . it was very difficult to become a member of Wak’á-wac’ipi. One had to be picked and chosen because of a good character and report; one could not will to belong; but could only be chosen. The members did the choosing, and only when a member died, so that a new one was necessary to make up the number. The membership was large, but it was very selective for all that.

All members of Wak’á-wac’ipi were Dreamers or Wak’á-men or women. That means that through dreams or some other means of communication, the individuals had gained power from the supernatural and were in harmonious relation with it. [Deloria n.d.:7–8]

The Mystery Dance was the mechanism through which practitioners received their ceremonial bundles (*wašičuŋpi* or *wóphiyepi*) and other accoutrements, knowledge, and powers distinctive of the holy-man position or social status. Through participation in this rite individuals were taught the sacred lore, mythology, social customs, and history of the people; how to perform and conduct the greater and lesser Lakota ceremonies; and the sacred, esoteric languages of the shamans (*wakháŋ iyá*) and the spirits (*haŋblóglaka*) (Walker 1991:30, 117–118, 136–137). In other words, the Mystery Dance was the mechanism by which practitioners ascended the ladder of Lakota religious hierarchy or structure. Therefore, participation in the *Wakháŋ Wačhípi* was an absolutely crucial

distinguishing factor between holy men and other practitioner types.²⁵⁰ Only after this arduous period of apprenticeship, instruction, observation, participation, and sacrifice did a practitioner become a master of ceremonies, prognosticator, prescriber, proscriber, and a religious and magico-medico-ritual originator.

Holy men were the repositories of sacred knowledge. They were often the tribal historians, storytellers of traditional narratives and myths, and pipe keepers.²⁵¹ As Walker (1991:234) explains, “the shamans were the proper persons to explain difficult and obscure matters in the mythology or ceremonial of the Lakotas.” In general, shamans taught the people how to be sacred and how to be Lakota. They shaped the ethos and worldview of their followers, instilling in them the lore, values, and virtues of the Lakotas. They were wise and trusted councilors who gave advice on all religious matters, they trained other practitioners, and they were the religious authorities, originators, and gatekeepers of the tribe (Walker 1917:56; 1991:94). Holy men often assigned tutelary or totemic spirit guardians to their followers (Lynd 1889:161–163). In many cases the doctrines that only the shamans knew, the ceremonies, and the esoteric languages comprised the restricted knowledge that only holy men had access to (Walker 1917:72, 79; 1991:234).

Shamans had many varied abilities that other practitioner categories did not necessarily possess. *Wičháša wakháŋpi* communicated with, interpreted, and spoke for

²⁵⁰ Apparently, there was a close connection between the Mystery Dance and the origins and discovery of medicine, cures, and disease theory. Describing his father, a powerful practitioner, No Flesh explains, “When he was a very young man, he had a vision, in which the great bear took him to the region of the spirits. He joined the spirits in the mystery dance and they instructed him in regard to all diseases and the medicines good for them.”

²⁵¹ This represents a continuity with the past in that many contemporary Oglala religious leaders are storytellers, educators, tribal historians, and pipe and bundle keepers.

the *wakǰáŋ* beings in the universe. They interpreted all sacred communications, their will was regarded as the will of the spirits, and their word was authoritative. They were viewed as the earthly manifestations and representatives of the spirits. For instance, Lynd (1889:161–162) describes how among the Dakotas a young man first purified himself before approaching a holy man with a filled pipe and tears in his eyes, ritually wailing, crying to or for, and quite literally *praying to* the practitioner from Sioux perspectives. This is exactly how an individual would properly approach a spirit.

Through divinatory practice holy men were the great prognosticators of the Lakota people. They diagnosed sickness to discern its cause, nature, who was most qualified to cure it, and prescribed and proscribed courses of treatment and physical and psychological therapy (Hassrick 1964:290). Some shamans had the ability to divine the future, locate lost objects, control and manipulate the weather, and call animals closer to camp in times of famine and scarcity. Some holy men were capable of transmutation, possessing the power of invisibility, while others could ward off evil influences, provide magical protection, heal through the invocation and aid of good spirits, and drive away evil spirits through the use of their ceremonial bundles. Holy men could detect acts of sorcery/witchcraft and identify which spirits were responsible for various illnesses. In this way they were able to locate the cause or source and character of sickness (often conceptualized as a physical object and manifested as pain), an important prerequisite to the treatment process. Holy men also produced and consecrated charms, potions, and talismans for their customers, patients, and families, providing the necessary songs and ritual formulae required to activate their potencies. It is unlikely that a single holy man could have obtained, acquired, or mastered all the abilities and techniques

described above, but certainly some exceptional individuals mastered and practiced many of them (Densmore 2001:245; Walker 1917:74–75, 79, 90–92, 132–135, 153, 161; 1991:78–79, 85, 94–95, 106, 113, 117, 129, 140).

Each shaman had his own ceremonial bundle or implement (*wóphiye, wašíčun*) containing the *šičún* (spiritual essence, potency) or *thún* of his spirit guardian.²⁵² Because only holy men conducted the ceremonies pertaining to the most powerful spirits, usually the celestial deities, only holy men could possess ceremonial bundles imbued with the essences of the more potent manifestations of *Wakháŋ Thánka*. The ceremonial bundle was prayed over, invoked, and utilized in the holy man's *wakháŋ* doings; in treating and curing the sick and wounded, in expelling evil influences and restoring patients back to health, in evoking²⁵³ occult power into various objects, and in other magico-medico-ritual undertakings. According to Sword, "When the holy man treats the sick, he performs a ceremony and invokes his ceremonial bag and the familiar (*sicun*) in it does what he asks it to do" (Walker 1991:93). The *wašíčun*, potency of a *wakháŋ*, and ritual regalia and paraphernalia were the *šičúnpi* of the shaman. A holy man's ceremonial bundle was supremely powerful, wrapped up in the identity of its owner, and revered as the being whose potency it contained²⁵⁴ (Walker 1917:152–153; 1991:90).

²⁵² Sword occasionally equates *thún* with *šičún*. See Sword (in Walker 1917:153).

²⁵³ "In ritual magic," explains Greer (2003:244), invocation is "the act of bringing a deity or other spiritual power into the magician. It is distinguished from evocation, which is the process of summoning a spirit into some form of manifestation external to the magician."

²⁵⁴ According to Sword, "A *Wasicun* is one of the *Wakan* beings. It is the least of them, but if its *ton* is from a powerful being it may be more powerful than many of the *Wakan* beings. This *Wasicun* is what the priests do their work with, but the white people call it the medicine bag, which is a mistake, for there are no medicines in it. A medicine bag is a bag that doctors have their medicines in. If a man has a *Wasicun* he may pray to it, for it is the same as the *Wakan* being whose *ton* (*wan*) is in it" (Walker 1917:153). Here Sword appears to equate *šičún* with both *thún* and *thunwán*.

A holy man's ceremonial bundle could exorcize or control malevolent spirits, such as *Iktómi* (Trickster), *Wazíya* (Wizard), *Wakáŋka* (Witch), and *Anúŋ Ité* (Double Woman). Through their ceremonial bundles shamans could evoke occult or parapsychological power into external objects, imbuing them with potency. Or, alternately, they could use their *wašičuŋpi* to annul the potency of an object through the proper prescribed ritual. *Wakháŋ Tháŋka* gave a *wičháša wakháŋ* the power that rendered him *wakháŋ* and the ability to impart *thúŋ* (spiritual essence of a *wakháŋ* being) into anything (Walker 1917:90–92, 152–153). This ability to impart or evoke *thúŋ* into external objects and people was a significant factor distinguishing holy men from other practitioner types.

The *wašičuŋ* (ceremonial bundle) was central to a holy man's practice. They invoked, utilized, and evoked their ceremonial bundles and the familiar spirit guardian (*šičúŋ*) encased therein in their ritual practice. They knew distinct songs and incantations, prayers, or ritual formulae for each other-than-human person they invoked. Each practitioner could have different songs for each spirit being, all of which were in the esoteric, symbolic language of the holy men (Walker 1991:95). According to Sword, "This is . . . the speech that only the shamans know. The shamans speak this speech in all their ceremonies and songs so that the people may not learn those things that only the shamans should know" (Walker 1991:94). Curtis (1908:63) corroborates the words of Walker's interlocutors. Through the Vision Quest, he explains, a spirit being taught—and hence gave—a practitioner "certain prayers and songs, which will always remain the same in different ceremonies. The songs and prayers of two medicine-men taught by the same animal vary somewhat, though all bear resemblance to one another."

Holy men alone could produce and consecrate sacred bundles for members of their families and followings, also providing the ceremonial songs and ritual formulae required to activate their potencies. Anyone who wished to conduct a ceremony or become a shaman had to first select a holy man to prepare a ceremonial bundle for him (Walker 1917:88, 90–92, 158; 1991:129, 242–243).

Holy men also painted, and hence consecrated, people. Individuals who were to become *akíčhita*, *hujká*, or other formal social statuses were first instructed and counseled and then painted and consecrated by shamans in ritual settings. The symbolic designs painted first by shamans became insignia to the recipient, indicative of an office or status. These markings were first painted by a holy man in ceremony, as in the marking of *akíčhita* and *hujká* candidates. Thereafter, the individual gained the right to renew the paint at any time. Red paint, in particular, symbolized the sacred powers of the holy men.²⁵⁵ Additionally, shamans painted the hands of Sun Dancers so they could handle ritual objects and sanctified their regalia and implements through incensing, another form of consecration (Walker 1917:70–71, 76–77, 144; 1991:67, 281).

In other words, holy men produced *wakháŋ* transformations. As Sword explains, “When a priest uses any object in performing a ceremony that object becomes endowed with a spirit, not exactly a spirit, but something like one, the priests call it *tonwan* or *ton*. Now anything that thus acquires *ton* is *wakan*, because it is the power of the spirit or

²⁵⁵ The Oglalas possessed a detailed symbolic color classification. According to One Star, “Red is the color of the sun; blue, the color of the moving spirit; green the color of the spirit of the earth; and yellow is the color of the spirit of the rock. These colors are also for other spirits. Blue is the color of the wind; red is the color of all spirits. The colors are the same for the friends of the Great Spirits. Black is the color of the bad spirits. A man who paints red is pleasing to the spirits” (Walker 1917:159).

quality that has been put into it. A *wicasa wakan* has the power of the *wakan* beings” (Walker 1917:152). The ability to cause transformations and impart magical potency (*thúŋ* or *thúŋwáŋ*) into people and objects distinguished holy men from medicine men or herbalists. As Feather on Head explains, “I can give magic power to things. I can make the mysterious things. I have power over the Indians to do mysterious things to them. I can cure the sick and I can make the well sick. If they come to me and listen to me, I can do mysterious things for them” (Walker 1991:215).

Holy men directed the ceremonies. They were the masters of ceremony in all major rituals, such as the Sweat Lodge, Vision Quest, *Huŋká*, Buffalo Sing, and minor ceremonies, such as the Piercing of the Ears and naming of young children.²⁵⁶ According to Walker’s interlocutors, the Sun Dance “must be conducted by a shaman who knows all the customs of the people. . . . He must know all the secret things of the shamans” (Walker 1991:181). Shamans were the leaders and establishers of all ceremonial camps, could interfere with social customs, and they alone could alter ceremonies, acting as the religious and ritual innovators or *bricoleur* of the Lakotas, fashioning novel constructions of reality with the elements at hand. Holy men alone could promulgate new ceremonies and determine the form and flow of ritual. In other words, shamans decided what was correct, proper, and traditional in the religious and magico-medico-ritual domains.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Holy men directed all the major or great ceremonies because they pertained to all the people collectively. If something went wrong or was done incorrectly all the people suffered (Walker 1991:68, 81). In general, holy men saw to the collective religious and magico-medico-ritual needs of the people, while medicine men or herbalists saw to their individual needs. This represents a general theme: holy men saw to the collective needs of their people, such as episodes of drought, famine, epidemics, and the like.

²⁵⁷ Today “the elders” or simply “tradition” are the claimed normative or ideal authorities in determining what is proper and how to conduct ceremonies. However, in actual practice it is the influential leaders who train and influence others who determine the proper ways to conduct rituals. Other practitioners adopt the forms that the most prominent leaders practice. It is these well-known practitioners who are the actual underlying authorities in the religious and ritual domains.

Further, holy men could impose, dictate, implement, and lift taboos on others, even chiefs. In this way holy men were also influential civil and political leaders. Knowing and conducting all the ceremonies was truly the distinguishing characteristic of a holy man (Walker 1917:58, 61, 67–69, 78, 121–122; 1991:67–68, 74, 81–82, 89, 181).

Malevolent or antisocial holy men could hinder or terminate life movement, causing or inflicting misfortune, sickness, and death through their songs, incantations, and ceremonies. Illnesses inflicted by holy men were considered “different” (*thókeča*) from ordinary physical ailments and often could only be treated or cured by another, more potent holy man with the aid of his *wašíčuŋ* (Walker 1917:163; 1991:91). For instance, if the *akíčhita* (camp police) wrongfully blamed or punished a holy man for some indiscretion or deception he could curse them (Walker 1991:96).

Alternately, benevolent holy men could sustain and perpetuate life movement, treating and curing sickness through the ritual invocation of their ceremonial bundles, song, and prayer. In general, holy men specialized in the treatment of spiritual, paranormal, psychological, psychosomatic, and symbolic illnesses, such as various types of soul-loss (renewing and revitalizing an afflicted *niyá* or retrieving and reincorporating an errant *naǵi*) and disease-object intrusion (whether it be a foreign object or projectile shot and implanted through sorcery/witchcraft or a case of malevolent spirit possession). Normatively, shamans treated the psychological, psychosomatic, or symbolic ailments of their people using mystico-spiritual or magico-ritual methods and techniques. They prepared very mysterious medicines that were consecrated²⁵⁸ and imbued with power

²⁵⁸ Various Lakota forms for consecrate include *wakǵáŋ káǵa* (to make *wakǵáŋ*), *wógluzepi* (consecrated; taboo; from *ogluze* [to dip out from into one’s own dish]), *yawákǵáŋ* (to consider *wakǵáŋ*), and *yuwákǵáŋ* (to make holy or special, consecrate). *Wókǵáŋ* or *wówakǵáŋ* is something consecrated to the *wakǵáŋ* or for ceremonial purposes (see Buechel 1970:371, 526, 630, 655; Walker 1991:98, 112).

through their incantations (*phikhíyapi*) and ritual formulae. If a malevolent spirit or influence (*thūwán*) was the cause of a sickness, it was best treated and cured by a holy man, not a medicine man or herbalist.

According to Sword:

The holy man is the most potent in treating the sick. He can speak with the Great Mystery and they will help him. He does not treat the sick with medicines. He has a ceremonial bag. It is called *wopiye* in Lakota. This does not have medicines in it. It has a mystery [*wakhán*] in it and this mystery makes the bag very potent. It has all the potency of the mystery. The holy man invokes his ceremonial bundle or bag. It may be like a bag or it may be like a bundle. Or it may be anything that is revealed to him in a vision. This bag is prepared with much ceremony by other holy men and the thing in it is made holy by ceremony. It may represent the Bear or the Buffalo, or the *wakan* of the sky, or anything. Then it is like a part of himself.²⁵⁹ It is like his ghost [*niyá*] only it has more power than a man's ghost has.

The holy man prays to his ceremonial bag. He must know the song that belongs to it and the right words to say in praying to it. Then when he sings this song and says these words, the bag will do as he bids. It is not the bag which does this but that which is in the bag. This is called *sicun* in Lakota. The bag is called *wasicun*. A holy man does not give medicine to the sick unless he is a medicine man also. If he is a medicine man, he may give medicines and invoke his ceremonial bag also, and the bag will compel the medicine to do as he wishes it. [Walker 1991:92]

Holy men were the highest-ranking and most potent and powerful ritual practitioners among the Lakotas. Through years of experience, observation, participation, and sacrifice they accumulated numerous other-than-human spirit guardians, powers, and abilities and mastered a variety of ritual curing techniques. They doctored and healed

²⁵⁹ A holy man symbolically identified with his ceremonial bag or bundle (*wóphiye* or *wašičuŋ*), which was a manifestation and representation of a particular spirit being, allowing for ritual transformations to occur. The close connection between a human and the other-than-human person (*šičúŋ*) represented by and encased within his ceremonial bundle (*wašičuŋ*) evokes classical anthropological and sociological discourse on totemism.

mainly through the use of their ceremonial bundles, not necessarily with medicines (*pěžúta*), although many undoubtedly also functioned as herbalists. As Walker's interlocutors explain, "A shaman is a wise man who has intercourse with the spirits. He is generally a medicine man. He knows about the medicines and what sickness they are good for" (Walker 1991:104). Holy men were wise masters of ceremony, leading and directing the great religious rituals, and intermediaries or intercessors, mediating between the common people and the spirits.²⁶⁰ The spirits made their wishes known largely in two ways: through direct communication in the Vision Quest or through holy men. Shamans were considered *wak'hán* by the common people in relation to humankind in their role as intermediaries. Holy men were the earthly manifestations and representatives of the spirits, and giving to the shamans was the equivalent of sacrificing to the spirits (Walker 1917:79, 135, 153, 161; 1991:79, 85, 94, 97–98, 104, 106, 113).

The holy men represented *Wak'hán Thánka*, communicating with and speaking for the spirits (Walker 1991:94, 118). They had access to restricted esoteric knowledge that only the most powerful practitioners knew and understood, such as mythology, religious symbolism, philosophy, and ideology; the order of operations of ritual; and the holy languages of the shamans and spirits. Holy men were the gatekeepers, and they guarded their religious and magico-medico-ritual knowledge, limiting access to it (Walker 1917:158; 1991:95–96, 105, 117). As Sword explains, "the secret things of the shamans . . . should be told only to one who is to become a shaman" (Walker 1991:81). Lesser practitioners—usually younger individuals with less accumulated spirit helpers, knowledge, power, mastered methods and techniques, prestige, followings, and wealth—

²⁶⁰ Powers (1986:217) maintains that mediation is the most significant feature distinguishing holy men from herbalists.

had to work their way up through the ranks, similar in some regards to the age-grade societies of other Northern Plains tribes, diachronically, processually, and cumulatively gaining access, knowledge, experience, and power throughout life. Proof of ritual efficacy came only with experience and public display. Prestige, reputation, social standing, and the attainment of a following were functions of proof of ritual efficacy, while wealth was a function of prestige and social standing.

Next we will examine the counterpart to the holy man, the *p̄hežúta wičháša* (medicine man) or herbalist. As opposed to holy men, we will see that typically medicine men: (1) did not utilize ceremonial bundles in their practice; (2) did not possess bundles with the most potent spirit essences; (3) did not prepare sacred bundles for others; (4) did not consecrate and paint people in ritual settings; (5) did not act as intermediaries between human and other-than-human persons; (6) did not direct the major ceremonies of the Lakotas; (7) were not the leaders of Dream Societies; and (8) were not at the top of the religious structure or the masters in the master-apprentice model of training and transmitting sacred knowledge.

6.2 *P̄hežúta Wičháša* (Medicine Man, Herbalist)

Densmore's final method for treating the sick is the giving of herbs. Practicing this method were those individuals who had knowledge of plants and herbs and their medicinal use and value. This knowledge could be bestowed by a spirit in a vision, but could also be learned, inherited, or purchased from other practitioners. As No Flesh explains, normatively "The medicinemen learn their medicines from the spirits in a vision. The spirits tell them what to use and how to use it. Their medicines are nearly

always herbs (*wato*) or roots (*hutkan*). Therefore, all their medicines are called grass roots (*pezuta*)” (Walker 1917:163).

In Lakota, this practitioner category is called *pěžúta wičháša/wínyan* (medicine man/woman), from *pěžúta* (grass roots, herbs) (Walker 1917:152). One of the major definitional problems we have faced is that frequently *all* Lakota practitioners are conventionally glossed as medicine men. As we have seen in the section on medicine this is an invasive misnomer. We may refer to *pěžúta wičháša/wínyan* as medicine men/women only if we understand and define these terms carefully and precisely, as we must with all the magico-medico-ritual terms discussed herein.

This type of practitioner was the herbalist or giver of herbal medicines and remedies. They were the pharmacists and ethnobotanists of the tribe, having obtained or attained extensive knowledge of the environment, flora, and fauna, including herbs, plants, animals, disease, physiology, and some psychology. Medicine men treated and cured the sick but did not generally instruct other practitioners in the master-apprentice model, prepare and consecrate sacred bundles, or direct ceremonies, aside from their own idiosyncratic doctoring rites.

The *šičúŋpi* (familiar; spirit guardians; potencies of *wakháŋ* beings imparted to inanimate substance) of medicine men were the medicines, herbs, and pharmacopeia they used in their practice, the medicine bags or bundles in which those medicines were stored, and their doctoring implements. We must highlight and make note of this important distinguishing factor between holy men and medicine men: a holy man treated the sick and performed his *wakháŋ wičhóh'an* (ceremonies) using his *wašičuŋ* (ceremonial bundle), which was the *šičúŋ* of a holy man or shaman (*wičháša wakháŋ*); a

medicine man, on the other hand, treated the sick and performed his doctoring rites using his *ožúha p̄hežúta* (medicine bag), which, along with the medicines and medical implements and paraphernalia contained therein, was the *šičúŋ* of a medicine man or herbalist (*p̄hežúta wičháša*). Sword, among others, firmly distinguishes between these two practitioner types, their ritual implements, and methods:

The common people of the Lakotas call that which is the wrapping of a *wasicun*, *wopiye*. Most of the interpreters interpret this *wopiye* as medicine bag. That is wrong, for the word neither means a bag nor medicine. It means a thing to do good with. A good interpretation would be that it is the thing of power.

Ožuha pejuta is a medicine bag. *Ožuha* means a bag, and *pejuta* means a medicine. *Ožuha pejuta* means simply a bag to keep medicines in. It is the same as any other bag, and it has no more power than a bag to keep corn in.

Often when a shaman is performing a ceremony with his *wasicun* the interpreters say he is a medicine man making medicine. This is very foolish. It is the same as if when the minister is giving communion it was said he is a physician making medicine for the communicants. [Walker 1991:80]

Medicine men may best be conceived of as the medical doctors, physicians, or pharmacists of nineteenth-century Lakota society, treating and healing the physical, corporeal body as opposed to the spiritual, non-corporeal aspects of human beings; physiologically manipulating certain organs and body parts. Although there was a distinct spiritual element to their practice—in that disease and medicine were mysterious (*wak̄hán*) by nature²⁶¹ and all practitioners invoked the aid of the spirits as a preliminary

²⁶¹ According to Walker's (1991:106) interlocutors, "The mysterious (*wakan*) of anything is the *tontonsni* [without physical properties]. The *tontonsni* is that which causes it to act on other things or on mankind. It is that which causes medicines to act on people. It is that which spirits act on the people when they are not present. It is that from which the shamans and medicine men get their power. It is that which the spirits get from things which are offered them."

rite—medicine men were not considered the great, wise spiritual leaders of the Lakotas (Walker 1991:105). That role was filled by the *wičháša wakǰáŋpi* (holy men, shamans), although, as with all the categories outlined herein, a single individual may practice one or all of these methods and be considered one or all of these types. In other words, these categories are cumulative, permeable, and not mutually exclusive.

As Standing Bear recalls:

A medicine-man was simply a healer – curing, or trying to cure, such few diseases and ailments as beset his people *in the body, having nothing to do with their spiritual suffering*. A medicine-man was no holier than other men, no closer to Wakan Tanka and no more honored than a brave or a scout. He lived the same life in the band that other men did, wore the same kind of clothes, ate the same variety of food, lived in the same sort of tipi, and took care of his wife and family, becoming a fair hunter and sometimes a very good one. More often he was an excellent scout, but seldom a great warrior. But as a member of his band he occupied no superior position, and simply filled his calling with as much skill as he could command, just as any *physician*, lawyer, or baker does today.

The medicine-man was a true benefactor of his people in that his work was founded upon and promoted the Indian ideal of brotherhood [i.e., kinship], and all service rendered to fellow beings was for the good of the tribe. Such wisdom and ‘magic power’ as he had achieved must be shared, as were food and clothing, with his fellow man. He made no charge for his helpfulness in ministering to the sick, for the comforting songs he sang, nor the strength he gave them; and when a medicine-man was called, he never was known to refuse the summons.²⁶² [Standing Bear 2006b:203; emphasis added]

Medicine men normatively treated the common (*ikčéka*) physical ailments, injuries, and wounds of the people, not soul-loss, disease-object intrusion, or malevolent spirit or influence (*tǰuŋwáŋ*) possession, which were the mysterious (*wakǰáŋ*),

²⁶² In fact, payment (*wíši*) in the traditional manner of the giving of food, new clothing, a horse or horses, or similar gifted items was an essential terminal rite or constituent element of the ritual treatment process. See Buechel (n.d.) and Walker (1991:199, 237).

psychological, psychosomatic, or spiritual ailments of the people, treated by holy men (Walker 1917:163). Consequently, the treatment methods of medicine men were physiological, more scientific or practical, and akin to standard medical treatment, as opposed to the mystico-spiritual or magico-ritual methods and practice of holy men. As Sword explains, “When the medicine man treats the sick, his medicines must be swallowed or smoked or steamed” (Walker 1991:92). Although the medicines they used were often revealed in a divine manner or trance state the medicine man’s practice was based largely on accumulated, acute, and systematic knowledge of nature (botany, flora, fauna, etc.), physiology, and trial and error akin to contemporary Western conceptions of medicine and science. But, again, this does not detract from the spiritual element inherent in a medicine man’s methods: each medicine was associated with and required a distinct song and ritual formula to activate its power, without which the medicine and treatment was ineffectual. “When one has a medicine,” Sword explains, “he must have a song for it and he must know something to say every time he uses it. If the wrong song or invocation is used, the medicine will do no good. Then another medicine man should try his medicines” (Walker 1991:91). We will recall that frequently holy men prepared and consecrated medicine bundles for young medicine men and provided the songs and ritual formulae required to activate their potencies.

Some herbalists had and utilized only one medicine, while others had and utilized many. According to One Star, “A medicineman knows the songs of his medicines and they are his *Sicun*”²⁶³ (Walker 1917:159). The practitioner may discover these medicines

²⁶³ Perhaps this has led to some of the confusion between medicine men and holy men and their respective bundles. The *wašičuŋ* or *ožúha pñežúta* of a medicine man was his medicine bundle containing his *šičúŋ*, which were the very medicines and paraphernalia he used in his practice. The *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* of a holy

or they may be revealed in a vision or dream, although typically a learned holy man counseled and interpreted the vision of a novice, instructing and directing him on a subsequent plan of action. As there were many types of medicines, so there were many types or subcategories of medicine men, each associated with the specific sicknesses they treated and specialized in and the medicines they used. However, medicine men did not have the ability to cause sickness or inflict it on others, as did holy men and conjurors.

Apparently some medicine men historically belonged to Dream Societies while others did not (Walker 1991:91). As Walker's interlocutors explain, "If one wants to become a medicine man he seeks a vision,²⁶⁴ and if he sees the right thing it will instruct him what he must do. It will also instruct him what medicine he must use. Then when he has related his vision to the wise men [i.e., holy men], they will tell him what he must do. When they have instructed him, he will belong to a cult in medicine [Dream Society]" (Walker 1991:105).

Thunder Bear elaborates on the limited determinative role of the visionary experiences of prospective medicine men. If the knowledge obtained or attained in the Vision Quest:

. . . pertains to the sick or to anything that may be used as a medicine, this knowledge constitutes him a medicine man so far as that particular medicine is concerned. But it gives him no other knowledge or power. If the vision pertains to a particular kind or class of medicine, as, for instance, Bear medicine, he must become the pupil of some Bear medicine man and learn what the medicines are, how to prepare them, how to

man was his ceremonial or sacred bundle containing his *šičúŋ*, which was the *thúŋ* or potency of his spirit guardian.

²⁶⁴ This sentence clearly indicates the hierarchical role of holy men vis-à-vis medicine men: in order to become a practitioner one had to first seek a vision, which required seeking the mentorship and direction of a holy man or shaman.

administer them, and the songs and ceremonies that pertain to them.
[Walker 1991:132]

Normatively, a successful Vision Quest was a preliminary rite of passage beginning one's journey toward becoming a medicine man. After the initial vision encounter and establishment of a kinship relationship with an other-than-human person the master-apprentice model for transmitting sacred religious and magico-medico-ritual knowledge went into effect. The master-apprentice model built a philosophical foundation and honed the skills of the neophyte practitioner. We will recall that holy men were the masters and medicine men the apprentices in the hierarchical, seniority based master-apprentice model.

But the training process of a would-be medicine man was much less rigorous than that of a neophyte holy man, distinguishing the two types of practitioners. Ideally, a medicine man successfully sought a vision, received some brief instruction, and performed a trial run or two. He may even purchase his medicines, and the assistance of an established holy man was essential throughout this process. A holy man, to the contrary, required a vision or multiple visions and spent years apprenticing with an established holy man, learning the social customs, history, mythology, philosophy, doctrine, and ceremonies of the Lakotas in great detail. Much of this was accomplished through experience and participation, listening, observing, and doing, rather than speaking, all of which were and are cornerstones of the master-apprentice model. Finally, most prestigious holy men danced the fourth grade of the Sun Dance, being completely suspended from the sacred tree, which functioned as a final rite of passage in a long

series of initiation rites.²⁶⁵ The completion of the Sun Dance represented the conclusion of the liminal period in one's training, marking the reintegration of a practitioner into society, and recognizing him as a qualified and properly trained holy man ready to direct his own ceremonies and begin his own practice.

The differences between holy men and medicine men should now be apparent. Many nineteenth-century and contemporary Lakotas clearly differentiate between these two categories or types, which we have established as binary opposites (Bushotter 1937:Story 199; Densmore 2001; Posthumus 2008-2014; Walker 1917, 1991). Holy men treated psychological, psychosomatic, or symbolic sickness using mystico-spiritual or magico-ritual techniques. They were generally considered more potent in terms of efficacy, power, and healing abilities than their counterparts, the medicine men or herbalists, who treated physical or physiological sickness using techno-scientific techniques (see Figure 10). Our final category mediates or hinges between these two extremes, combining elements of both practitioner types. While holy men were the spiritual and cultural leaders of the Lakotas and medicine men the herbalists, medical practitioners, and physicians, *waphíya wičháša* (conjurors, magicians) represented an intermediate category of doctor-shamans who utilized both techno-scientific and mystico-spiritual methods in their practice. These practitioners used common and mysterious techniques to treat both physical or physiological ailments, as well as psychological, psychosomatic, or spiritual sickness.

²⁶⁵ Participation in the Mystery Dance functioned in a similar way historically.

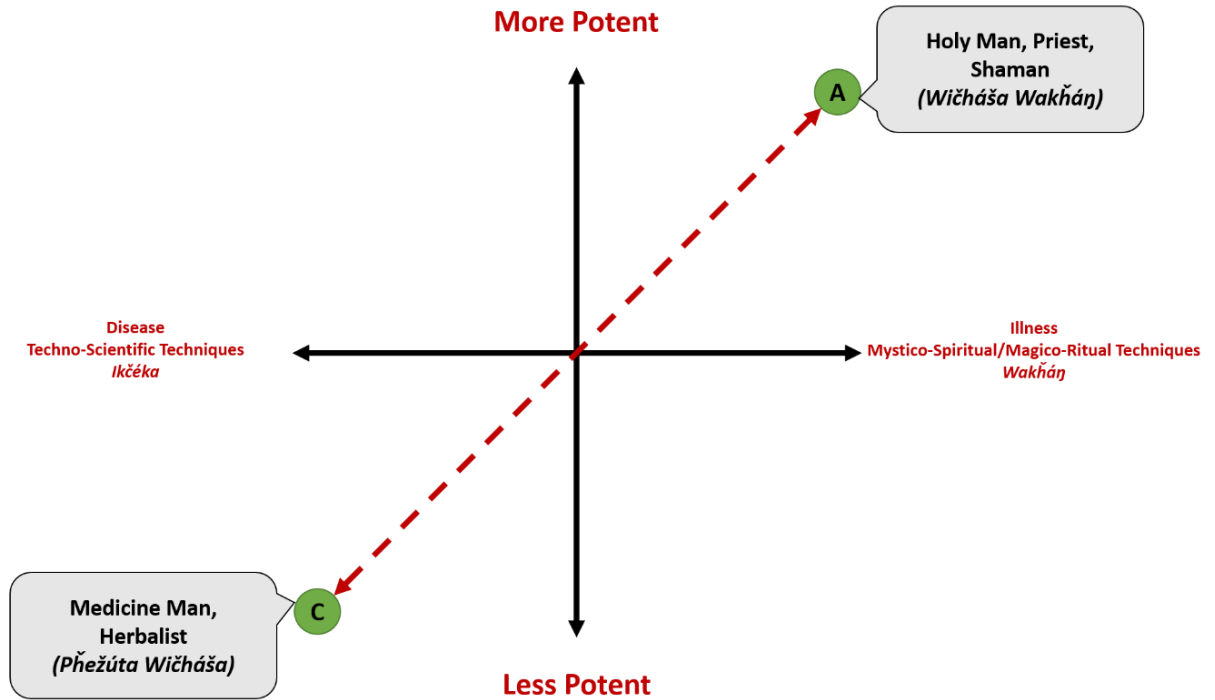


Figure 10: Holy Men and Medicine Men

6.3 *Waphíya Wičháša* (Conjurer, Magician, Extractor or Introducer of Illness)

Densmore’s second method for the treatment of the sick, “conjuring,” provides the intermediate pivot in our analysis between holy men and medicine men. Nineteenth-century conjurers or magicians, *waphíya wičháša* in Lakota, generally used methods characteristic of both practitioner types and had the ability to treat and cure both physical, corporeal (*ikčéka* [common]) sickness, as well as spiritual, noncorporeal (*wakḥán* [mysterious] or *thókeča* [different]) sickness. Their techniques ran the gamut from medico-techno-scientific to mystico-spiritual/magico-ritual. They are referred to in the literature conventionally as doctors, healers, conjurers, and magicians. As we have seen the general terms medicine man and holy man are also sometimes applied to conjurers or

magicians, indicative of their intermediate position in the classification of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners, but complicating our task here.

Conjurors were known for treating and doctoring the sick and for producing powerful charms and potions—at a price—for various people and purposes. Similar to holy men and medicine men many varieties or subcategories of conjurors existed in nineteenth-century Lakota society, both in terms of method or technique and other-than-human power source. Toad, Bear, Bird, Fish, *Heyókħa*, and Double Woman dreamers were particularly associated with the conjuror category, as well as the mysterious and menacing Bone Keepers discussed by Tyon (in Walker 1991:161–163). Apparently, dreaming of certain things, mainly terrestrial creatures or animals that roamed the earth, compelled an individual to become a conjuror (Walker 1991:159, 161). As Tyon explains, “Those men who become doctors, Indian doctors, do not do it intentionally. The dreams they have of animals are what cause them to believe they are doctors. . . . those men who are doctors dream of animals. That is why they are doctors. The people believe in them” (Walker 1991:161). The power of belief is significant and will be examined in greater detail below.

The training of a *waphíya wičháša* was more rigorous than that of a medicine man, but less extreme than that of a holy man. Most conjurors mastered various herbalist techniques and went on to accumulate multiple abilities, methods, powers, and spirit guardians through additional Vision Quests and apprenticeship with other reputable conjurors or holy men. However, the average conjuror had not danced the fourth and most extreme form of the Sun Dance or participated in the Mystery Dance, differentiating him from established holy men. Hence, most conjurors had not received ceremonial

bundles (*wašičuŋpi* or *wóphiyepi*) and therefore did not treat the sick with them (although they may have possessed medicine bundles [*ožúha p̃hežúta*]). Further, the average conjuror had not been trained extensively in the mythology, philosophy, social customs, and sacred lore of the Lakotas, having only a fragmentary knowledge of such things, as opposed to the systematic knowledge of the holy man. Finally, conjurors did not have extensive or comprehensive ritual knowledge, were not trained to direct the major ceremonies of the Lakotas, and did not speak and understand the esoteric languages of the shamans or spirits. In nearly every respect the conjuror occupied an intermediate space between the medicine man and the holy man.

While the spiritual or magico-ritual element of a medicine man's practice and repertoire was minimal and limited, the conjuror incorporated more mystical elements into his method. However, knowledge of conjuror practice is severely limited because they tended to treat their patients and manufacture their charms and potions in darkness and secrecy so no one knew precisely what they did²⁶⁶ (Walker 1991:92–93). A major distinction between the conjuror and the holy man is that the holy man, unless he was also an herbalist, utilized exclusively mystico-spiritual or magico-ritual techniques to treat psychological, psychosomatic, or symbolic sickness, invoking his *wašičuŋ* to aid him in his mysterious undertakings. The conjuror, being between the two extremes, likely did not solely use magico-ritual methods but incorporated techniques characteristic of both herbalists and holy men. The conjuror combined the techniques of the medicine man and holy man, practicing both psychological or symbolic and physical or physiological

²⁶⁶ Tyon claims that conjurors practiced their craft secretly because what they did was “very bad. . . . For that reason, they do not want others to know about it, it is said. They sometimes kill men by using medicine, they say” (Walker 1991:161).

manipulations of various organs and body parts, including the mind. The conjuror, like the holy man, incorporated aspects of what we refer to today as psychoanalysis and psychotherapy into his treatment repertoire (Lévi-Strauss 1963:198–201; Posthumus 2008-2014).

The fact that herbal medicines were rarely given to a conjuror's patient or victim as part of the treatment process distinguishes him from an herbalist. Treatment methods, in particular, are clues to differentiating Lakota practitioner types: holy men treat with their ceremonial bundles, medicine men treat with herbal medicines, and conjurors usually treat using some form of the *yaǵópa/yaphǎ* technique, extracting sickness by either blowing or sucking it out using the mouth, a bone tube, or some other hollow object²⁶⁷ (Fugle 1966:24). This method was generally used to treat cases of disease-object intrusion and involved the preliminal locating of the sickness, often through divinatory means; the liminal blowing or sucking out of the illness using the mouth or a long hollow object, such as an eagle-wing bone or a pipe stem; and finally the postliminal spitting out and public display of the sickness—often in the form of a worm, bug, feather, fingernail, toenail, or blood—to the patient and all onlookers present. Again, certain types of

²⁶⁷ Kapferer (2003:21) astutely notes how rites performed to counteract sorcery/witchcraft reveal the cosmologies—as negations—that are integral to its conception and practice. In the Lakota case diviners (holy men) were enlisted to identify acts of sorcery/witchcraft, and rites to counteract it involved the extraction of the sickness, conceived of as a foreign pollutant, disease-object, projectile, or poison, or, more broadly, as bad medicine or negativity. The Lakota terms for poison (*oǰáka*, *oǰágya*, *ikté*, and *ǰmúnǰa*) semantically focus on influencing or contaminating someone with negative power or losing spiritual power through contact with negative influences. These beliefs and countermeasures, rites and counterrites, reveal the underlying cosmological framework of Lakota sorcery/witchcraft, understood as the introduction of foreign objects, such as worms, maggots, fingernails, and other projectiles, embedded in Oglala belief and mythology. See Walker (1917:161–163).

dreamers (*iháŋblapi*) tended to be associated with this method, such as Toad and Bird dreamers²⁶⁸ and Bone Keepers (Walker 1991:159, 161).

Conjurors treated the sick generally in darkness, at night (*haŋhépi*), and secretly so that no one knew exactly what they did and how they did it. Sword refers to a magician who heals and makes others well—one who sustains and perpetuates life movement—as a *waphíya wičháša*, from *waphíya* (to cure or treat people, to conjure the sick). Sword refers to a magician who causes sickness—one who actively and purposefully disrupts life movement—as a *wakǎŋ škáŋ wičháša* (Fugle 1966:27; Walker 1991:92). This term is a mystery. It may refer to one whose spirit guardian is *Táku Škaŋškáŋ*, the patron deity of moving things represented by the sky, or it may refer to one who causes things to move in a mysterious manner. In any case, I was unable to solicit any information on the term *wakǎŋ škáŋ* from any contemporary practitioners.

Conjurors primarily treated victims of sorcery/witchcraft (Fugle 1966:24–25).²⁶⁹ In this way conjurors or benevolent magicians used magic that proceeded by extracting and curing sickness (usually by sucking or blowing), while sorcerers or malevolent magicians used magic that proceeded by introducing and causing sickness (usually through shooting, blowing, or other processes of malevolent magical attack). However, the human propensity for good or evil crosscuts all other categories, and hence both benevolent and malevolent magicians were capable of using magic for good or for evil.

²⁶⁸ The association between toads, birds, and sucking appears to be yet another example of imitative or homeopathic magic and the model of/model for bipolarity of ritual symbols: birds suck worms out of the ground, and so logically dreamers of birds use this technique also to suck out sickness. As Tyon explains, “Whatever these toads suck, they suck hard. So it is that a man who dreams of a toad is very *wakan*, they believe. From the time of his dream, he doctors people using his mouth. He takes all the bad blood out of the body, it is said” (Walker 1991:161).

²⁶⁹ Fugle (1966:25) notes the similarities between Lakota conjurors and the Ojibwe *kusabindugeyu* practitioner or shaman who cures primarily sorcery victims by sucking. The connections between Sioux and Ojibwe ritual and practitioners are both striking and fascinating and call for further investigation.

Perspective, context, and group expectations and sentiment cannot be underestimated, serving as the great variable or determinant in the social dynamics relating to ritual practitioners: one group's conjuror or benevolent magician is another's sorcerer or malevolent magician. Logically, then, sorcerers and witches legitimized, rationalized, and necessitated the existence of conjurors. The sorcerer provided job security for the conjuror and vice-versa. The relationship between conjuror, sorcerer, patient/victim, and social group was cyclical and significant. But more on that later.

Conjurors were also particularly renowned for the production of various charms and potions. At the request of their patients and customers—and for a handsome price—conjurors skillfully concocted powerful and alluring love medicines (*wiičhuwa*), often made from an extracted hair of the target or a sample of menstrual flow; good-luck charms for success in gambling, games, and hunting; or deadly poisons with which one could seek revenge and wreak havoc on one's enemies (Walker 1991:161–163, 242–243). According to Sword, a *wakháŋ škáŋ wičháša* (evil conjuror or magician who causes sickness) “makes charms and philters and he may make very deadly potions. He is in league with the great evil one. He can do mysterious things to anyone, either present or far away. The things he does or makes are not medicines. He makes charms to win games or to kill enemies, or to win the love of men and women” (Walker 1991:92). However, a conjuror lacked the ability to produce and consecrate ceremonial bundles (*wašičuŋpi* or *wóphiyepi*) for other practitioners. While they may have had the ability to practice various forms of treatment, sympathetic magic, and sorcery/witchcraft, conjurors apparently could not imbue objects with the *thúŋ* or *šičúŋ* (spiritual essence) of a spirit

being. This ability was reserved for holy men, who received their ceremonial bundles and learned how to impart potency into objects through the Mystery Dance.

Additionally, the conjuror did not direct the major ceremonies of the people, as did the holy man. Although a conjuror might belong to any one or none of the Dream Societies, he appears to have played a more idiosyncratic role in society, as opposed to the holy man who advised the tribal council and played more of a social and political role within his tribe. But as these categories are cumulative, permeable, and not mutually exclusive, a gifted and dedicated conjuror might prove and establish himself as a holy man and thus climb the ladder of Lakota religious hierarchy.

In terms of ascribed ability, power, and potency the conjuror again occupied a space between the medicine man and the holy man. Unlike a medicine man a conjuror had the ability to, in Sword's words, "cause disease by his mysterious powers" (Walker 1991:91). The human propensity for good or evil, along with the dreamer category, crosscuts the categories discussed herein, so that any type of practitioner using any type of method or technique might use his skill and power either to maintain and perpetuate life movement or to disrupt and terminate it; to create and sustain life or to hamper and destroy it. This ability to cause misfortune and inflict sickness induced the people to fear and detest malevolent magicians (Walker 1991:163).

Providing further evidence of the superior power of the conjuror vis-à-vis the medicine man is the fact that a medicine man could not successfully treat or cure a sickness produced by a conjuror. "If a magician has made one sick," explains Sword, "then medicines will not cure such a one. The magician or a holy man should treat such a person" (Walker 1991:92). Only another conjuror or a holy man, utilizing mystico-

spiritual or magico-ritual techniques, could successfully treat and cure a sickness caused by a *waphíya wičháša*.²⁷⁰ Pitted against a psychological or symbolic illness the medico-techno-scientific knowledge and techniques of the medicine man were largely impotent. However, the holy man was more potent than either the conjuror or the medicine man. As Sword explains, “A holy man may be a magician also. But such men are to be feared and the people will not patronize them. A holy man is more potent than a medicine man or a magician. He can cause his ceremonial bag to overcome the medicines and charms of the others” (Walker 1991:92). Again, we see that the conjuror was truly the intermediate category between the holy man and the medicine man (see Figure 11).

Having established the tripartite division of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioner types and the significance of the intermediate role of the conjuror or magician between the holy man and the medicine man we may now proceed to some concluding remarks.

²⁷⁰ Tyon (in Walker 1991:162) describes how the Bone Keepers caused sicknesses that only they could treat and cure, blurring the moral distinction between good and bad practitioner, conjuror and sorcerer, extractor and introducer of sickness.

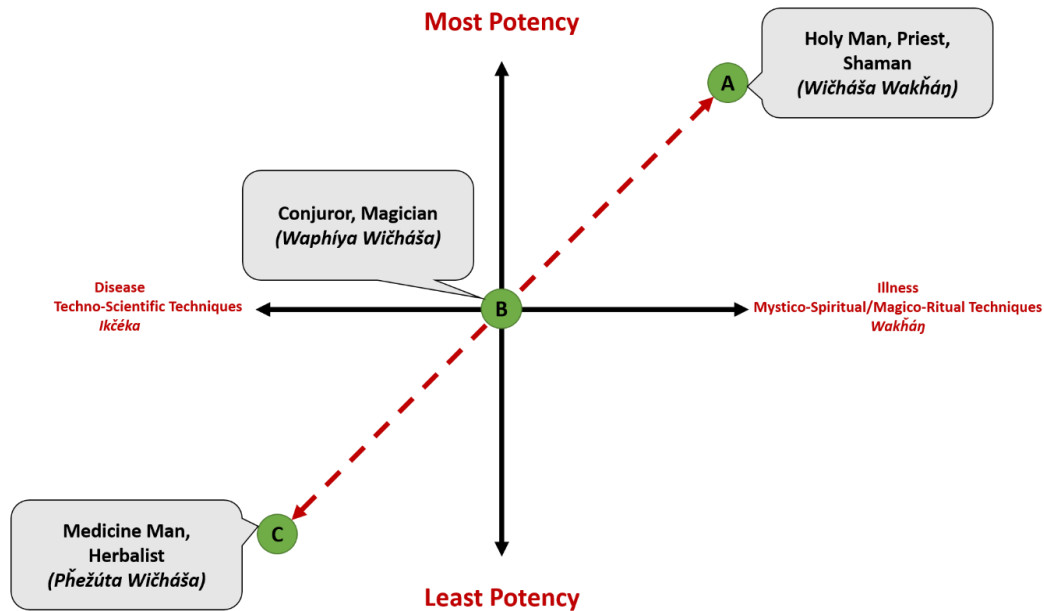


Figure 11: Holy Men, Conjurors, and Medicine Men

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter we will discuss universal elements of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice, as well as distinguishing factors differentiating practitioner types, arguing for elements of hierarchy in religious structure in terms of accumulated abilities, experience, powers, reputation, and techniques.²⁷¹ In essence, these conclusions corroborate and authenticate the Walker corpus and the words of his Oglala interlocutors, despite the complexities and classificatory difficulties posed by categorical permeability. Finally, we will highlight the ultimately social and cultural character of

²⁷¹ Using Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) framework, the power of a practitioner may be conceptualized as an accumulation of various types of capital: cultural capital, in the form of knowledge and language fluency; economic capital, in the form of wealth, goods, food, services, and facilities; social capital, in the form of kinship, social connections and relationships, and a group of followers; and symbolic capital, in the form of a reputation, prestige, social standing, perceived authenticity, and legitimacy. The most powerful and influential practitioners had the most access to these stakes or forms of capital, enabling for their continual production and reproduction. These stakes were specific to the ritual field but could also be transformed and translated from one field to another. But more on this later.

magico-medico-ritual practice and examine the complimentary, mutually constituting, yet binary relationship between conjurors and sorcerers in nineteenth-century Lakota society.

Certain elements, ritual implements, and paraphernalia were nearly universal across all categories of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice. For instance, each practitioner owned some kind of consecrated bag, bundle, or container and usually kept a sacred pipe and stem. These implements comprised part of the holy man's *wašičuŋ* (ceremonial bundle) and the medicine man's *ožúha p̄hežúta* (medicine bundle). Other essential ritual paraphernalia included various herbs (such as tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar), a dish of water, various feathers and fans, an eagle-bone whistle, sacred paints, and fire, among other articles.

Every practitioner used a drum and rattles, consecrated or made sacred through ceremony. Consecration was usually executed through the ritualized incensing of herbs (*wazílya*), such as sweetgrass, sage, and cedar, or through the painting of the hands and other body parts with *wasé* (ceremonial red earth paint), the underlying concern in both cases being purification. Music with the drum and rattles functioned in a variety of ways in ritual contexts: (1) to please benevolent spirits to enlist their aid; (2) to placate and appease malignant spirits believed to cause misfortune and sickness; (3) to frighten and expel malignant spirits disrupting life movement; and (4) as a pathway to trance, ecstatic, or transcendent states (cf. DuBois 2009; Jakobsen 1999:9–17). So, music and incensing generally functioned to invoke, please, and propitiate spirits; to banish²⁷² unwanted or

²⁷² Greer (2003:57) defines banishing as “The process of causing a spirit or nonphysical force to depart or withdraw from manifestation.” Normatively, sweetgrass was burned first, as it is pleasing to the spirits and inclined them to hear the proceedings and aid in them. Sage was burned next, as it is displeasing to malevolent spirits and served to dispel or banish them from a ceremonial space (Walker 1917:161–162; 1991:76–77).

malevolent influences; and to ease and precipitate the transition from one mental or spiritual state to another; from the human to the other-than-human realm. Each practitioner also had specific songs associated with particular vision experiences, other-than-human persons, or medicines that were sung to activate the powers and potencies of the practitioner's familiar spirit (*šičúŋ*), ritual implements and regalia, or medicines, enabling the practitioner to be efficacious in his ceremonial doings. Additionally, each spirit guardian and ritual implement was associated with a particular prayer, incantation, or verbal ritual formula, serving a similar activating purpose (Walker 1991:46, 76–77, 91–94).

Building on our analysis of historical Lakota disease theory, it is useful to conceptualize of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners and their treatment methods in terms of a continuum, the two extremes of which are disease/techno-scientific and illness/mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual (see Figure 12). These terms refer both to treatment method (techno-scientific and mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual) and the type of sickness treated (disease and illness). By disease we mean sickness caused by a physical or physiological malfunction or agent; common (*ikčéka*) physical or physiological ailments, injuries, and wounds that afflict the corporeal body of patients and are treated by more-or-less techno-scientific means. By illness we mean sickness brought on by a patient's perception of his or her bodily state; unusual (*wakħán* [mysterious] or *thókeča* [different]) psychological, psychosomatic, or spiritual conditions that afflict the non-corporeal aspects of patients, such as soul-loss or disease-object intrusion introduced by sorcery/witchcraft or other forms of malevolent magical attack, which nevertheless afflict the body, causing physical symptoms. These spiritual

sicknesses were treated by magico-ritual or psychological means.²⁷³ Some sicknesses were entirely disease, while others were entirely matters of perception (psychosomatic), but most represented a combination of the two (Monaghan and Just 2000:136–137).



Figure 12: Spectrum of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Disease Theory, Treatment, and Practitioners

Medicine men or herbalists (*p̄hēžúta wičháša*) fall on the disease/techno-scientific end of the continuum, while holy men or shamans (*wičháša wakháŋ*) fall on the illness/mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual end. Conjurors or magicians (*waphíya wičháša*), on the other hand, are more variable, tending to fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, between the medicine man and the holy man. Like a center midfielder in soccer, the conjuror's range was great, playing both offensive and defensive roles in terms of complimentary magical processes of disease-object introduction and extraction. Conjurors often combined elements of both techno-scientific and mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual techniques in their practice to treat disease, illness, and combinations of the two.

²⁷³ Despite the usefulness of this theory it is ultimately a generalization with inherent shortcomings. Some sicknesses of both varieties were likely treated by both physical and spiritual, techno-scientific and magico-ritual means.

One of the great distinguishing features between the holy man and the medicine man was the means by or source through which a practitioner treated and cured. The holy man cured with and through the potency of his *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundle), which contained the *šičúŋ* (potency of a *wakháhŋ* being) and *thúŋ* (spiritual essence) of his spirit guardian and was considered to be (a manifestation of) and represented that other-than-human person. In some sense the spirit being infused into an individual's ceremonial bundle was his totem or tutelary spirit, received during the Mystery Dance, with whom the practitioner identified, communed, and shared a common kinship. In this way the holy man quite literally wielded the power of the *wakháhŋ* beings. The holy man's *wašičuŋ* was clearly an instance of symbolic identification and ritual transformation, its potency residing in its totalizing force. The medicine man, on the other hand, treated the sick with his *ožúha phezúta* (medicine bundle), which might contain herbal medicines, pharmacopeia, various animal parts, and other implements used in his practice, such as a claw, flint, or other instrument with which to puncture, cut, and make incisions (Walker 1991:91–93; cf. Kapferer 2003:27).

From nineteenth-century Lakota perspectives medicine (*phezúta*) was anything used to alleviate pain or suffering, cure the sick or wounded, and keep life in the body (Walker 1917:152; 1991:91–93). In other words, holy men cured through magico-ritual, occult, or parapsychological means while medicine men treated largely through technological or natural means, based on acute and systematic observation of the natural world, meticulous knowledge of ecology, human and animal physiology and interaction, and trial and error. While preliminary invocation—often consisting of incensing, song, and prayer or incantation—was relatively consistent across categories, the actual source

or potency producing the desired effect distinguished the holy man from the medicine man. In other words, the *šičúŋ* of the holy man differed from that of the medicine man. The conjuror or magician fell in a gray area somewhere between the two extremes, utilizing both techno-scientific and mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual techniques in his ritual doings.²⁷⁴

Accordingly, the type of sickness treated also distinguished practitioner type. Disease—common physical ailments, injuries, and wounds—was typically treated by medicine men or herbalists, while illness—unusual spiritual, paranormal, or psychosomatic conditions—was treated by holy men. Conjurors or magicians might be consulted and employed to treat disease, illness, or hybrids of both using techno-scientific or magico-ritual techniques. Again, the classification of practitioner based on other-than-human power source transcended the other distinctions discussed herein, so that a Bear dreamer, for instance, might be a medicine man, conjuror, holy man, or all of the above. Frequently, practitioners specialized in the treatment of certain types of sickness, so that certain patients/victims tended to gravitate toward certain (types of) practitioners. We have also noted the tendency for holy men to diagnose cases and prescribe the course of treatment, determining the specialist most qualified to effect a cure (Hassrick 1964:290).

The severity of the sickness might also determine which practitioner type was called upon. Patients suffering from the severest, most perplexing sicknesses might be brought to holy men, while more routine, less severe cases were brought to herbalists.

²⁷⁴ While a conjuror might have a medicine bundle and a *wóthawe* (personal war medicine), it is likely that only the most experienced, powerful, tested, and trusted conjurors possessed ceremonial bundles. Only a learned and prestigious conjuror with a large following, reputation, and proven record of ritual efficacy was likely to participate in the *Wakǵáŋ Wačhípi*, the normative mechanism through which ceremonial bundles were assigned to practitioners. Such a conjuror was likely on his way to holy-man status, rising through the ranks of the Lakota religious hierarchy, which might be conceptualized in terms of reputation and publicly perceived levels of power or potency.

Perhaps intermediate cases that were not immediately life threatening but were nonetheless mysterious were brought to conjurers. In all likelihood specific ailments were associated with particular medicines or treatments, which were associated with specific practitioners. For instance, Bird doctors (medicine men or conjurers) were known to be the most effective at treating sickness believed to be caused by worms (*waglúla*) (Walker 1917:162–163; 1991:10–11).

The training and manufacture of a holy man also distinguished him from a medicine man. While a medicine man was instructed and guided by a holy man in the execution of his Vision Quest and in the interpretation of his vision, it was ultimately the vision experience itself and the knowledge bestowed by other-than-human forces that prescribed which sicknesses a medicine man would treat, which medicines he would use, how he would use them, and their appropriate dosage (Curtis 1908:62–70; Walker 1917; 1991). Alternately, a vision was not necessarily required of a medicine man, who more conventionally was trained by a holy man or another medicine man or might even buy his medicines and techniques. A holy man, conversely, was rigorously trained by other holy men over a long time period. The master-apprentice model was pervasive in Lakota society and continues to be the major method for the transmission of sacred knowledge.²⁷⁵ Lakotas tend to learn and master religious philosophy, ideology, and ritual practice through experience and participation. Holy men were the masters in the master-

²⁷⁵ Apparently, apprenticeship as a form of initiation is common in many cultures in which shamanism figures prominently in the religious and magico-ritual realms (see DuBois 2009; Jakobsen 1999:52–65; and Wilson 2013:195–214).

apprentice model and the leaders of the Dream Societies,²⁷⁶ while medicine men were more likely to be apprentices and helpers.

A holy man was generally older, more experienced, and wiser than a medicine man. These three attributes tended to be positively correlated. A holy man often acquired multiple visions, accumulating numerous magico-medico-ritual methods and techniques, and was normatively required to participate in the Sun Dance and Mystery Dance as rites of passage, sometimes experiencing a vision of the most potent aspect of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*, *Wí* (Sun) (Walker 1991:95). Holy men tended to have visions of the most powerful manifestations of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*, the invisible and celestial deities, while medicine men and conjurors tended to have visions of animals or other terrestrial creatures.²⁷⁷ According to Sword, “The invisible Gods never appear in a vision except to a shaman. . . . The ceremonies for the visible and the invisible Gods differ except the Sun Dance” (Walker 1991:95). Accordingly, the ceremonial bundle of a holy man contained more potency and greater power than a medicine man’s medicine bundle, a direct reflection of the bundle’s other-than-human power source. Again, the conjuror’s power normatively fell somewhere in between that of the holy man and the medicine man.

Age, experience, and wisdom tended to be correlated with power and potency, which tended to be correlated with reputation, prestige, and social status. In terms of potency or effectiveness in treating the sick nineteenth-century Lakota conceptions generally held that the holy man or shaman was the most effective or potent, followed by

²⁷⁶ According to Walker’s interlocutors a shaman or holy man “is respected and feared by the Indians. He is usually the leader of a sect who have certain spirits they have intercourse with” (Walker 1991:104).

²⁷⁷ Amiotte argues for the application of the term “animal doctors” to Lakota religious belief and ritual practice, a designation usually reserved for the Caddoan Pawnee and Arikara tribes (Posthumus 2008-2014) (see Holder 1970; Murie 1981; Parks 2001).

the conjuror or magician, followed by the medicine man or herbalist. The holy man's *wašičuŋ* could overcome the medicine man's medicines and the conjuror's charms. In terms of hierarchy the greatest distinguishing factor was perhaps a practitioner's ritual efficacy or proven public record of success in treatment and the related belief in the effectiveness of the practitioner's techniques on the part of the patient/victim and larger social group (Walker 1917:163; 1991:91–92).

Lévi-Strauss, building on the work of Durkheim (1915) and Mauss (1972), discusses the significance of group expectations, sentiment, and public opinion in terms of magico-ritual efficacy, positing the theory that ultimately magic is a social phenomenon and public opinion creates the magician. Belief and efficacy are central to cultural conceptions of healing, magic, and sorcery/witchcraft. The powers of the ritual practitioner and the efficacy of his rites are dependent on the beliefs of the group to which he belongs. Culture and tradition provide the frame within which both the practitioner and the patient/victim act and perform, as well as the context and impetus for behavior and belief²⁷⁸ (Leacock 1954:63). Lévi-Strauss writes:

. . . the efficacy of magic implies a belief in magic. The latter has three complementary aspects: first, the sorcerer's belief in the effectiveness of his techniques; second, the patient's or victim's belief in the sorcerer's power; and, finally, the faith and expectations of the group, which

²⁷⁸ We might compare this frame or gravitational or magnetic field to Bourdieu's concept of field, a social space consisting of "a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (capital)" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). Each field has its own players or agents, rules, internal logic, and regulatory principles and dynamics that govern the rules of the field. Agents have a stake in the operation of the field, which is a space of conflict and competition as agents attempt to monopolize the various stakes or forms of capital specific to each field. Further, each practitioner acquires and develops a distinctive habitus, predispositions that guide and constrain practice, mediating between the subjective agent and the objective reality of lived experience (see Jenkins 1992). A habitus consists of "a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). Currently I am working on a project analyzing Lakota ritual practice and social organization based on Bourdieu's framework of practice.

constantly act as a sort of gravitational field within which the relationship between sorcerer and bewitched is located and defined. [Lévi-Strauss 1963:168]

In all magico-medico-ritual operations there is a significant tripartite relationship among the practitioner, patient/victim, and social group. This is clearly the case among the Lakotas.

Lakota practitioners defined or ascribed themselves and were defined or ascribed by others in interaction as sacred, mysterious, and powerful.²⁷⁹ Recurring Lakota forms include *wakǰáŋ ič'ílapi* (they consider themselves sacred) and *wakǰáŋ igláwapi* (they count themselves among the sacred) (Bushotter 1937; Powers 1986:213). This self-ascription is the first aspect of Lévi-Strauss's tripartite classification, the practitioner's belief in his own power and the effectiveness of his techniques. The second and third aspects of the classification tend to cluster together: the belief of the patient/victim in the practitioner's power is a direct reflection of group belief, expectation, faith, and sentiment. The relationship between (a) the patient/victim and the practitioner, and (b) the group and the practitioner is expressed in Lakota by the term *wakǰáŋla* (to consider someone or something sacred or holy), as in *Mathó iháŋblapi kiŋ wakǰáŋwičhalape ló* (Those who dreamed of a Bear are considered sacred), or the related term *wakǰáŋkila* (to regard one's own as sacred or holy).

The belief of the patient/victim and group was secured, nurtured, and sustained through various means. First, the practitioner must be an effective ritual performer, singing the correct songs, saying the prescribed prayers, performing the correct ritual

²⁷⁹ However, most traditional practitioners do not publicly broadcast their status as such, possessing a quiet, humble confidence in their abilities, techniques, and efficacy.

actions in the prescribed order, communicating with and interpreting for the spirits in the esoteric languages, making the appropriate “healing noises”²⁸⁰ at the appropriate times to bring the ritual drama to a dramatic crescendo, etc.

Second, the practitioner, especially conjurors, must in many cases produce a visible object—the physical manifestation or representation of symbolic sickness—and publicly display it to the patient/victim and onlookers present. This physical object symbolic of sickness functioned on a variety of levels to psychologically convince the patient/victim and the social group that the cause of sickness has been removed, that the cure has been successful and efficacious, and that healing, wellness (*wičhózani*), and spiritual equilibrium has been restored or will be reestablished. The public display of the disease-object extracted also served to authenticate, legitimize, maintain, and validate the practitioner’s religious authority and status as a healer and intermediary, bolstering and buffering his socially ascribed power, the belief in the efficacy of his techniques, and the necessity of Lakota religious hierarchy and social stratification in general. Third, the practitioner’s public record of ritual efficacy earned him a reputation as a competent and effective healer.

Lévi-Strauss (1963:179–181) discusses the effectiveness of psychotherapy and symbolic treatment methods in cases of psychological and psychosomatic illness, but he also highlights our fourth and perhaps most important means by which the reputation of a

²⁸⁰ A skilled practitioner was one, according to Deloria, who could successfully “interpret . . . mystery [read, *wak’háŋ*] into the vision” (Deloria n.d.:33). Deloria (n.d.:72) discusses the Lakota exclamation *áhohohoho* and how it is pronounced in a very characteristic way in ritual settings. “In all tales involving the making of new life by means of the sweatbath,” she explains, “and in all mystery acts, the holy man is said to make this utterance as he goes into the most profound part of his act. It appears now that that is called Hóg.nag.nakiya, in Teton, and Hóhnahnakiya in Santee. Ho, voice; g.nág.na, I can best describe as sound travelling over a corrugated surface. . . . Kiya, to cause one’s own to be.” There is much more work to be done comparing Lakota ritual practice to performance using insights from the anthropology of performance and performance studies.

practitioner is secured, nurtured, and sustained: it is the reputation itself, the socially ascribed belief in one's ability and efficacy, that made a practitioner and rendered his practice productive and successful. One's reputation tended to have a life of its own, reinforcing, evolving, and regenerating itself through social processes and word of mouth, sometimes referred to in Indian Country as the "moccasin trail." Importantly, it was not necessarily the number of people that a practitioner had cured, but the reputation of being a great healer, sincerely held by the social group, that allowed for the successful treatment of psychological and psychosomatic sickness.

We have repeatedly witnessed in Lakota belief and ritual that skepticism was and is seen as dangerous and disruptive, identified and scolded by the practitioner and the spirits, and scapegoated as a secondary rationalization for unsuccessful ritual endeavors. Normative folk stories tell of *thun̄kán̄* or *yuwípi* stones and gourd rattles striking skeptics in the darkness during ceremonies and other negative consequences of cynicism and disbelief, aimed to teach moral lessons and reinforce belief in traditional ritual and its practitioners. While the social nature of magic and psychological healing applies more directly to holy men and conjurors, it is nonetheless universally significant: perhaps it was group belief and expectations alone, the social and cultural "gravitational field" within which the practitioner and patient/victim operated, which allowed a practitioner to be successful in his endeavors; to gain a following among his people; accumulate wealth, power, and prestige; rise to the rank of holy man; and distinguish himself qualitatively and quantitatively from the medicine man.

There was a qualitative and quantitative power differential among practitioner categories, as well as a relatively unilineal progression or career trajectory in which a

medicine man climbed the ranks of the religious hierarchy, eventually becoming a conjuror, and in some cases rising to the position of a holy man. However, some practitioners were content with their role as herbalists, acolytes, or apprentices and did not pursue greater power and status. Those who were more ambitious and did move up the ranks did so through ability, apprenticeship, dedication, desire, experience, initiation, observation, and participation, coupled with frequent prayer, fasting, sacrifice, and Vision Quests, gradually gaining the favor of many spirit beings, mastering a number of other-than-human abilities and powers, and the knowledge to treat a variety of sicknesses in a variety of ways and to direct various ceremonies. Mirroring this progression in terms of the acquisition of various abilities and attributes was a concomitant development of public awareness of a practitioner and his powers, concretely reflected and manifested in public opinion, prestige, reputation, social status, the growth of one's following or congregation, and the accumulation of wealth in various forms. Of course, a rare and powerful vision might allow an individual to bypass a status in the hierarchy, kick-starting one's magico-medico-ritual career. These progressions were both quantitative (more spirit guardians = more power) and qualitative (more spirit guardians = greater diversity in terms of abilities and curing techniques; a medicine man was not necessarily a holy man, but a holy man was likely to also be a medicine man).

Accordingly, then, a holy man was likely to also be a medicine man and a conjuror, possessing the requisite powers and abilities to perform the tasks and methods of both practitioner types, in addition to his role as a holy man (Walker 1991:92, 104) (see Figure 13).

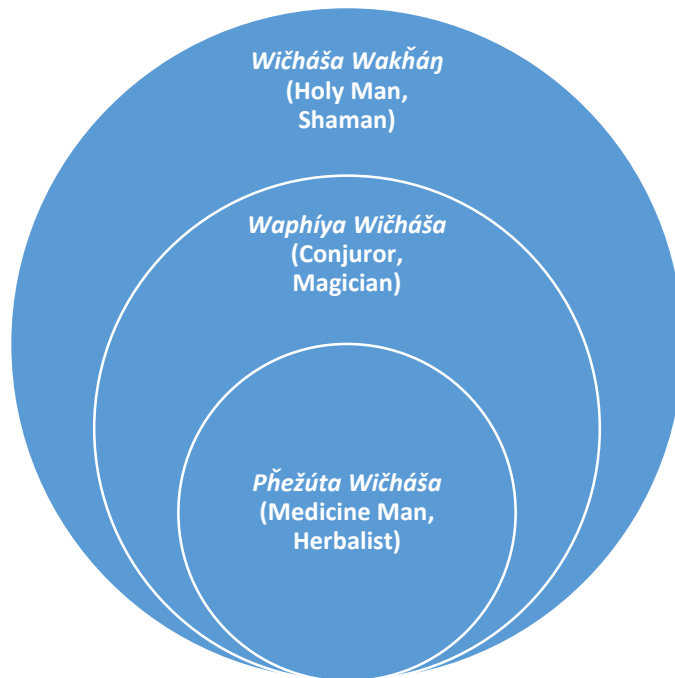


Figure 13: Hierarchical Categories of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Magico-Medico-Ritual Practitioners

Practitioner categories were also cumulative and permeable, emphasizing different aspects of a practitioner's power (see Figure 14). As DeMallie explains:

The Lakotas use the word *wapiyapi* (from *piya*, to make anew) to designate a healer. *Pejuta wicaša* (literally, medicine man) refers to a healer who uses roots and other medicines to cure; this term is also used for white men's doctors. *Wicaša wakan*, or *wakan wicaša* (holy man), is a healer whose power comes from the mystical experiences of his vision. There are no sharp distinctions among these three designations; rather, they can be thought of as emphasizing different aspects of a healer's power: *wapiyapi* implies conjuring, *pejuta wicaša* emphasizes the use of medicinal cures, and *wicaša wakan* brings to mind visionary power and wisdom. [DeMallie 1984:102 n 3]

Consequently, a conjuror might also be considered a medicine man, if he had the appropriate vision and skill set, learning the required knowledge and techniques. But a

medicine man, strictly speaking, was unlikely to also be considered a conjuror or holy man. A practitioner identifying principally as a medicine man was likely to be in the early stages of his development and career as a magico-medico-ritual practitioner or perhaps someone who was content to remain an herbalist, consciously declining to climb the ranks of Lakota religious structure.

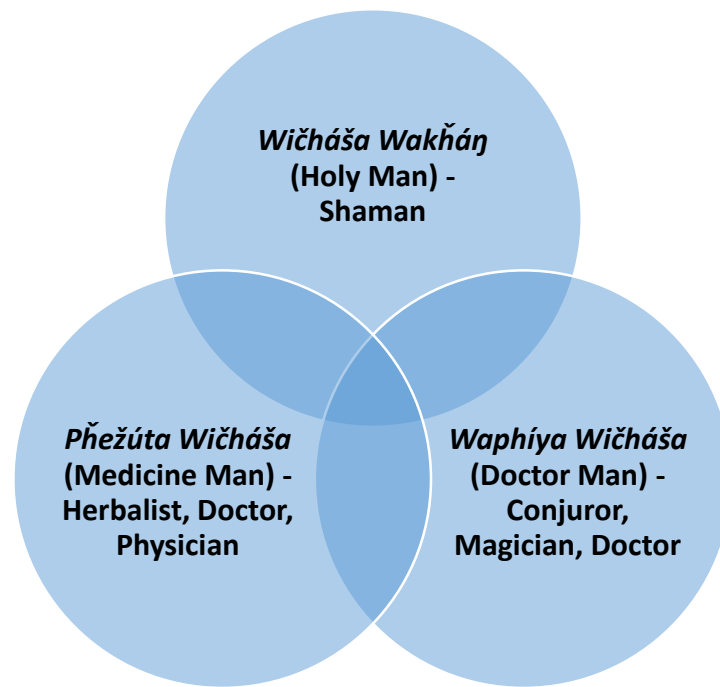


Figure 14: Permeable Categories of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Magico-Medico-Ritual Practitioners

Another significant distinguishing feature was the role of the holy man vis-à-vis ritual. Holy men were the religious leaders and masters of ceremonies, knowing and directing the major collective rituals of the Lakota people. Medicine men were the medical doctors or physicians and might conduct the lesser, individual rites and those pertaining specifically to medicine or the treatment of common physical ailments,

injuries, and wounds. In a revealing passage Short Feather states that “The Bear is the friend of the Great Spirit. He is very wise. He taught the shaman the secrets of the ceremonies. He teaches the medicine men about the medicines and the songs that they should sing” (Walker 1991:115).

Clearly there was a division of labor among practitioners, but it was permeable, some individuals transcending categories and defying classification. As we have seen the realities of Lakota magico-medico-ritual practice were complicated, dynamic, and idiosyncratic. But normatively it appears that holy men or shamans were associated more with the great, collective ceremonies concerned with macrocosmic themes, while medicine men or herbalists were associated strictly with medical treatment and more idiosyncratic, individual ceremonies concerned with microcosmic themes. Through visions and the guidance of the spirits holy men alone had the power to change or alter ceremonies and to promulgate new ones, a privilege not granted to medicine men. Only the oldest, wisest, and most revered holy men dared to alter ceremonies because supernatural retribution might result from any ritual misstep²⁸¹ (Walker 1991:81, 104). As Sword explains, “The medicine men governed all ceremonies of medicine. But a shaman could change any custom or ceremony” (Walker 1991:81).

In general, holy men saw to the psychological and spiritual needs of the people collectively, alleviating group difficulties and renewing, restoring, and strengthening the health and wellness (*wičhózani*) of the group on a macrocosmic level. This aspect of

²⁸¹ According to Walker’s interlocutors a shaman “leads in all the ceremonies. He may promulgate ceremonies of a new kind. If he does this he must prepare himself by the sweat bath according to the customs and seek a vision. If his vision is right he will be told what to do. Then he may organize a new ceremony according to the directions he receives in the vision. Not many dare to attempt to do this. Only very old and very wise men would attempt to do this, for if one should do such a thing wrong the spirits would be displeased with it and punish such a one in some way” (Walker 1991:104).

holy-man practice was clear in their role as ritual leaders, masters of ceremony, and intercessors or intermediaries in the Sun Dance and *Yuwípi* ceremonies in particular. The medicine man, on the other hand, saw to the strictly medical, physical, physiological, or pharmaceutical needs of the people, but on a much more individual or microcosmic level. The holy man tended to direct the calendrical, collective ceremonies of the people, while the medicine man performed rites of affliction and life-crisis rituals on an ad hoc basis for individuals in need of treatment and restoration. However, as we have continually seen Lakota religious organization and ritual practice defied simplistic explanations: the very same individual might be both a holy man and a medicine man, directing both the major and minor Lakota rituals. Finally, we must remember that from Lakota perspectives physical and spiritual health are intimately interrelated, so much so as to seem inseparable in many ways, so that holy men and medicine men, strictly speaking, treated different yet complimentary aspects of the same unified whole, conceived of generally as health or wellbeing (*wičózani*), like two sides of the same coin. As long as a practitioner was benevolent all three types from distinguished herein ultimately worked toward the same goal: the perpetuation and sustainment of life movement.

The role of holy men as intermediaries between the human and other-than-human realms also distinguished them from medicine men. As Merete Demant Jakobsen (1999:9) explains, the shaman was “a master of spirits in the traditional society. His role is to contact and to possess spirits so that a communication on behalf of an individual or society as a whole can be established. . . . The shaman is in charge of this communication.” Holy men mediated between the human and other-than-human realm, between the living and the dead, and knew the sacred, symbolic languages of the shamans

and the spirits, interpreting all sacred communications from the other realm. This ability was not common among the average medicine man, who no doubt relied upon established holy men to interpret vision experiences and other mystical or spiritual encounters.

Holy men were repositories of cultural and sacred lore, having a systematic knowledge of Lakota cosmology and mythology, while a medicine man's or conjuror's knowledge of such things was more scattered and fragmentary. Holy men knew the symbolic attributes and proper ceremonial procedure for each manifestation of *Wakǵán* *Tǵánka* and each ritual (Hassrick 1964:254–255, 292). For instance, Hassrick writes (1964:255), the holy man “knew that fire embodied the power of the Sun, while mysterious things exhibited the power of the Sky. He was aware that anything which grew from the earth could possess the power of the Earth, while anything with the hardness of stone could be endowed with the power of the Rock.” Knowledge of Lakota history, ideology, philosophy, and social customs was also more fully developed among holy men, as opposed to medicine men.

We have already noted the qualitative and quantitative differences in terms of spirit guardians distinguishing a holy man from a medicine man. A medicine man tended to have one or two spirit guardians, while a holy man often had several. As previously noted some evidence suggests that holy men acquired atmospheric, celestial, or invisible spirit guardians (sky deities), while medicine men and conjurors normatively obtained terrestrial spirit guardians, such as animal spirits (Walker 1991:95, 159–161).²⁸² This mirrors the historical ceremonial organization of the Pawnees and other Plains tribes, as

²⁸² As Colhoff (1948-1953:Letter 19) explains, “the high priests appease the storm gods, for gentle rains, to cleanse the world of filth and purify the universe, this is in case of violent storms, and sprinkle leaves of cedar over the live coals as incense to the storm gods.”

discussed by Ruth Benedict (1922).²⁸³ In order to understand the dialectical, structural relationship between myth and ritual, explains Lévi-Strauss (1963:240), “it is indispensable to compare myth and ritual, not only within the confines of one and the same society, but also with the beliefs and practices of neighboring societies. . . . Structural dialectics does not contradict historical determinism, but rather promotes it by giving it a new tool.” For our purposes, we must extend this comparison to the domain of religious organization in general. Comparing the Dakotas and the Pawnees, Benedict writes:

The Dakota make a sharp break between the laity and the shamans; their preliminary experiences, special knowledge, and relations to the supernatural were all differentiated. The shamans possessed an esoteric vocabulary; they were organized in cults where initiation was wholly on the basis of supernatural experience; they alone had guardian spirits won by fasting and vision. Those entering the sun dance enrolled in different grades and endured different tortures according as they were candidates for the shamanistic class or not.

So far has this classification gone that guardian spirits were obtained by diametrically different methods by the two classes. Shamans fasted for their visions in the ordinary way; on the contrary, the guardian spirits of those not so numbered were assigned at puberty by the shamans.²⁸⁴ The old writers, whose descriptions make up J. O. Dorsey’s account of the cults of the Dakota, go so far as to say that individual

²⁸³ If this analysis holds it also mirrors the hierarchical organization of the spirit beings who figure in Lakota mythology and religious philosophy. The *thúŋ* of the Sun (*Wi*) is fire, and it is the most potent. It cannot be imparted to anything, and no practitioner has it for his *šičúŋ*. The *thúŋ* of the Sky (*Škán*) is the next most powerful. Only the oldest and wisest holy men could secure the *thúŋ* of *Škán* for their ceremonial bundles. Next in terms of potency came the terrestrial powers, Earth (*Makhá*), followed by Rock (*Ínyan*), followed by various powerful animal spirits, such as Bear (*Mathó*) and Buffalo Bull (*Tháthánka*) (Walker 1917:81–82, 158). According to Sword, the *thúŋ* of *Škán* is the most powerful, and “it can be imparted only by very wise shamans and with a great deal of ceremony. No one but a very wise shaman should have a *sicun* with the *ton* of *Škan*” (Walker 1991:95). Sword elaborates on the hierarchical structure of Lakota spirit beings as they are imbued into ceremonial implements, explaining that “A *wasicun* can do only what the God can do. . . . A more powerful *wasicun* will prevail against a less powerful” (Walker 1991:96).

²⁸⁴ Here Benedict seems to be referring to the acquisition of a medicine or ceremonial bundle prepared and consecrated by a holy man. Lynd (1889:161–163) also describes the seemingly random assignment of war medicines and associated totems or tutelary spirits and taboos to young men by *zuyá wakhán* (sacred war leaders) among the Dakotas.

guardians were here never revealed in vision; but in this they were certainly ignorant of the necessary qualifications of the shaman.

Among the Dakota we have still no fixed and hierarchal priestly class. The Pawnee, however, while supposedly sharing the same guardian spirit ideas as the Arapaho, for instance, have found it possible to superimpose a ranked and vested College of Cardinals. A vision by no means in itself gave right of entrance into this priestly hierarchy. A shaman was made not by any momentary experience, however essential, but by prolonged training. In the myths this necessity is most often formalized somewhat after this fashion in the spirits' instructions: "There [in your lodge] you must stay by yourself, so that I may appear to you in your dreams, and teach you the songs and also my powers." In practice, candidates were instructed by the shaman or priest whom they would succeed at his death. For since the number was practically fixed, vacancies could occur only in this way.²⁸⁵

But the Pawnee not only fixed a gulf between the laity and the non-laity; this latter class was also strongly subdivided. Highest in prestige, authority, and esoteric knowledge stood the priests, guardians of the sacred tribal bundles, to whom even the chiefs were subordinate. Separated from these, but also from the laity, were the medicine-men, whose powers came more especially from visions, and whose functions were healing and sleight-of-hand. In theory, at least, these two groups did not enter each other's ceremonies.

This differentiation of priest and medicine-man corresponded to the division of their cosmology, so that the priestly class derived their power from the gods above (chiefly the stars) and the medicine men from the gods below (chiefly the animal lodges). While, therefore, the guardian spirit idea carried with it over the greater part of the Plains the idea of a common exercise by all men of spiritual powers, sharp separations between laity and non-laity had nevertheless arisen in certain tribes, notably the Dakota and Pawnee. [Benedict 1922:10–12]

Benedict's findings shed light on our discussion here, corroborating the words of Walker's interlocutors and the existence of religious hierarchical organization and structure among the Lakotas. The difficulties in drawing absolute or conclusive distinctions among the varieties of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners speaks to the inherent individuality and important role of innovation and practical adaptation in the religious and ritual domains, characterized simultaneously as

²⁸⁵ This sounds very much like Frazier's account of the *Wak'hán Wačhipi* and its membership.

both static and dynamic. But perhaps there is more to it than that. Perhaps the individuality inherent in Lakota religious belief and ritual practice has less of a determinative and restraining role than we had previously imagined. While individuality does play a role in generating the permeability of our categories, the underlying hierarchy of Lakota religious organization, the clear demarcation of the “laity” from the “non-laity,” and the tripartite classification within the “laity” proposed here, similar to that of the Pawnee and other Plains tribes, is still discernable and indexed in a variety of ways, which we have demonstrated in this chapter.²⁸⁶

It is likely that some form of hierarchy in terms of power, capital, prestige, and wealth was either indigenous to or developing in Lakota religious organization throughout the nineteenth century, similar, perhaps, to the situation among the Pawnees. Holy men, the most powerful practitioners with the most accumulated abilities, knowledge, followings, and wealth, directed the major ceremonies and were the most sought after in terms of treating the sick. They were also the leaders, head men, or “high priests” of the Dream Societies. But at the same time these potent and prestigious practitioners transcended the Dream Societies in that they were counted among a select group of individuals who led these groups, but also accumulated communications, knowledge, and abilities from multiple other-than-human power sources. Finally, these individuals were the masters in terms of the master-apprentice model of transmitting sacred knowledge and ritual training. They were at the apex and the gatekeepers of this

²⁸⁶ Interestingly, today the distinctions among practitioner types and their specializations appear to be fading away, reflecting a general trend moving away from innovation, individuality, and culture as the organization of diversity, and toward the replication of uniformity. Among contemporary Oglala practitioners the types of rituals performed have become the major distinguishing and identifying factors, but nearly all ritual specialists are now leaders and directors of the *Yuwipi* and Sun Dance ceremonies (Posthumus 2008-2014).

“trickle-down” system of access to cosmological, mythological, religious, and ritual knowledge. They were subordinate to no other religious practitioners and were generally apprenticed to no one (Walker 1991:153).²⁸⁷

The theory that holy men received powers from celestial beings while medicine men received powers from terrestrial beings is substantiated not only by comparative data from other Plains tribes, but also by multiple Lakota sources. Describing the mysterious atmospheric deity *Tháté* (Wind), the Oglala Red Rabbit says, “Only very venerable shamans know anything of him (*wicasa wakan ksapapi*, rendered wise or venerable shamans). He presided at the institution of the *Wowaci Wakan* (the mysterious dance). He gave to all the mysterious people their *ton* (influence, or power, emission of power)” (Walker 1991:127). Standing Bear (2006b:133) recalls that Lakota youths grew up hearing of “the discoveries of the dreamers, the tales and prophecies of wise men, . . . and secrets the brotherhood of animals shared with the medicine-men.” According to Tyon, “medicine men²⁸⁸ dream of animals. And then they doctor people” (Walker 1991:153). Later, Tyon elaborates, saying, “Those men who become doctors, Indian doctors, do not do it intentionally. The dreams they have of animals [or of amphibians, birds, or reptiles] are what cause them to believe they are doctors. . . . Thus those men who are doctors dream of animals. That is why they are doctors. The people believe in them” (Walker 1991:161). Finally, Standing Bear writes:

²⁸⁷ However, it is likely that this upper crust of religious practitioners met together in council to discuss matters of collective religious and ritual import.

²⁸⁸ Tyon tends to use the Lakota term *waphíya* for medicine man. See Walker (1991:170). This does not discredit our analysis and theory, however, as *waphíya* (conjurers, magicians) are in an intermediate position between medicine men and holy men, utilizing practices and techniques from both categories.

Now the medicine-man derived his knowledge from the infinite source – Wakan Tanka. For him knowledge was not in books, nor in the heads of professors, but in the works of Wakan Tanka as manifested in the creatures and beings of nature. This association of knowledge with all the creatures of earth caused him to look to them for his knowledge, and assuming their spiritual fineness to be of the quality of his own, he sought with them a true rapport. If the man could prove to some bird or animal that he was a worthy friend, it would share with him precious secrets and there would be formed bonds of loyalty never to be broken; the man would protect the rights and life of the animal, and the animal would share with the man his power, skill, and wisdom. In this manner was the great brotherhood of mutual helpfulness formed, adding to the reverence for life orders other than man. The taking of animal life for food and clothing only became established, and frugality became regarded as a virtue. Animal life took its place in the scheme of things, and there was no slavery and no torture of four-footed and winged things. By acknowledging the virtues of other beings the Lakota came to possess them for himself, and for his wonder and reverence and for his unsurpassed humbleness and meekness Wakan Tanka revealed himself to the medicine-man. [Standing Bear 2006:203–204]

Wissler points to a similar distinction between holy men, which he refers to as shamans, and medicine men. He explains that any individual who had a vision that conformed to a specific formula was entitled to become a member of a Dream Society, being initiated through the *Wachípi Wakhán* (Mystery Dance) or some other rite of passage: “Any person having such a dream is a shaman”²⁸⁹ (Wissler 1912:81). Wissler does, however, posit a clear distinction between shaman (*wicháša wakhán* [holy man]) and medicine man (*phezúta wicháša* [herbalist]), writing:

In this connection it may be well to distinguish between a medicineman (pejuta wic’asa) and a shaman. The former is one who gets medicines and formulae from a shaman, or an originator. The shaman puts him through

²⁸⁹ Standing Bear (2006b:206) writes that any individual who receives a vision is thereafter known as a “dreamer or medicine-man.” However, he does not distinguish between types of practitioners, instead using the conventional and generalized term “medicine man” to refer to a variety of practitioners, including healers, diviners, and animal callers. The author agrees that a vision makes an individual a dreamer (*ihánbla*), but not necessarily a practitioner.

four sweat houses, teaches him the songs and other parts of the formula and delivers a bag of the medicine. He may or may not give the directions for preparing the medicine, so that often the medicineman is entirely dependent upon him for a new supply. On the other hand, the medicineman can, it is said, create other medicinemen by a similar ceremony. Throughout we find no such conception of ownership and transfer of songs and formulae as among the Blackfoot tribes.

Should one desire to become a shaman and not have normal dreams or experiences of the requisite form, he may go to a shaman for a special ceremony. After certain preparations and instructions the shaman takes the candidate out to some lonely place, sets up four offerings on poles. Here the candidate may fast and pray. The shaman may cut and tie him as in the sun dance, or the candidate may himself cut off and offer small pieces of flesh. If a dream or vision is granted, the candidate goes into a sweat house on his return and relates to the shaman his experience. He, himself is thenceforth a shaman. [Wissler 1912:82]

The words of Benedict and Wissler corroborate and authenticate those of Walker's interlocutors. They also correspond closely to Densmore's tripartite classification of Lakota practitioners that served as our model and point of departure in the preceding chapter. In essence, a medicine man was any practitioner who had any medicine, whether obtained or attained, used in any way to treat and cure the sick or wounded or to alleviate pain. He was an herbalist, medical doctor, or physician, not usually considered any holier or more potent than the average person. A successful Vision Quest was apparently not a prerequisite to becoming a medicine man.²⁹⁰ A holy man, on the other hand, through years of apprenticeship, devotion, persistence, and self-sacrifice successfully sought a vision or multiple visions. He was a more divine and potent figure who had the power of the *wakǰáŋ* beings—manifested in his ceremonial bundle—and used occult or paranormal (*wakǰáŋ*) means to treat and cure the sick and in his magico-ritual practice. He was a religious leader and ritual master of ceremonies. A

²⁹⁰ For example, a Bear medicine man could achieve practitioner status through the process of being treated by another Bear doctor, not necessarily by having a visionary encounter with the Bear Spirit.

holy man accumulated great knowledge, ability, and power through years of experience, participation, and training, perhaps even attaining or obtaining visions from the celestial powers or atmospheric deities. Conversely, medicine men and conjurors were more likely to have visions of terrestrial animals, as opposed to the sky powers.

Holy men were the originators and gatekeepers of esoteric religious and ritual knowledge. They altered and created new ceremonies, imposed and lifted taboos, trained and produced neophyte practitioners, provided practitioners with medicines and the songs and prayers required to activate their potencies, produced and consecrated war medicines and ceremonial bundles for their followers, and infused *wakḥáŋ* potency into external objects. Apparently, established medicine men could train and produce new medicine men, but only holy men could train and produce aspiring holy men.

Shamans treated psychological, psychosomatic, or spiritual illness using their ceremonial bundles and mystico-spiritual-magico-ritual methods. They tended to see to the collective psychological and spiritual needs of their people. They worked what might be called miracles—amazing, inexplicable, mysterious, and powerful acts that defied explanation and transcended human understanding, reason, and rationality (*wakḥáŋ ečhúŋpi* [*wakḥáŋ* doings]; *wakḥáŋ káǵapi* [making *wakḥáŋ*]). Conversely, medicine men used the herbal medicines and instruments contained in their medicine bundles to provide medical care for the sick and wounded, using techno-scientific methods of trial and error to treat the physical or physiological diseases and maladies of their people. Herbalists tended to treat patients on an individual level. Experience or explicit learning informed them that certain methods, plants, or herbs were effective in treating and curing specific conditions, sicknesses, or wounds. Holy men and some especially powerful conjurors

could cause or inflict sickness through their songs, incantations, and ceremonies, but medicine men had no such power.

Finally, the propensity for good or evil, like the dreamer category, transcended the hierarchical organization we have established here. Human beings, like the spirits themselves, could be good or evil, benevolent or malevolent, working toward the maintenance and perpetuation of life movement or toward its obstruction and termination. These of course are culturally, historically, and socially constituted categories. According to our definitions a good or benevolent practitioner used other-than-human power and magical processes for good, social, and selfless purposes (that the people may live), while a bad or malevolent practitioner used other-than-human power and magical processes for evil, antisocial, malicious, and selfish purposes. Often the tendency toward good or evil in magical practice was a reflection of the practitioner's spirit guardian: whether it was a benevolent or malevolent other-than-human person. Perhaps the organization of Lakota religion was indeed modeled on the organization of the Lakota spirit world. Figure 15 illustrates various Lakota practitioner types in terms of both practice and propensity for good or evil.

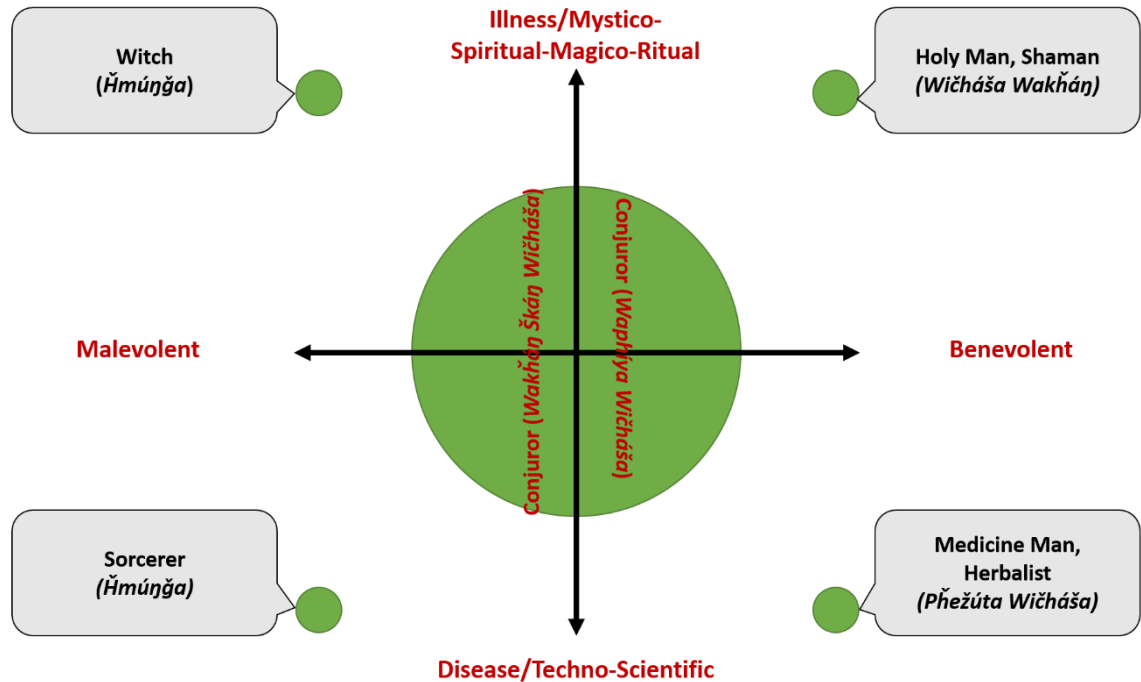


Figure 15: Benevolent and Malevolent Lakota Practitioners

The complimentary, mutually constituting, and binary relationship between conjurers and sorcerers—that is, between benevolent and malevolent magicians respectively—illustrates the role of the propensity for good or evil that crosscut Lakota religious organization and ritual practice, and also how it is relative, being culturally and socially constructed and historical situated. Essentially, one group’s conjurer was another’s sorcerer and vice-versa.

The tripartite relationship among the practitioner, patient/victim, and social group discussed above also encompassed the relationship between the conjurer and the sorcerer. Conjurers extracted sickness—conceived of in terms of disease-object intrusion—from their patients, while sorcerers introduced sickness through shooting or blowing disease-objects into their victims. The magical process of shooting medicine itself was seen as neither good nor bad. Rather, it was morally ambiguous. Human agency, intention, and

will rendered medicine either benevolent or malevolent. Interestingly, holy men and medicine men, on either extreme of our continuum, were not necessarily associated with disease-objects, as were conjurors and sorcerers. The object itself, whether it was a bloody worm, a rolled-up feather, or a fingernail, represented the very center of our continuum: it was a physical object symbolic of a psychological or psychosomatic illness. It was a spiritual illness rendered visibly and manifested physically. The introduction and extraction of disease-objects was the domain of the conjuror and his malevolent counterpart, the sorcerer. In Lakota society, the very existence of the sorcerer rationalized and necessitated the existence of the conjuror (see Figure 16) (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963:175–177, 234–235).

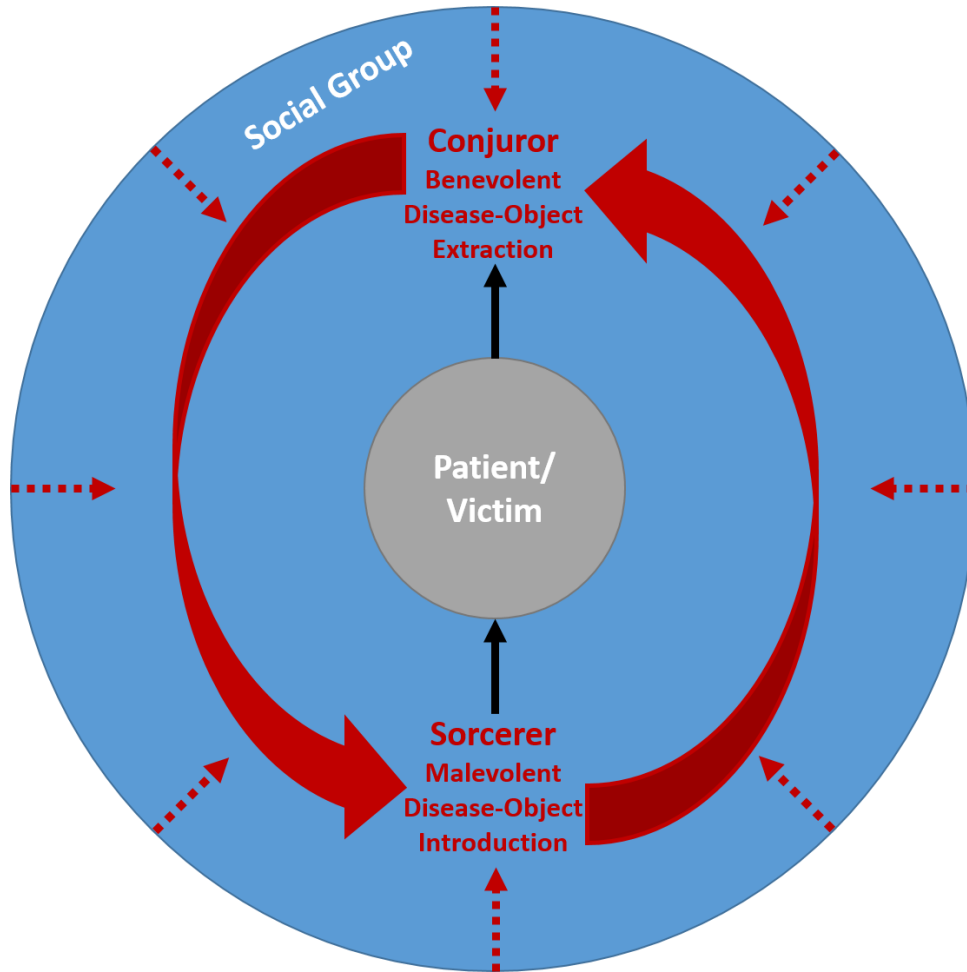


Figure 16: Quaternary Relationship between the Conjuror, Sorcerer, Patient/Victim, and Social Group

Although they played different roles, medicine men, conjurors, and holy men all may or may not have been members of Dream Societies, associations which functioned to bind together individuals who shared common visionary experiences and other-than-human power sources. It is to Dream Societies that we turn our attention to next.

8. DREAM SOCIETIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LAKOTA RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND MAGICO-MEDICO-RITUAL PRACTICE

Individuals who dreamt of the same spirit being often banded together in a number of religious organizations known as Dream Societies, in which the other-than-human person or spirit guardian was the major symbol of identity, power, and relatedness.²⁹¹ These Dream Societies (*Ihánblapi Okhólakičhiye*), associations of individuals that were religious in nature and named after a particular animal or spirit being, were significant to and prominent in nineteenth-century Lakota religious life. Dream Societies were comprised of individuals—usually men—who experienced similar visions, were recognized by the same other-than-human person, and hence shared a common spiritual power source. Co-members of a given society often shared common healing, curing, doctoring, and magico-ritual methods and techniques (Fletcher 1884b:276; Wissler 1912:81).

Historically there were a number of Oglala Dream Societies, including but not limited to: the *Heyókħa* (Contrary) Society, comprised of Thunder dreamers who acted in an anti-natural manner, often as the opposing force or counterpoints at the ceremonies of other Dream Societies; the *Hehákā* (Elk) Society, whose members were imbued with mysterious powers over women; the *Mathó* (Bear) Society, the largest and most prominent of the Dream Societies, whose members were particularly gifted curers; the *Sintésapela* (Black-Tailed Deer) Society, comprised of young men who carried hoops

²⁹¹ Perhaps reacting negatively to the claim that there was sacred knowledge hidden from the common people, Deloria, focusing on the inherent individuality of Lakota religion and religious practitioners, contradicts the very notion of Dream Societies, writing, “There was no leaguings together, because of a similarity of vision” (Deloria n.d.:2). She explains further, writing, “I say again there is no leaguings of, for instance, Bear Doctors or any other kind, to trick the people. Each one was his own priest and got his secret direct; and it might be quite different from another’s, who might also have the same control. I mean, you get your vision from the Buffalo; I get mine from the Buffalo. That did not mean we knew the same tricks. The supernatural buffalo-spirit was supposed to have such variety of powers that it could pass one kind to each, without their sharing” (Deloria n.d.:3).

similar to Elk dreamers but with spider-web designs in the center; the *Tháhč'a* (White-Tailed Deer) Society; the *Šungmánitu* (Wolf) Society, whose members wore wolf skins, were likely scouts, had some power to cure and remove arrows, and prepared *wóthawe* (war medicines) for mystical protection against enemies; the *Tháthánka* (Buffalo Bull) Society, comprised of individuals whose visions made them adept scouts, buffalo callers, healers, and warriors; the *Wiykte* (Berdache) Society, which did not perform a specific ceremony, but was comprised of especially *wakháŋ* men—some of whom were hermaphrodites—who shared similar visions, often dressed and acted like women, performed women's roles, and bestowed sacred names upon young children; the *Wiyyan Núnpapika* (Double Woman) Society, comprised of women who dreamt of the mythical Double Woman or Deer Women, were especially adept quill workers, and had particularly strong powers of seduction over men; and the *Wakháŋ Ičíhanbla* (Dreaming Pair) Society, comprised of pairs of individuals who had visions of one another and whose rituals involved shooting medicine or *wakháŋ* potency at one another (Powers 1982b:57–59; Wissler 1912:81–99).

Wissler maintains that historically there were seldom more than three or four members of a given Dream Society at one time. Although a common vision experience was the major prerequisite for membership, joining a Dream Society was expensive because of obligations to sponsor various rituals, feasts, and giveaways. As Fletcher notes, “Membership in these societies is not confined to any particular gens or grouping of gens, but depends upon supernatural indications over which the individual has no control. The animal which appears to a man in a vision during his religious fasting determines to which society he must belong” (Fletcher 1884b:277). The societal and

economic necessities of Lakota life were mirrored in the Dream Societies. According to Hassrick (1964:293), “From the point of view of the entire society, the dream cult had a real foundation in the economic and religious needs of the group. There was no schism between the individual need and the group need.”

Because a *wakǰáŋ* dream was the essential qualification for membership, women were also members of Dream Societies, except apparently the Bear and Wolf Societies (Wissler 1912:88, 90). Writing of the Bear Society, Wissler (1912:88) explains that “no women members are known. We were told that women never dreamed of bears. The shamans of this cult were held in very great regard because of their power in healing wounds. When one of them gives a feast all medicinemen having received their medicine and all who have been cured by the bear medicine are invited to attend. The wives of the shamans and medicinemen may also attend, but no other women.”

Fletcher (1884b:277) provides additional information on the role of women in Dream Societies, writing, “Some societies admit women to membership, through their own visions, or occasionally by those of their husbands, but more generally by means of the visions of male relatives. The women sit in a place assigned them, and those possessing clear soprano voices are instructed in the music, and accompany in high tenor voices the men who sing in unison.” Bushotter notes that women also honored men by providing the shrill, uvular fricative “lililili” or screech-owl call (*uŋgnáǰičala hothúŋ*) for some men’s societies (Bushotter 1937:Story 194). Additionally, women prepared the terminal feast, a foundational Lakota ritual phoneme or riteme²⁹² marking the end of ritual performances.

²⁹² Seth Kunin defines ritemes as “the smallest constituent units of . . . rituals” (Kunin 2004:13).

According to some, a specific vision was enough to insure membership in a Dream Society. Others claim that men and women were initiated into Dream Societies through the *Wačhípi Wakhán* (Mystery Dance), where they were instructed in the society's esoteric beliefs, rituals, taboos, and songs. During the *Wačhípi Wakhán* some upper-level initiates were given *wašičuŋ* or *wóphiye* (ceremonial bundles) infused with *wakhán* potency by the holy men who were the leaders and most powerful members of the Dream Societies. According to the Oglalas Red Cloud, Meat, and No Flesh (in Walker 1991:117), these bundles "should be made of something dreamed of. Medicine may be kept in them. *Wasicunpi* should remain in them." Consequently, vegetal medicines revealed in dreams and the skins or parts of the spirit vision instructor or intermediary were often centerpieces of a sacred bundle (Dorsey 1894:440; Walker 1991:30, 48, 117–118, 136; Wissler 1912:81). Such bundles became an individual's personal medicine, understood broadly as both spiritual and secular, tied to identity, and essential to his or her success in all things. Fletcher notes:

These religious symbols are the most sacred personal possessions; they are rarely inherited, being generally buried with the person. In a few cases, when a man has possessed peculiar powers of prophecy and supernatural force, his son, if he inherits his father's talent, would sometimes inherit the sacred symbol or his progenitor and carry it with his own, in his personal bag. In every instance which I have been able to authenticate, these more recondite gifts have been accompanied by a sort of medical skill. [Fletcher 1884c:290–291 n 6]

The mythical water monster *Uŋktéŋhi*, inveterate enemy of the sky power *Wakínyan* (Thunder Being), created the first ceremonial bag and also instituted the *Wačhípi Wakhán*. Participating in the *Wačhípi Wakhán* obligated the initiate to ever after hold the

mystical lore and mysterious practices of the holy men as sacred (Dorsey 1894:440; Walker 1991:30, 48, 117–118, 136).

Dream Societies were rather loosely organized and informal. Using Schneider's (1969) terms, the bonds that united the members of a Dream Society into a unified group were based usually on shared identity and *wak'háŋ* or other-than-human substance in terms of common spiritual ties to or relationship with the society's spirit guardian and representative. Hassrick writes, "Allegiance to one's supernatural mentor was strong" (Hassrick 1964:292). There were also relationships of diffuse, enduring solidarity defined in terms of a shared code for conduct and behavior. Thus, membership in a Dream Society was not based on birth, shared natural substance, blood, residence, or volition per se. Instead, membership was largely a matter of participation, self-ascription, and ascription by others in interaction with both the secular and sacred domains (cf. Barth 1998:5–6; Schneider 1969:120–124).

Lakota Dream Societies were distinguished not only by their emblematic spirit guardians or sources of power, but also frequently by the types of medicines they utilized and the specific functions they performed. These medicines (*p'hežúta*), along with instructions in their usage, were often revealed by spirit beings in human, animal, vegetal, or other form during the Vision Quest.²⁹³ To gain membership in a Dream Society one's vision had to conform to a certain formula, the basic elements of which consisted of: the dreamer, the instructor, the person requiring aid or the one to be overcome by medicine, and the person or persons giving the medicine (Wissler 1912:81).

²⁹³ For more on the Vision Quest, see Albers and Parker (1971); Benedict (1922); Black Elk (1989:44–66); Irwin (1994b); Martinez (2004); and Walker (1991:83–86, 129–135).

Lakota people actively sought visions and believed they correspond to the character of the seeker. With visions came obligations that were as binding as the necessity to fulfill a vow.²⁹⁴ If one failed to act on one's vision or fulfill a vow made in the presence of the spirits, misfortune (*wówaħtani*), sickness, failure in hunting or warfare, or some other disaster would surely result. Those who failed to fulfill vows had bad luck or, in Bushotter's words (1937:Story 119), *šicáya waák 'ip 'a kta* (will meet something badly), expressing the notion of inevitable future misfortune not yet experienced. Fletcher (1884b:277) writes, "A vision, I was frequently told, comes of God, and a man who does not act it all out faithfully commits a sin, and evil fortune will befall him or his parents in consequence of the dereliction." This notion of "supernatural" or spiritual-mystico retribution was and continues to be common.

It was believed that various natural forces or phenomena, such as lightning, would punish those who did not act on visions or fulfill vows, causing the disruption and often termination of life movement (Densmore 2001:157). Life movement was critical to historical Lakota religious belief and magico-ritual practice and continues to be today. When he was thirteen years old the Oglala Calico had a dream in which he and his family were struck by lightning. After consulting with his father Calico realized that "If I did not go through the ceremony, I would be killed by lightning. After this I realized that I must formally tell in the ceremony exactly what I experienced" (Wissler 1912:83).

Providing a feast for Dream Society members, setting up a ceremonial lodge, and publically announcing one's vision to the tribe were usually the first preliminary vision obligations. The postliminal feast was an essential Lakota riteme, nearly as fundamental

²⁹⁴ If a religious practitioner accepted a pipe from someone, hence agreeing to treat a patient, this act was also as binding as a vow.

as the ritual itself. Feasts usually marked the termination of a ceremony and the readjustment to secular existence, but also embodied core cultural values, such as generosity and hospitality. If an individual failed to provide a feast in accordance with his or her vision he or she might have to repeat the feast at another time. As Walker (in Wissler 1912:85) notes, “Sometimes one must give several feasts before it is announced that he has acted according to his vision.”

The public announcement of one’s vision took the form of a prescribed ritual performance that served to indicate the nature of the vision, identify one’s spirit guardian, and ally and bind the individual with others who experienced similar visions. This performance, known as a *káǵapi* (performance, imitation), was discussed in detail above. As Fletcher (1884b:276) writes, “Each society has a ritual composed of chants and songs to be sung during different parts of the ceremonies, having words describing in simple and direct terms the act which accompanies the music.” Deloria provides evidence corroborating Fletcher’s observations, describing how the food distribution portion of the Victory or Scalp Dance was associated with a specific Dog Society song (Bushotter 1937:Story 196).

Each Dream Society sponsored and performed ceremonies composed of specific prayers, chants, songs, dances, and ceremonial acts. The specific rites varied from one society to the next. While these rituals allowed for vision-inspired variation and individual innovation they were also characterized by what religious studies scholar Catherine Bell (1997:152–153) refers to as ritual invariance, implying that ritual is carefully choreographed in order to insure timeless repetition. Lakota ritual generally may be conceptualized as both static and dynamic. It was imperative that rituals always

be performed in the prescribed manner, neither embellishing nor truncating any aspect of the performance, lest *wakúŋza*²⁹⁵ or “supernatural retribution” result, leading to the cessation of life movement. Dream Society rituals only took place in accordance with a vision, often necessitating the initiation of a new member. The details of such visions were scrupulously fulfilled and (re)enacted during the ceremony in great detail (Fletcher 1884a:275 n 22; 1884b:276–277; Walker 1991:83).

Music and dance, in the form of songs and steps received in visions, were essential to Lakota Dream Society ritual performances. As Standing Bear recalls:

Since song was the usual method of keeping the Lakota in touch with his Wakan Tanka, it formed a large part of all ritual. Many songs were dreamer songs received while in communion with spirits of beings personified as humans. Some of the dreamers who brought songs to the people were the Elk, Duck, Thunder, Hawk, Wolf, Spider, Fox, Crow, and Stone. The wisdom of these beings was given to the dreamer in song and he in turn sang them to help his people. [Standing Bear 2006b:214]

Dance, a powerful and prevalent Lakota religious symbol, was equally important and meaningful in magico-ritual practice. “For the Lakotas the dance was a symbol of religion,” DeMallie (1982:392) suggests, “a ritual means to spiritual and physical betterment.” Since these songs and dances were given by other-than-human persons they were believed to possess religious power in their own right. Fletcher (1884b:276) notes, “Every member is taught these songs after his reception into the society, and the music is thus handed down from generation to generation. Other songs are sometimes sung which have been composed by members and thus belong to the society.” Society songs were

²⁹⁵ See Grobsmith (1974).

strictly guarded and rarely sung, except at society rituals, and never in vain or irreverently (Fletcher 1884b:276–277; Standing Bear 2006b:218–220).

Each prayer and song referred to specific ritual actions as they were performed. In Dream Society ceremonies visions were ritually (re)enacted and spirit beings imitated, allowing for symbolic identification and ritual transformation. This was done because vision powers remained dormant until they were publicly performed and acknowledged. A common distinguishing feature of historical Dream Society rituals was the practice of sorcery/witchcraft in the form of shooting medicine, in which members ritually shot *wakháŋ* potency or influence at other members, participants, or spectators through various means, including but not limited to mirrors, hoops, and symbolic representations of snakes and other spirit beings.²⁹⁶ The shooting of medicine was only done by those with mystical aid and efficacious medicine and was associated with the ritual rivalry among Dream Societies. It was a demonstrating, exercising, and contesting of the ritual efficacy and *wakháŋ* abilities and powers of religious practitioners and their spirit guardians. For instance, in the *Mathó káǵapi* (Bear imitation) a *Mathó waphiya* (Bear conjuror), cloaked in a bear skin, might become bulletproof and stab onlookers with a knife, only to demonstrate his healing powers by subsequently curing them of their wounds (Walker 1991:159). Individuals who were shot with and overcome by medicine often became dizzy and dazed; collapsed to the ground as if dead; spit and coughed up dirt, blood, bird claws, bugs, sage, fingernails, and other plants; and then were healed by practitioners and ritually brought back to life (Bushotter 1937:Story 88; DeMallie

²⁹⁶ As previously noted, shooting medicine was particularly associated with *ǎmúnǵa* (sorcery/witchcraft).

2001:808; Hassrick 1964:279; Powers 1982b:57–59; Standing Bear 2006b:218–219; Wissler 1912:81–99; 1916).

Shooting medicine was part of the more pervasive Lakota ritual focus on competition or publically demonstrating or testing one's *wakǰáŋ* powers and abilities. Bushotter (1937:Story 88) explains that Elk dreamers impersonated the elk “as a means of testing their medicine, to see how holy it was.” He also describes a ritual called “They Demonstrate Invulnerability,” in which large crowds of onlookers gathered as holy men came together, ritually painted and adorned themselves, blew on sacred flutes, and then were shot at with arrows. But the arrows did not penetrate the holy men. Then they were shot with guns, but the bullets were ineffective and fell harmlessly to the ground, flattened against the holy men's bodies. Sometimes blood poured from the mouths of the performers, but there was no sign of wounds on their bodies. The performance was completed when the holy men washed the sacred paint from their bodies.²⁹⁷ They were only invulnerable during the ritual performance. Bushotter writes, “It was the sacred painting of earth colors which had rendered them safe . . . With medicine they had first covered themselves, by rubbing it over the body, and also perhaps it was by the power of the flute, the people supposed. Perhaps the bullets were also treated with this same medicine, people said” (Bushotter 1937:Story 84).

As previously mentioned, there were a number of consistent Lakota ritual articles and religious symbols that were essential to all magico-medico-ritual practice, regardless of the Dream Society. At Pine Ridge in 1882 these indispensable ritual elements included a pipe; a sacred dish, usually made of a hard wood; fire; sweetgrass, sage, cedar, tobacco,

²⁹⁷ Painting was and is another significant Lakota riteme.

and other sacred plants and herbs used for smoking, incensing, and purification; a meticulously prepared space of mellowed earth serving as an altar; a buffalo skull; and various symbols affixed upon the mellowed-earth altar or painted upon some reflective surface—such as a mirror—or on the hide of an animal or bird (Fletcher 1884b:277).

In addition to these essential ritual elements each Dream Society had specific regalia and ritual objects related to or characteristic of its other-than-human emblem or spirit guardian and its members' visions. Wissler describes the formal regalia of Oglala Elk dreamers (*Heháka ihánblapi*):

They wear peculiar triangular masks made of young buffalo skins, with a pair of branches trimmed to represent elk's antlers. These horns are wrapped with otter fur to represent horns "in the velvet," as the immature horns of the elk are described. They carry a hoop of two cross cords, supporting a mirror at the center. These dreamers are believed to have magical powers and to throw or shoot their influence into all they oppose; so, as they dance about the camp circle, they stamp a foot and flash sunlight from the mirror at persons in sight. This is supposed to put the victims in the power of the elk cult. [Wissler 1912:87]

Walker provides a detailed description of the formal regalia of an Oglala Buffalo dreamer (*Tháthánka ihánbla*) around the turn of the twentieth century:

The Shaman went into his tipi and donned his regalia. This was a headdress consisting of a cap made of buffalo skin with the long shaggy hair on it and a small buffalo horn attached to each side so that it would stand out from the head as buffalo horns do; from each side hung a pendant made of white weaselskins and hawk quills. From the rear hung a strip of buffalo skin with the hair on and a buffalo tail²⁹⁸ attached to it so as to come below his knees when standing. This was the formal regalia of a buffalo medicineman. His only clothing was a breechclout, leggings, and

²⁹⁸ According to Deloria, animal tails worn in ritual performances symbolically represent the specific animal spirit (Bushotter 1937:Story 194). We will recall that symbolic identification is a prerequisite to ritual transformation.

moccasins. His hands, body, and face were painted red, symbolizing his sacred powers as a Shaman; there were three perpendicular black stripes painted on his right cheek, this being the sign of his authority on this occasion. When he came from his tipi he held in his right hand his Fetish and two small wands, each having a small globular package wrapped in soft tanned deerskin attached near the smaller end; in his left hand he carried his ceremonial pipe, and a staff made of chokecherry wood.²⁹⁹ [Walker 1917:144]

Through symbolic identification, enacting and embodying spirit powers in Dream Society rituals and dances, human performers were ritually transformed into spirit powers through a process I refer to as spirit mimesis. The Lakota term for spirit mimesis is *káğa* (to make, act, enact, represent, perform, imitate). The terms *akhóyaka* (to wear, as in a spirit “wearing” a human being) and *káğa* are semantically very similar, except that *káğa* can be used as an active verb more freely, i.e., *Mathó wakáge* (I imitated the Bear). Imitation and (re)enactment were significant Lakota religious and magico-ritual concepts in that, similar to beliefs concerning language and art (see Brown 2007:2–3, 53–57), it was believed that through performance and (re)enactment the various spirits imitated were simultaneously invoked, evoked, and quite literally produced or manifested. Impersonating, imitating, or (re)enacting one’s vision or the spirit being from whom one received power activated, enacted, and embodied that power on the human plane, in a sense opening the portal or road (*čhanjú*) between the spirit and human realm. Spirit mimesis ritually manifested the spirit power being imitated or (re)enacted. The words of a Thunder Being vision song recorded by Lone Man for Densmore read:

Wakháŋ makáğapelo. (I have been made sacred.)

²⁹⁹ There were definite similarities between the regalia of Buffalo dreamers and Sun Dance leaders or intercessors (see Densmore 2001:126).

Wakháŋyaŋ makáǵapelo. (I have been influenced in a sacred manner.) [Densmore 2001:165–166]

Clearly, the concepts of wearing, imitating, (re)enacting, influence, and making sacred were common and significant ones.

Historically Dream Societies were extremely important in that they functioned to preserve, maintain, and transmit traditional knowledge. According to Sword, “The Bear medicine men teach each other the songs and ceremonies and the medicines they must use and what they are good for” (Walker 1991:91). Thunder Bear verifies Sword’s claim, saying, “If the vision pertains to a particular kind or class of medicine, as, for instance, Bear medicine, he must become the pupil of some Bear medicine man and learn what the medicines are, how to prepare them, how to administer them, and the songs and ceremonies that pertain to them” (Walker 1991:132). Through Dream Societies—and the master-apprentice method of training and transmitting sacred knowledge³⁰⁰—a great diversity and high degree of specialization in religious belief and magico-medico-ritual practice was sustained and perpetuated, allowing for the characteristic individuality and innovation inherent in nineteenth-century Lakota religion and ritual. As Fletcher writes:

These religious societies . . . draw their membership from all the gentes and are small private circles within the great religious circle of the tribe. When the annual religious festivals are held, all persons must take part, and as far as I have been able to learn none of these religious societies at that time take any precedence, or as societies perform especial religious services. The old religious forms and rituals are often preserved in these societies after the tribal religious ceremonies, from untoward circumstances, have fallen into disuse. [Fletcher 1884c:294 n 12]

³⁰⁰ The master-apprentice model continues to be the major training method for contemporary Oglala religious practitioners at Pine Ridge.

Fletcher underscores the significance of Dream Societies in terms of the overall religious landscape of historical Lakota society and culture, what Bourdieu would refer to as the Lakota religious or ritual field.

In a similar vein the Santee elder Starr Frazier explained to Deloria a parallel function of the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* (Mystery Dance) among the Eastern Sioux: “Each Wakǰá man or woman who, from the beginning, was admitted, added his knowledge of medicine, derived from his rapport with the supernatural, so that as the years went by, more and more such knowledge was accumulated” (Deloria n.d.:8). Describing candidates for initiation into the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* Frazier explains, “It is assumed that the candidate has some secret knowledge of herbs and other means of saving life, which he derived from his vision or other channel of reaching and being reached by the Supernatural. It is further assumed that his acceptance of the candidacy is in itself a readiness on his part to give over everything he knows of this sort into the common pool” (Deloria n.d.:17).

Wissler explored Plains Indian Dream Societies in great detail in the early twentieth century. The Oglalas, explains Wissler (1916:858), “have no series of distinctly shamanistic associations . . .” However, the *Heyókǰá* and *Heǰáka* Societies usually appeared together and were associated with one another: “Whenever the elks thus appear,” Wissler (1912:88) notes, “the heyoka come near and try to make medicine to harm the elks and their followers, but are usually unable to do so.” According to Wissler (1916:860), “in fact all the animal cults tended to dance together in one great fête . . . at which time they masqueraded according to their respective cult animals.” Specific Dream

Societies attended the rituals of other Dream Societies in order to publically test the society's power, shooting medicine at the assembled dreamers (Hassrick 1964:278–279).

Considered together as a whole the various Dream Societies in nineteenth-century Lakota society and culture comprised much of the underlying structure of what Fletcher (1884c:294 n 12) refers to as “the great religious circle of the tribe” and what Bourdieu would call the religious or ritual field (see Figure 17). Wissler, writing almost thirty years later, confirmed Fletcher's observation. He writes that some were disposed to consider the Oglala Dream Societies collectively “as all parts of one great cult and it is true that they often held their ceremonies at the same time and all jointly participated in the ceremonies of shooting medicine, where they made a show of rivalry” (Wissler 1912:95). The specific vision requirements, characteristic features and functions, interrelationships, rivalries, strategies, and boundary maintenance mechanisms that distinguished nineteenth-century Lakota Dream Societies fueled and perpetuated a great diversity in religious belief, as well as acute specialization in magico-medico-ritual practice. The “great religious circle of the tribe” in the pre-reservation era, comprised of a number of distinct Dream Societies with diverse religious beliefs and highly specialized practices and practitioners, was an example of culture and religion as the organization of diversity, rather than the replication of uniformity (cf. Barth 1998:1–38; Wallace 1952). Next we will examine how these ideas translated and traditions and practices evolved throughout the dawn of the reservation period in the twentieth century and beyond, focusing on the social organization of contemporary Oglala Lakota religion.

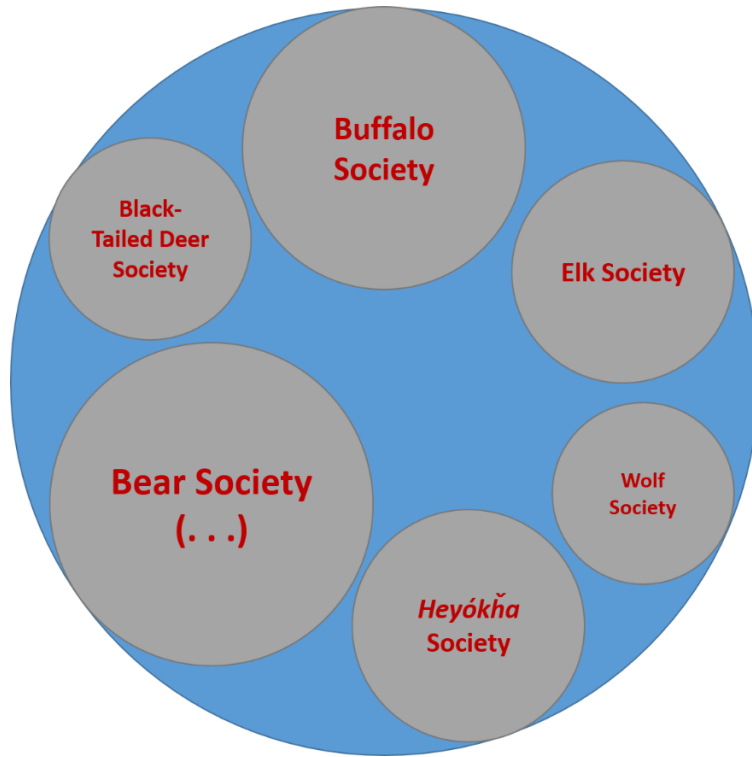


Figure 17: Dream Societies in Nineteenth-Century Lakota Religious Organization

PART FIVE: ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY OGLALA LAKOTA BELIEF AND RITUAL

1. TRADITION AMONG THE OGLALA LAKOTA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Undoubtedly, tradition is one of the most visible, pervasive, significant, and controversial key cultural symbols among the Lakotas today. It is also one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences. Great value is placed on conceptions of tradition in Lakota discourse, and behavior is validated by its use. As anthropologist Raymond Bucko suggests, “fidelity to perceived tradition is invoked by many to authenticate their practice. The Lakotas’ use of their understanding of the past is essential for understanding contemporary ritual in which past and present, continuity and innovation, precedence and practicality are brought together” (Bucko 1998:97). Tradition is a complicated, dynamic, and loaded term.

Tradition is symbolic, polysemous, paradoxical, and powerful, simultaneously conceptualized as static and fluid, concerned with both conservation and innovation. Ultimately, it is a continuous, ongoing process (see Bucko 1998; Glassie 1995). Tradition is about commitment to the *Lakhól wičhóh’an* (Lakota way of life), history, identity, indigeneity, persistence, power, responsibility, and sacrifice. Among the Lakotas, history provides the core of tradition and what is considered traditional, yet, like indigeneity, tradition is a thoroughly modernist, highly politicized, and discursive notion. The persistence and survival of traditional continuities may be interpreted primarily as functions and reflections of political and social structural processes of the present (cf. Kapferer 2003:19–20). As Kapferer (2003:20) explains, “the concept of ‘traditional’ . . . subverts the recognition that some practices which do have historical depth, and maybe

because of it, possess internal dynamics that make them always already modern.”³⁰¹ In this section we will explore what tradition means from past and present Oglala perspectives and what constitutes a traditional lifestyle in the twenty-first century. Clearly, tradition is a key to understanding both historical and contemporary Lakota identity, indigeneity, religion, and ritual and is a focus of and force in contemporary Lakota decolonizing strategies.

In DeMallie’s seminal article “Lakota Traditionalism: History and Symbol” (1991) the title alone speaks volumes: two key aspects of the meaning of tradition from Lakota perspectives are history—social and cultural conceptions and constructions of the past—and symbolism. Perhaps the most crucial foundation of tradition lies in understandings of the collective Lakota past—whether grounded in Western notions of history per se, oral tradition, or fanciful syncretic reconstructions in the present of an imagined past—and a sense of continuity with that past and with one’s Lakota ancestry. Paradoxically, tradition is anchored in the past but negotiated in present modernities: “Lakota tradition,” writes DeMallie (1991:8), “like the past of any cultural group, has become modeled by the concerns of the present.”

In 1894 Fletcher recorded an example connecting the importance of conceptions of the past, ancestors and elders, and the endless stream of the generations to the idea of tradition among the Hunkpapa Lakota. She writes (1884a:274 n 21), “The old priest said toward the close of his description of the [White Buffalo] festival, ‘Thus my grandfather

³⁰¹ Informed by Taussig, who utilizes French intellectual Georges Bataille’s theory of the sacred, we might assert that the power and unity of the modern Lakota people collectively springs from the magical force of a hegemony forged through ethnic constructions of tradition and traditionalism, providing disparate groups separated sometimes by great distances with an immediate unity. This phenomenon is comparable to Frazer’s notion of sympathetic magic (see Kapferer 2003:18; Taussig 1997).

did, thus he was made a holy chief, and his son after him, and I too, who am now an old man. They have told me that I must do thus to do right, and I try to do right and teach my children so that they may follow in the right way and live long.” Referencing perceived continuities with the past, even today, is often the method by which what is considered to be traditional and authentic is legitimated among the Lakotas. Fletcher’s account also speaks to the method and pedagogy by which Lakota religious practitioners are trained, namely, through the master-apprentice model.

DeMallie writes:

Historical context is essential for understanding the concept of “traditionalism” today, which more than any other symbolizes for the Sioux what it is to be Indian. The attempt to return to the “old ways,” the “traditional ways,” “Lakota ways,” motivates many Sioux people today, both young and old, to find satisfaction in beliefs and practices that provide historical links to the past. In the process, contemporary Sioux people are reinventing tradition and creating a new sense of tribalism that expands far beyond reservation boundaries to provide a secure basis for Indian identity in the white man’s world.³⁰² [DeMallie 1991:2]

Feraca also notes the fundamental significance of history vis-à-vis Lakota traditionalism, along with the central importance of elders and their conceptions of history and maintaining what they consider to be “proper”:

Traditional religion is herein treated as recognizing, respecting, acquiring, and utilizing supernatural power in terms of such beliefs and practices *deriving from the pre- and early-reservation period*. . . . In the context of the twentieth century, understanding what is traditional in Lakota religion can only be achieved with attention to each succeeding (or preceding) generation of ‘*old-timers*.’ The Lakotas rationalize their beliefs and rites in terms of *what they think is proper in the view of the aged*, whether or not

³⁰² This process has only gained momentum since the dawning of the digital age and the accelerated processes of globalization accompanying it.

the successively younger people are themselves truly aware of what transpired earlier. In this respect I have often been greatly impressed at the ease with which many Lakotas are able to make generational leaps backward, even to previous centuries, to justify what they perceive to be a traditional aspect of a given religious ceremony.³⁰³ [Feraca 1998:xi–xii; emphasis added]

Various expressions in the Lakota language are used in reference to the old ways of the Lakota people, such as *eháŋni* (long ago, in the past, in old times), highlighting the importance of the historical element inherent in Lakota conceptions of tradition (DeMallie 1991:7). The Lakota language reflects these considerations, providing evidence for the connection between tradition(alism) and the past. According to DeMallie (1991:7), the Lakota expression for generation, *ikčé wičháša wičhóičhaže* (literally, ‘Indian ways’), “refers not to the passing generations as such, but rather to the means of generation of the Indian people, their customs and ways of life.” (Re)generation is an essential Lakota ritual theme and cultural value.

The Lakota term *wičhóh’añ* is at the heart of conceptions of tradition.³⁰⁴ As Bucko suggests:

The word *wiçhóh’q* ‘tradition’ is used in several ways by the Lakotas on the reservation. The first meaning . . . implies the handing on of a body of material from the past. The second, more analogous to custom or habit . . . , refers to actions in the present that represent generalized repetitive behavior. Finally, the English word *traditional* is used to mean “proper, correct, or accurate” and can imply one or both of the two Lakota meanings.

Actions or behaviors consistently carried out by a wide variety of Lakotas in the present qualify as traditional. [Bucko 1998:98]

³⁰³ Loretta Fowler’s cohort theory is relevant here. See Fowler (1987).

³⁰⁴ Other Lakota expressions for tradition(al) include *Lakhólyakel*, *yulákhólyakel*, and *Lakhóta hčá*. In these expressions, the stem is “Lakota” itself, indicating that what it means to be traditional is equated with what it means to be Lakota in general.

Bucko defines tradition as the constructed synthesis of a dialectical process combining past and present. According to Bucko, tradition results from a dialectic in which participants “bring the past into the present, not as a whole, but according to current understandings, needs, and circumstances” (Bucko 1998:12). Religious and ritual innovation, adaptation, and diversity result because each individual constructs and formulates the two poles of this dialectic in distinct ways, based on individual cumulative spiritual experiences (Bucko 1998:12–13). Bourideu might refer to this formulation as one’s religious habitus, in that tradition reflects a largely unconscious and ongoing dialectical process whereby subjective expectations and dispositions are constrained by and situated and (re)produced in relation to objective realities.

Tradition, writes Bucko, “is not simply a combination of past and present but an individually and communally accepted combination of these elements” (Bucko 1998:252). Lakotas ultimately legitimate or disqualify traditional practice based on informal communal consensus and ritual effectiveness. Being an ongoing process there is no single source or representation that fully encompasses or encapsulates tradition: there are many expressions and representatuions of Lakota tradition, so that the plural, Lakota traditions, may be a more appropriate understanding of the phenomenon. As Bucko (1998:96) suggests, “History is joined to contemporary exigencies in a dialectical process to create tradition ever anew. Tradition is neither *creatio ex nihilo*, nor is it an exact replication of the past. It is the debate over the valid combination of these poles by valid interpreters that sparks the variation and core consistency of . . . [tradition] today.” Tradition is rooted in past practice, yet negotiated and symbolically (re)constructed in the

present through communal action and throughout the course of any and every ritual act. Traditional is in all cases synonymous with appropriate and valid (Bucko 1998:13–14, 98, 111).

Bucko and others have been inspired by the work of anthropologist Morris Foster, who utilized sociologist Edward Shils's (1981) conception of tradition to great effect in his influential study of Comanche identity (Foster 1991). Foster's definition of tradition is interactive and processual: "The pattern of repeated interaction constitutes the tradition in each community. The modes of subsistence, the social units, the cultural frameworks, even the languages used in any one period are instrumental rather than fundamental to this pattern of tradition" (Foster 1991:172–173). Foster's conception of tradition reflects Lakota definitions of tradition as constituted and (re)produced by and through practice and communal action. "Thus," concludes Bucko (1998:100), "contemporary behavior is the ultimate criteria for tradition, albeit behavior that is linked to and evaluated by perceptions of the past."

Feraca (1998:xii) points to the significance of the power concept (*wakǰáŋ*)—and associated elements of fear (*kǰókípǰa*, *wókǰókípǰe* [a cause for fear, something dangerous; often used to characterize the spirit realm and *wakǰáŋ* doings generally]), respect (*ohóla*), and honor (*yuóniháŋ*)³⁰⁵—tied to conceptions of tradition: "What is genuinely traditional is gauged . . . by assessing . . . differing levels of respect for the power associated with such ritual. . . . Traditionalists fear not only those who abuse or

³⁰⁵ For Bushotter, *ohóla* refers to respect, reverence, and worship, all of which are semantically interrelated from Lakota perspectives. *Wakǰáŋla* is also used in reference to worship (see Bushotter 1937:Story 28), although the notion of worship itself, undoubtedly a Christian influence, is not wholly adequate in reference to Lakota religious belief and ritual practice. According to Feraca, all Lakotas share a combination of fear and respect in relation to the *wakǰáŋ* and Lakota religious traditions. As Feraca (1998:xii) suggests, "This combination, it can be assumed, existed aboriginally. For the Lakotas, the concepts of fear and respect are, in a religious sense, virtually indistinguishable."

misuse things religious but the power itself, a seminal element often lost in the numerous descriptions and discussions of Lakota religion.” For Feraca, Lakota traditionalism is not about the frequency, quality, or quantity of ritual and sacrifice; rather, it is about adherence to and respect for tradition in its own right. This is what many Lakotas refer to as *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ*, the nexus of Lakota traditions, belief, symbols, and values that guide and determine thought and behavior. *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ* is perhaps the best way to conceptualize the notion of tradition in the Lakota language.³⁰⁶

For many contemporary Lakotas a sincere love and respect for and dedication to *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ* is at the heart of Lakota traditionalism. As Oglala artist and educator Arthur Amiotte explains, living according to *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ* means working, operating, and behaving according to the ideals and beliefs of Lakota society. It represents an ethnocentric worldview— honed over thousands of years and practiced with passion, even after nonnative contact—that continues into the present. *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ* also includes loving, supporting, and perpetuating all Lakota traditions and being absolutely committed to them (Posthumus 2008-2014).

For Amiotte, closely related to *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’añ* is the concept *ša’ič’iya* and its semantic relative *ša’iya* (Posthumus 2008-2014). *Ša’ič’iya* in its ancient meaning refers literally to making or painting oneself red with pigments or earth paints, usually in ritual and social settings as a sign of tribal identity, solidarity, purification, or consecration. Red is the most sacred of colors among the Sioux, apparently an ancient belief (Walker 1917:149). As Lynd states, “In the worship of their deities *paint* forms an important feature. *Scarlet* or *red* is the religious color for sacrifices” (Lynd 1889:169; emphasis in

³⁰⁶ A Lakota Facebook friend of mine lists *Lakǎól Wičhóǎ’añ* (Lakota way of life, Lakota traditions) in her Facebook profile under the category “Religious Views” (Posthumus 2008-2014).

original). According to One Star, “Red is the color of the sun . . . A man who paints red is pleasing to the spirits” (Walker 1917:159).

Ša’ič’iya literally refers to ceremonially painting oneself red. Figuratively it means to wear one’s best or don one’s finest regalia in order to consecrate and present oneself to the sacred powers of the universe. Over time the meaning of *ša’ič’iya* extended beyond painting to adorning oneself appropriately to honor the tribal ideals of a given occasion. An individual who practiced the ideal of *ša’ič’iya* represented the best of Lakota culture (Posthumus 2008-2014). Fletcher references *ša’ič’iya* without naming it, observing that all the Hunkpapa chiefs gathered at a White Buffalo Ceremony she witnessed in the early 1880s arrived in their finest ceremonial dress. At the ritual feast immediately following the ceremony each of the attendees had their faces painted red (Fletcher 1884a:266, 273).

The related term *ša’iya* refers to ceremonially painting another person red, and by extension, to give others fine things or adorn them with clothes, regalia, other respectable precious garments, household goods, horses overloaded with gifts, and sometimes even entire tipis. According to Amiotte, *ša’iya* is the outward expression of the fundamental Lakota value generosity and the very foundation of the Giveaway, a central and common Lakota ritual³⁰⁷ (Posthumus 2008-2014). Through *ša’ič’iya* and *ša’iya* Lakotas demarcated the sacred, consecrated themselves and others, and prepared for presentation to and communion and interaction with the spirit realm. Ultimately, *Lakħól wičhóħ’an* means living in balance or harmony with the universe and embodying and epitomizing all the things symbolized and represented by the Lakota virtue *ša’ič’iya*. Love of and

³⁰⁷ For more on the Giveaway, see Amiotte (1990) and Grobsmith (1981b).

dedication to *Lakǎól wičhóǎ'an* and the conscious, regular practice of the ideal of *ša'ič'iya* are foundational to Lakota traditionalism and the Lakota religious ethos and worldview, which we will explore in the next chapter.

Part of the complexity inherent in conceptions of tradition is its multifaceted and problematic history in the discipline of anthropology, tied to salvage-anthropology efforts. According to DeMallie (1991:3), in studying Native North America anthropologists for many years “focused on recording the fast-vanishing customs of earlier times, always reaching back into the memories of the oldest living tribal members to reconstruct life as it was before the white man—the ‘ethnographic present,’ or as anthropologists have sometimes called it, ‘traditional culture.’” It is important to note that reconstruction of the past was a central element of this endeavor, which functioned both to commodify and glorify the past and the knowledge of elders in American Indian society, leading in many cases to the objectification of native culture, identity, and language (see Castile 1996; DeMallie 1991:8; Heller 2010).

Since its inception anthropology as a discipline has been implicated and intimately involved in these processes of cultural commodification and objectification. As DeMallie (1991:8–9) suggests, “Perhaps it is in part the intervention of anthropologists that has caused the expression ‘traditional culture’ to be used in English. During the past decade the word ‘tradition’ has come to stand for the entire concept. Lakotas now speak of ‘traditional people,’ meaning those who adhere in thought and deed to values considered to reflect the Indian past.” Perhaps the entire tradition-traditionalism complex, like the notion of the supernatural, is a Western notion imposed on American Indians by nonnative outsiders. In any case, the discursive modernity of

tradition—a dialectical process based on conceptions of the past but embedded in present economic, political, and social realities—is apparent. This facet of traditionalism constructs and reflects various paradoxical processes at work in contemporary Lakota life.

Through textualization nineteenth-century anthropology sought to preserve or salvage representations of cultures believed to be destined for extinction.³⁰⁸ At best, according to the dominant opinion of the times, native groups would cease to exist as distinct cultural units, gradually fading through the fragmenting processes of assimilation and syncretism. From the beginning anthropology has been implicated in the creation, definition, defense, and denial of perceived cultural authenticity, a problematic concept in its own right. Some scholars critique the very notion of Indianness and Indian identity as a spurious construct or an invention of tradition.³⁰⁹ Anthropology is tied to conceptions of authority and the dynamics of power relations within and outside of local native communities. Anthropological fieldworkers tend to determine that certain individuals are more authentic or representative of a given culture than others, thus legitimating certain voices, invalidating others, selecting from a limited range of opinions and beliefs, and consciously or unconsciously establishing a cultural orthodoxy. In short, anthropologists have found themselves—and sometimes purposefully positioned themselves—in the role of defining “authentic” expressions of native cultures (Bucko 1998:109–111; see Hoxie 1984).

³⁰⁸ Matti Bunzl’s (2004) article on a neo-Boasian approach in anthropology is stimulating and promising. For Boas, anthropology involved a history of the present, taking cultural differences for granted, yet seeking to explicate their evolution and existence.

³⁰⁹ There is a large corpus of material dealing with the dynamics of authenticity, tradition, and the notion of its invention, starting with Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and continuing with Handler and Linnekin (1984), Linnekin (1983, 1991), Clifton (1994), and Sahlins (1999), among others.

Concepts such as authenticity, authority, legitimacy, and validity are semantically intertwined with and closely interrelated to tradition. Bucko effectively and eloquently addresses these issues in his book *The Lakota Ritual of the Sweat Lodge: History and Contemporary Practice* (1998), highlighting the significance of the period during which Lakota religious and ritual expression were outlawed by the United States government, which I refer to as the ban period. In 1881, just two years before the government officially banned all forms of American Indian religious worship and ritual, the Lakotas of Pine Ridge held their last legal Sun Dance, the annual life-renewal ceremony and high point of the ritual calendar. Especially in the prereservation era the Sun Dance served to bring all the Lakota people together in one place, renewing bonds of friendship and alliance. It also served to renew the people's dedication and commitment to the Lakota way of life.

In his *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* on October 10, 1882 Commissioner Hiram Price planted a seed that would forever alter the course of United States government policy concerning American Indian religious freedom: "Civilization is a plant of exceedingly slow growth," Price wrote, "unless supplemented by Christian teaching and influences" (Prucha 1990:157). The following year Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller took up the torch lit by Price. In his *Annual Report* on November 1, 1883 Teller spoke of "a great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians, viz., the continuance of old heathenish dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, &c. These dances . . . ought . . . to be discontinued, and if the Indians . . . are not willing to discontinue them, the agents should be instructed to compel such discontinuance" (Prucha 1990:160). As a result of this push to "civilize" the American Indian by means of

suppressing their distinct spiritual practices and traditions American Indian religious freedom was outlawed by the government in 1883. The ban was not officially lifted until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.

The effects of the influential 1928 Merriam Report nearly a half century later gradually led to the demise of the ban on American Indian religion and ritual, anticipating the 1934 Wheeler-Howard Act, popularly known as the Indian Reorganization Act (Prucha 1990:219–225). Although traditional spiritual practices were apparently observed and maintained in secret during the crucial transition period from the initial ban in 1883 until after the Merriam Report in 1928, a great amount of religious knowledge was lost as the older generations of Lakotas passed on and the younger generations were raised in a hybrid milieu in which the ever-present and inescapable shadow of colonialism, Christianity, and other non-traditional beliefs and values constantly loomed.

After the initial ban on Lakota religious practices in 1883 white Indian agents among the Lakotas kept close tabs on what was going on at the reservations, particularly anything of a spiritual nature. The agents were harsh and altogether intolerant of anything resembling native religious practices and Lakota people were punished or denied rations if they were even suspected of participating in their ancestral ceremonial ways (DeMallie 1991:14).

Then in 1928, the same year the Merriam Report was issued, the Lakotas were instructed to perform a Sun Dance for then-president Calvin Coolidge. The dancers at that first public Sun Dance since 1881 were mostly elderly and none actually pierced, a common feature of the Plains Sun Dance.³¹⁰ Some dancers did, however, “mock

³¹⁰ Piercing in the context of the Plains Sun Dance refers to the practice of piercing the pectoral muscles of the dancers as a sacrifice to the Creator. Wooden skewers are threaded through the pierced chests of any

pierce”—that is, they wore leather harnesses that gave the appearance of being pierced. In many ways the 1928 Sun Dance must have felt like a recreation of the old Lakota religion or a reenactment of the old buffalo-hunting days when the people were happy and not confined to the reservation with its hopelessness and dismal drudgery. To some Lakota people at that time the 1928 Sun Dance was probably just an act, similar to “playing Indian,” but to others it was a real and meaningful religious experience that served to reawaken, reestablish, or publicly resume the religious sensibilities of a deeply spiritual people. The 1928 Sun Dance in many ways could be viewed as the very beginning of the revitalization of Lakota religion and ritual that gained momentum and force throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Lakota religion purportedly remained strong on an underground and secretive level, the 1928 Sun Dance was the first public celebration of Lakota spirituality since 1881.

The secrecy, subversion, and supposed continuity of underground practice throughout the ban period, which spanned at least fifty years from 1881 to the 1930s, gave rise to a persistent and instructive phenomenon that Bucko labels ethnognosticism:

Secrecy allows for the broad development of what might be called ethnognosticism, which holds that when cultural information was transmitted to outsiders (particularly anthropologists), it was deliberately altered in order to protect the true tradition. Thus, the true past is known only to certain individuals (or distributed among a few individuals who must meet together to reconstruct the whole). Tradition, in this instance, is preserved in secret knowledge, held to be transmitted within family lines.³¹¹ [Bucko 1998:100]

dancers who choose to pierce and ropes are used to connect the skewers to the Sun Dance pole in the center of the sacred area. The dancers then attempt to break free of the skewers by tearing the flesh of the chest. Piercing was particularly opposed and demonized by pro-ban agents, government officials, and missionaries who, without understanding its cultural, cosmological, and symbolic underpinnings, considered it to be “savage” and “primitive” (see Mails and Fools Crow 1979 and Walker 1991).

³¹¹ In particular, some contemporary practitioners claim that the Sun Dance and associated ceremonial bundles and ritual knowledge descended strictly along the *Khiyáksa* line, a prominent Oglala *thiyóšpaye*

Ethnognostics are the “true knowers” and repositories of Lakota tradition. Lakota ethnognosticism is a force and process both within and outside of Lakota groups. “As an internal strategy,” explains Bucko (1998:101), “it is used to defend its own construction of tradition against the truth claims of outside groups and even competing groups internal to the system. As an external strategy, New Age individuals claim access to legitimate practice from traveling medicine men, from the reading of texts, or from insights gleaned from their own spiritual experiences or former lives as Indians.” But the fact that textualized documentary representations of Lakota culture and practice have an influence on Lakota belief has been consistently recognized (Bucko 1998; DeMallie 1984; Medicine 1987, 2001; Powers 1990).

A case in point is the influential yet much ballyhooed Walker corpus (1917, 1982, 1991, 2006). Some Lakotas claim that Walker’s interlocutors deliberately lied to him in order to protect the true beliefs of the Oglalas. Some contemporary practitioners deny that they have any knowledge of the Walker material whatsoever, despite strong evidence to the contrary and its public dissemination and wide-ranging availability at Pine Ridge since at least the 1970s. Others are more comfortable with openly confessing to having knowledge of, reading, and studying Walker’s texts (Bucko 1998:104–105; Posthumus 2008-2014). “Ethnognosticism rejects the body of recorded literature,” explains Bucko (1998:104), “claiming that a true, pure, unbroken tradition exists. The inherent assumption is also that there is a single tradition. The veracity of these recondite teachings is a point of contention on the reservation, where groups and individuals

(band) that originally settled in the Kyle District at Pine Ridge (Posthumus 2008-2014). Ethnognosticism may also be productively compared to other Lakota ceremonial bundle traditions.

sometimes argue over both who has the accurate tradition and who represents it faithfully.” Learning tradition from textualizations of spiritual experience is perceived as less legitimate or authentic, in comparison to learning it in the “old” or “traditional” way, that is, passed down through the generations in the form of oral tradition.³¹²

For Bucko, ethnognosticism is a symbolic defense against the perceived appropriation and alienation of cultural property from many fronts, whether they be anthropological, missionary, or New Age renditions of native spirituality. Ethnognosticism “also allows for broad cultural creativity,” explains Bucko (1998:104–105), “having a built-in form of legitimation (secret transmission), which is more difficult to refute than public explication. As a form of dialectic, ethnognosticism claims sole authority in access to the past, shifting the debate of legitimacy to who actually has access to this legitimate knowledge.” Similar to the former case against the anthropological validation of traditions of cultural authority, internal and external Lakota ethnognosticism is leading in some cases toward the dogmatization of an orthodox Lakota religious canon. In some ways the Walker material and Black Elk’s texts (1989, 2008; DeMallie 1984) have already begun this process. This appears to be the case particularly among neo-traditionalists who are often instructed by and apprenticed to Lakota ethnognostics, who are seen as traditional authorities and culture brokers. We will discuss and analyze contemporary social categories at Pine Ridge in greater detail below.

³¹² Although kinship may no longer be the major focus of Lakota identity in the twenty-first century, having been eclipsed by religion, it is still frequently used as a mechanism for the negotiation of legitimacy and authority in terms of tradition. Frequently one hears, “My grandfather told me, and he did it this way. . . .” and like expressions used to legitimate authority, authenticity, tradition, and practice. Religion and ritual are outer manifestations of identity, buttressed by claims to authority and legitimacy, based frequently on kinship. Pedagogy also serves a similar function: “This is how I was taught by so and so. . . .” Both forms ultimately reverence the past and Lakota conceptions of their history, the core of tradition and ultimate proof of authenticity and legitimacy for contemporary Lakota people (Bucko 1998:102).

In any case authority in terms of Lakota tradition is constructed and negotiated in various, often competing, and contradictory ways, one analytical model for its explication being ethnognoticism. The most important authorities in terms of tradition are, of course, the Lakotas themselves. Tradition must be communally recognizable as such in order to be considered a legitimate expression of tradition. But there are many ways to be traditional from twenty-first-century Lakota perspectives, which we will explore in the section on contemporary Oglala social identities. Historical texts also contest for authority, as well as accounts of contemporary practice written by anthropologists, missionaries, Native Studies scholars, and native and nonnative New Age practitioners. Various forms of media also cast a large shadow in terms of legitimating cultural practice and defining tradition, such as fiction, film, art, the New Age movement, and the American popular imagination and culture. Technology is an important lens through which we experience and construct our lived realities. All of the above influence and contribute to both emic and etic perceptions and opinions of validity. However, the legitimating mechanisms for continuity and change in the ongoing dialectical process that is Lakota traditionalism are ultimately and definitively anchored in and informed by communal activity, sentiment, and assent (Bucko 1998:102–103; DeMallie 1991:14–17; Foster 1991:171–174; Glassie 1995).

At the outset of this dissertation I sought to examine Lakota tradition from the opposing vantage points of the past and present, separating the poles of Bucko's dialectic process. The analytical goals from this perspective were to clearly differentiate historical tradition (and historical traditional religion and ritual) from contemporary tradition (and contemporary traditional religion and ritual). However, I have come to realize that Lakota

tradition, religion, and ritual frequently defy neat categorization and simplistic classifications and demarcations. Tradition is truly an ongoing, organic, and timeless process. Like myth, tradition must be conceptualized as time out of time or atemporal. If one digs deep enough and searches hard enough the underlying historical continuities in Lakota tradition, religion, and ritual reveal themselves as clearly and tangibly as the roots of an ancient ponderosa pine tree, rendering a delineation of tradition based on time arbitrary and ultimately meaningless. This contemporary section is an exercise in revealing and exploring these historical continuities and roots.



There are a number of tangible symbols that index and represent a continuum of traditionalism among the Lakotas. The symbols themselves are surprisingly persistent, stubbornly resistant to change. But the meanings associated with them, like conceptions of tradition and culture itself, evolve through time, reflecting various historical circumstances and shifting social, economic, and political realities and configurations. The process of tradition flows on through time and space like a stream of consciousness, acquiring novel meanings here and discarding irrelevant fragments of the past there. The only true universal and enduring continuities are the construct of tradition itself and the enduring life movement of the Lakota as a people.

Included among the important markers or symbols of Lakota identity are geographical factors, such as relative isolation from major population centers, especially those occupied by nonnatives; geolocal or residential patterns; blood quantum; various outward symbols of identity, such as hair style (long hair, braids), clothing styles or fashion choices (wearing beads, feathers, quillwork, Pendelton clothing, a blanket

[historically]), and housing traits (presence or lack of “clutter” (see Daniels 1970); and various behavioral and ideological attributes, such as membership in a drum group or participation in powwow culture or religious and ritual groups. These symbols are relative to context, and each may be used by both Lakotas and non-Lakotas to index and gauge various things, including individual identity, ethnic group membership, degree of assimilation, adherence to tradition, and commitment to the *Lakǎól wičhóǎ’an* and traditional values. We will examine these identity symbols, their implications, and analytical utility in greater detail in the section on contemporary Oglala social categories.

Much of tradition as it is constructed and enacted today is intimately tied to identity, ethnicity, politics, representation, and, hence, indigeneity. Indigeneity, like ethnicity, is relational, acquiring meaning not through essentialisms but through difference and boundary maintenance. It is highly politicized, often reactionary, and can productively be conceptualized as oppositional identity (see Figure 18).³¹³ Indigeneity is contingent historically and contextually and is extremely useful as a legal concept for political persuasion, fighting for the land, resources, and human rights of the often marginalized indigenous peoples of the world. From the perspectives of (neo)colonial oppressors indigeneity may be thought of as a subversive countermovement. From the perspectives of the oppressed it is an effective decolonizing strategy aimed at the conservation and protection of land, labor, life ways, human rights, and cultural survival in general (see Braun 2013; Weaver 2005).

³¹³ I do not support extreme constructivist theories that deny the reality and validity of culture, assuming that all markers of difference are necessarily part of a discourse of exoticism and essentialism. Instead, I see processes of differentiation and expressions of indigeneity, like religion and ritual in general, as revealing significant social, cultural, and political processes of reality construction, creation, and negotiation. See Harkin (in Harkin et al. 2004:xvi) and Kapferer (2013:5).



Figure 18: An Upside Down American Flag is a Common Symbol of Oppositional Identity and Indigeneity (Photo by Aaron Huey © 2013)

Lakota indigeneity is a strong force in modern America and has developed over many generations. Although the notion of indigeneity per se is a thoroughly modernist one, as Greene (2009) suggests, the practice and active, discursive negotiation of relational, oppositional, and processual ethnic identity is much older. According to DeMallie:

During the twentieth century, old elements in Lakota culture have been reinterpreted and reintegrated to serve as symbols of Indianness, to differentiate the Lakotas from white people and to serve as symbols of critical commentary on white culture. Through selective retention of past values and customs, as well as the creation of new patterns based on old cultural processes, the Lakota people have come through a period of

rejection of the past to embrace a recreated past that serves as a stabilizing force in a world progressively more confusing to Indians and non-Indians alike.

If the symbols and patterns of Lakota culture have developed over the past century, it is important to ask what the parameters of this change have been. Has a pristine “Lakota culture” been diluted with symbols borrowed from the white man’s culture? Has traditional “Lakota culture” become progressively more of a generalized “Indian culture” with the introduction of elements borrowed from other tribes? Is the whole that is Lakota culture qualitatively different from what it was a century ago? . . . Investigation of these issues leads to the underlying question of the nature of the boundaries around Lakota culture, in both the past and the present, and the patterns of interaction that these boundaries represent. [DeMallie 1991:8–9]

The unforeseen aftereffects of processes of indigeneity have been many and varied. Although maintaining cultural and political sovereignty, unintentionally the heightened and often emotional differentiation of us from them in the American Indian case has exacerbated the commodification and objectification of native culture, identity, and language, which has unfortunately often led to increased alienation and appropriation for profit by nonnatives of indigenous intellectual property, knowledge, and traditions.³¹⁴ Yet DeMallie points to continuity in terms of cultural objectification, suggesting that native culture is necessarily objectified today, as it was for traditional Lakotas of the nineteenth-century, such as George Bushotter, George Sword, and Nicholas Black Elk. The contemporary oppositional element, specifically in relation to Euro-Americans, is the modern (by)product of cultural confrontation, conflict, and, paradoxically, hybridity.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ There is a large and ever-growing discourse examining indigenous intellectual property issues. See, for instance, Brown (2003), Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), Geismar (2013), Greene (2004), Jackson (2010), and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 2004).

³¹⁵ Folklorist Jason Jackson’s theory of the paradoxical power of endangerment may be productively applied to Lakota social processes of indigeneity. Jackson (2007:38) writes, “customary knowledge and practices take on new power when identified as endangered traditions. To speak and act toward a tradition as if it were endangered is, paradoxically, a means of preventing the loss that the category of endangered attempts to describe. While the common analogy between endangered species and ecosystems and endangered languages and cultures is deeply problematic in many respects, there is a clear overlap at this

As DeMallie (1991:8) explains, “Indian culture is embraced in opposition to the white man’s way, while Indian people still interact in the social network of Western civilization.” One of the most visible symbols of Lakotanness and traditionalism today can be found in religion and ritual.

Religion, ritual, and a spiritual relationship with the universe are among the central features of Lakota traditionalism today, often gauged in terms of commitment and dedication to the Lakota way of life and participation in communal religious expression and ritual practice. Religion, expressed in belief and ceremony, is vital to Lakota identity and ethnicity, governing and centering the traditional life of the Lakota people since time immemorial (DeMallie 1991:8). Religion is ensconced beside history at the very heart of Lakota tradition, pumping precious lifeblood into the entirety of the Lakota nation and allowing for the perpetuation of collective ethnic life movement. Religion continues to be a force for Lakota indigeneity today, serving as a rallying battle cry on the bloody, contested, multinational frontlines of global decolonization efforts.

Tradition, religion, and ritual are not only central to contemporary expressions of Lakota indigeneity, they are also foundational to the historical and contemporary Lakota ethos and worldview, to which we now turn our attention.

point. Describing something as endangered is a way of both highlighting its special value (perhaps as yet not widely recognized) and of mobilizing people to intervene to prevent the loss—the disappearance—that is being evoked. More powerful in some ways than its conceptual neighbors tradition and heritage, endangerment can galvanize people to action, even as all these ways of thinking about culture significantly change the very phenomena they seek to celebrate.” Recognition of inescapable cultural hybridities endangers conceptions and constructions of “pure” or “authentic” traditions and identities and essentialist views of culture, giving processes of indigeneity new power to differentiate us from them and maintain ethnic boundaries.

2. CONTEMPORARY OGLALA LAKOTA ETHOS AND WORLDVIEW

Ideas and conceptions of tradition, along with associated notions of authenticity, authority, and legitimacy, are central to and inseparable from contemporary Oglala identity constructions. In some sense Lakota identity and Lakota religion have become inseparable and are mutually constituting. Identity is based on a distinct ethos and worldview that provide meanings, cultivate ideologies, frame realities, and constrain behavior.³¹⁶ But for many Lakotas the core of the Lakota ethos and worldview is spirituality, expressed through belief, ritual, and commitment to the *Lak̄hól wičhóh'ay*. This focus on the transcendent and appreciation of the *wak̄háŋ* has been noted since the earliest accounts recorded by outsiders and disparagingly described in terms of “primitive superstition.”³¹⁷ Religion and ritual connect individuals to both collectivities and the *wak̄háŋ*, and hence are tied to kinship, another foundation of the Lakota ethos and worldview. Kinship and relationship frame Lakota life and thought, inclusively defining and expanding the domain of personhood to include all life forms. Phenomena I have labeled Lakota religious tolerance and hybridity are (by)products of the Lakota ethos and worldview, all of which fuel and inform expressions and processes of Lakota indigeneity in the twenty-first century.

In anthropology the conceptual and analytical usage of the term worldview is broad. Worldview generally refers to the overarching philosophy of or outlook on the

³¹⁶ Recall that by ethos we mean the emotional tone or “feel” of a particular culture. Worldview refers to the understanding of or outlook upon the world that is unique to or characteristic of a given culture (see Barnard and Spencer 1996:604, 628; Geertz 1973; Hallowell 1960; and Redfield 1952).

³¹⁷ Superstition may be defined as any belief or action that is thought to be irrational. But rationality, as we have seen, is problematic and must be understood and defined in indigenous contexts (Barnard and Spencer 1996:624). In many cases superstition dovetails semantically with anthropological definitions and explanations of magic as beliefs and practices relying on humans’ ability to control other-than-human persons. Both magic and superstition are processes used to influence events beyond human control through occult or parapsychological means.

world of a given culture. Pointing to diacritical features of cognition and perception, worldview represents and frames fundamental conceptions of the world, which, in turn, influence and constrain behavior. Yet worldview tends to focus more on thought and feeling, cognition and emotion, as opposed to practice.³¹⁸ Worldview, like ethnicity and indigeneity, indexes critical, culturally constituted differences between groups of people, in this case based on how they perceive or view the world around them, and may be conceptualized as contexts, frames, or lenses of individual and collective significance (Rapport and Overing 2000:394–404).

Anthropologist Robert Redfield (1952:34) characterizes what he unfortunately labels the “primitive” worldview as being based on three assumptions, which are relevant to our discussion here. He writes, “One: in the primitive worldview, that which is confronted [read other-than-human forces] and that which does the confronting [read human] are not sharply separated; they tend to be unitary. Two: in the primitive worldview the predominating attitude toward the Not-Man is one of participant maintenance. Three: in the primitive worldview the universe is morally significant.” Redfield’s basic assumptions apply to our examination of Lakota worldview.

Worldview overlaps conceptually with cosmology, ideology, and culture itself but is particularly inextricably linked to ontology. Ontology is that aspect of metaphysics that examines the nature of being, existence, and reality in general and associated assumptions based on that understanding, such as basic categories of being and their relations (Edgar

³¹⁸ Geertz (1973), adapting Bateson’s (1936) earlier usage, differentiates worldview from ethos, essentially a distinction between thought or cognition and feeling or emotion. For Geertz (1973), worldview refers to an intellectual understanding of or way of thinking about the world and its workings common to a particular group, while ethos is an emotional appreciation, way of feeling about, or affectively evaluating the world. Ritual functions to assure the mutually supportive and sustaining relationship of worldview and ethos, which integrates culture. Successful ritual assures that what is thought is emotionally acceptable and what is felt is intellectually reasonable (see Rapport and Overing 2000:395–396).

and Sedgwick 2002:264–265; Rapport and Overing 2000:395). Redfield’s first and third assumptions above are linked to the relational ontology of the Lakotas and inclusive conceptions of personhood, as discussed by Hallowell (1960) and Detwiler (1992).

An understanding of the significance of the category and actions of persons, grounded in shared being, is essential to an understanding of the Lakota worldview. For the Lakotas the person category is not limited to human beings, but transcends it, and is inclusive of an other-than-human or spirit category. There is no clear ontological distinction between what might be called natural and supernatural, human and other-than-human, and religion is not characterized by belief, but rather by encounter, experience, manifestation, power, and other phenomenological concerns. Lakota religion is primarily concerned with a relational ontology and ethics. Behavior and relationship determine whether a phenomenon is categorized as animate or inanimate, human or other-than-human, not belief. Personhood is understood in terms of both ontological and moral significance and potential. As Detwiler (1992:239) suggests, “The category person applies to anything that has being, and who is therefore capable of relating.” In many ways religion and kinship are inseparable from Lakota perspectives.³¹⁹

The Lakota ethical metaphysic, coupled with the centrality of relationship, speaks to Redfield’s third assumption concerning the moral significance of the universe. Ethical considerations are at the heart of the Lakota ethos, the set of moods and motivations or general emotional tone and character that guides Lakota life, thought, and behavior (cf.

³¹⁹ According to Feraca, “communities and villages, usually deriving from historic bands, persist (Feraca 1966). In part due to isolation, traditional religion in these communities continues to flourish. Even in the smaller, truly remote locales, often two or more church buildings can be found. The activities of the Christian congregations, like those of the participants in traditional religious meetings, are very strongly kinship oriented” (Feraca 1998:6).

Geertz 1973:113, 126–127). The Lakota ethos is generally held to encompass at least four great virtues, namely, bravery, generosity, fortitude or strength, and integrity or honesty (Walker 1917:62). Other important Lakota cultural and ethical values include activity or industry, fidelity, frugality, harmony, humility,³²⁰ kindness, obedience, order, regeneration, respect, sacrifice, and service (Posthumus 2008-2014; Standing Bear 2006b:8, 27–28, 56, 66–69, 204).³²¹ According to Standing Bear (2006b:40), “the philosophical ideal of the Lakota was harmony, and the most powerful symbol was that of peace.”

The second and most important of Redfield’s assumptions concerning worldview is intimately tied to religion, ritual, and conceptions of tradition. “To a large extent,” explains DeMallie (1991:8), “‘tradition’ has become focused on the spiritual relationship of humanity with the universe, the sacredness of a relationship that antedates the advent of Europeans in the New World. Stressing harmony with man and nature, oneness with the earth, Lakota tradition became reoriented during the twentieth century to reflect Indians’ criticism of white culture.” From Lakota perspectives spirituality and ritual focus largely on balance and equilibrium, what Redfield (1952) describes as “participant maintenance,” an essential element of a worldview in which people are a part of nature

³²⁰ Humility, piety, or pitifulness is a central Lakota religious virtue and symbol, expressed in Lakota by the term *uṅšika*. *Uṅšika* springs from fear and respect of the *wakháŋ*, but also out of a call for aid and a recognition of relatedness from human to other-than-human. The Lakota word for prayer, *wačhékíya*, literally means to cry to or for and is closely connected to the concept of humility (Deloria 1998:28–29). “For the Lakota people,” explains DeMallie (1984:82), “prayer was the act of invoking relationship: the term *wacekiye* meant ‘to call on for aid,’ ‘to pray,’ ‘to claim relationship with.’” Sending a voice to the Great Spirit is a common metaphor for prayer in Lakota culture. The Giveaway is also associated with humility, in that giving away all of one’s worldly wealth and goods is a sign of humbleness in the face of the spirit powers of the universe. *Uṅšika* is foundational to the Lakota religious ethos and worldview.

³²¹ From more on Lakota ethics, see Blish (1926), Fletcher (in Hodge 1912:441–442), and Rose (2014).

rather than above or separate from it, working with the elements rather than against them, focusing on mutual beneficence and relationship.

From the perspective of participant maintenance it is the responsibility of human beings to maintain and perpetuate the harmonious relationships between humanity and other-than-humanity and the natural balance or equilibrium of the environment and the universe. As Redfield explains, according to the participant-maintenance worldview:

The cosmos is seen as a perpetually self-repeating system embracing both the physical universe and the supernaturals; man himself is a part of this system and his part in the maintenance of the unending cycle that ensures well-being is discharged in private good conduct and in public ritual. In this worldview one does not alter the universe, and one does not so much obey an authority as enact one's share of the whole sacred drama of life. [Redfield 1952:33]

Although there is no sharp ontological distinction between human and other-than-human and personhood transcends the category of human beings, there is a recognition of the human obligation toward the other-than-human in terms of ethics, power, and relationship. This is what Tambiah (1990:6) refers to when he discusses the distinctive feature of religion as being “a special awareness of the transcendent, and the acts of symbolic communication that attempt to realize that awareness and live by its promptings.” Again, the original meaning of the Latin root *religio* is enlightening. In Roman times, Tambiah (1990:4) explains, *religio* “carried a double meaning: the existence of a power outside to whom man was obligated; and the feeling of *piety* man had toward that power.” Both Redfield's and Tambiah's insights are instructive in our exploration of the Lakota ethos and worldview.

Ritual, in particular, is central to understanding the Lakota ethos and worldview. As Detwiler (1992:244) reminds us, the relational ontology and ethical metaphysic characteristic of Lakota culture, grounded in encounter, experience, and other phenomenological concerns, requires scholars of Native American religions and worldviews to turn from belief to the performative and behavioral character of religion. Kapferer's (2013) commendable work on ritual is particularly relevant to our present concerns. I support Kapferer's insistence that the ritual domain transcends Foucauldian notions of power relations and dynamics, providing the anthropologist with the opportunity to enter within the symbolic and performative processes wherein humans constitute their cultural and existential realities. Kapferer adopts a broadly phenomenological approach to ritual, characterizing it as imaginal, phantasmagoric, and virtual.³²² He writes, "Rituals are for me . . . complex dynamics of reality construction and creation. They are in other words key spaces (what I have referred to as 'domains of virtuality' . . .) in which human beings enter within the vitals of their realities, as it were, adjusting their processes and constitutive effect for ongoing existence" (Kapferer 2013:5).

Following Kapferer (2013), ritual is generative and intimately tied to ontology and sacrifice. Sacrifice is the central organizing dynamic of ritual, and the sacrificial nature of ritual distinguishes it from other forms of intensely symbolic performance. According to Kapferer (2013:6), "The sacrificial structure of ritual (a key dimension of which is the very opening of space within existence) is thoroughly to do with the vital reoriginating pragmatics of rite." Sacrifice and regeneration are crucial to the Lakota

³²² He critiques the drama-performance approach to ritual, opting for an interesting cinematic approach, based on his concept of virtuality, and influenced by Deleuze (see Kapferer 2013:9–10).

ethos and worldview and are defining and fundamental characteristics of Lakota ritual (see Densmore 2001; Lynd 1889; Walker 1917, 1991). In terms of participant maintenance, ritual, characterized by sacrifice and (re)generation, is critical.

Ritual also provides new orientations and perspectives on time and action, opening up an imaginal, phantasmagoric space, a domain of virtual reality encompassing the fullness of the potentiality of time. Ritual time, which Kapferer productively compares to Nietzsche's notion of the Eternal Return or Time as Totality (see Kapferer 2013:6; 2014), is directly related to sacrifice and Redfield's conception of participant maintenance. As Kapferer suggests, "ritual aims to re-situate (re-originate, re-birth) its participants within time so that the past is stopped from becoming its future - indeed the past and its effects being overcome through the machinery of rite in which, effectively, a new past is created through the future rather than vice versa" (Kapferer 2013:6). This also speaks to the central importance of and focus on the future in Lakota religious and ritual discourse.

Ritual participants enter into the process of time itself, in which all existence and potentialities are emergent, and come to foresee and are able to adjust their life's circumstances. Sacrifice, the defining dynamic of ritual, functions to divide the past from the future, creating and opening up an imaginal or phantasmagoric space within the totality of eternal time for the formation of new experiential realities (Kapferer 2013:6). Ritual, conceived of in these terms and as processes of participant maintenance, renews and restores the equilibrium and balance that characterizes the natural state and operation of the universe.

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Among the Oglalas at Pine Ridge the centrality and importance of ritual is striking and immediately apparent. On multiple nights each and every week, clustering with greater frequency around the weekends, sweat-lodge fires are set ablaze; ritual drums, songs, and prayers can be heard piercing and echoing through the night; practitioners are tied up and set free by their spirit helpers; people are treated, healed, and soothed; congregations feast on puppy and beef soup, frybread, and *wóžapi* (traditional berry pudding); and people chat and laugh as they drink coffee, *čheyáka* (wild mint tea), water, and pop long into the night.

Since the earliest accounts ever written about the Lakota people generally—and the Oglala especially—native insiders and nonnative outsiders alike have noted the foundational nature of religion and ritual among the Western Sioux.³²³ That is, the Lakota people are and appear to have always been a deeply spiritual people, motivated by religion, dedicated to the traditions of their ancestors, and tenaciously clinging to and upholding their distinctive way of life, especially in regard to what may be termed the religious or spiritual realm. As DeMallie (1991:4) suggests, “Few tribes have a stronger sense of identity with their past. To outsiders, the Sioux seem the epitome of ‘traditional people.’”

³²³ Geertz (2005:10) differentiates between religiousness (“everyday reflexive faith”) and religious mindedness (“self-conscious, doctrinarian belief”), and his categories are useful here. As Geertz (2005:12) explains, “The transformation of more or less routinely transmitted, compliantly received conceptions of the good, the true, and the actual into explicitly asserted, vigorously promoted, and militantly defended ideologies – the move from ‘religiousness’ to ‘religious mindedness’ of various sorts and degrees of intensity – that was ‘observed’ as getting underway in Moroccan and Indonesian Islam in the mid-1960s as those countries began seriously to reconsider their religious history is now a quite general phenomenon in a world where more and more people and the selves they have inherited are, so to speak, out of context: thrown in among others in ambiguous, irregular, poly-faith settlements.” Considering religiousness and religious mindedness as opposite ends of a continuum, we can easily characterize and plot various Lakota identity types as religious, religious minded, or a hybrid of both, depending on varying levels of spiritual (re)orientation. This distinction and insight will be especially useful in our discussion of contemporary Oglala social categories.

Oglala resilience in the face of dramatic change, colonialism, assimilation efforts, and missionary attempts to wipe out native belief systems is truly astonishing and admirable. The Oglalas of Pine Ridge have come to serve as exemplars of authenticity and models of the retention of traditional values for other American Indian groups. Among the seven tribes of the Lakotas the Oglalas are often considered the most traditional, meaning that there is a general belief among natives and nonnatives alike that the Oglalas tend to adhere in thought and deed to values considered to reflect the Lakota past (DeMallie 1991:8). Many religious and magico-ritual beliefs and practices are perpetuated among the Oglalas at Pine Ridge that became dormant on other Sioux reservations. These considerations form the foundation of what is perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of the Oglala people and a core attribute of both historical and contemporary Oglala identity, namely, the Oglala religious ethos and worldview.



The historical continuity and consistency of the Lakota ethos and worldview is undeniable. Missouri Fur Company trader Jean-Baptiste Truteau traveled the Missouri River from 1794 to 1796 and had numerous encounters and relations with the Tetons. He wrote that the indigenous peoples of the Upper Missouri had “blind faith in all their . . . superstitions and confidence in their medicine” (Parks et al. 2014:66). The artist George Catlin traveled the west and interacted with American Indians from 1832 to 1839, often commenting on the “superstitious” nature of the Tetons (Catlin 1973:2:229, 233). “Indian character,” Catlin (1973:1:35) states, “. . . is made up, in a great degree, of mysteries and superstitions.” In the late 1830s French geologist and explorer Joseph N. Nicollet described the Yankton or middle division of the Sioux, writing, “all their practices and

their customs come to them from the Teton — horses, songs, medicine ceremonies, dances, manners, etc.”

When the physician James R. Walker first arrived at Pine Ridge Reservation in 1896 it was the second largest reservation in the United States and “still considered the ‘wildest’ of the Sioux reservations by many people”³²⁴ (Walker 1991:6). According to Walker (1991:45), “The Oglalas were very religious, but not at all pious. They did not worship any thing. By sacrifices and ceremonies they propitiated their Gods to secure their aid, or placated them to appease their anger. . . . One or more of the Oglala Gods is ever present, therefore it behooves an Oglala to avoid offense by conduct in accord with the ceremonies prescribed by the shamans.” The photographer Edward S. Curtis traveled among the Tetons from 1905 to 1908. He corroborates Walker’s sentiments, reporting that “The Sioux, like other Indians, are exceedingly devout, all acts of their lives being attended with religious practices” (Curtis 1908:7).

According to Lakota chief and author Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939), religion, ritual, and tradition dominated Lakota culture (DeMallie 1991:8; Standing Bear 2006b:40–42, 196–197, 230). He writes, “The Lakota’s religion and philosophical ideas were an inseparable part of him – his as much as the blood that vitalized his being” (Standing Bear 2006b:212). In the 1930s the well-known Yankton Sioux ethnographer Ella C. Deloria (n.d.:9) noted that, “The extreme Oglala . . . loved ceremonial perhaps

³²⁴ Wildness (*wathóglā* [wild, unbroken, untamed]) may be understood and indexed in terms of relative degree of assimilation, acclimation to, and isolation from American culture and level of acceptance and hostility toward Euro-Americans. It was an important marker of pre- and early reservation-period Lakota identity. *Wathóglā* was often juxtaposed to *wágluǰe* (‘loafer’, hanger-on, one who lives with his or her relatives), a term used, often derogatorily, in reference to assimilated and acculturated Lakotas, originally referencing those who lived near the military forts, whose daughters were often married to white soldiers. Today, these distinctions are often applied to “full bloods” and “mixed bloods,” biosociocultural categories that we will discuss in greater detail below.

more dearly than any other band.” When anthropologist Haviland Scudder Mekeel³²⁵ conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge during two consecutive summers in the early 1930s he was immediately struck by the deeply rooted spiritual nature of the Oglalas. In early June 1930 Mekeel (1930:8) reports, “Entered western end of Pine Ridge and was much struck by difference in Indians. [Compared to Rosebud and Pine Ridge Town.] Many more ‘long-hairs’ and quantities of horses and teams. A thick settlement along White Clay Creek. Learned that this is the biggest group of full bloods.” As we have seen long hair and blood quantum, whether reckoned biogenetically or socioculturally, are important symbols of Lakota identity.

During his stay at Pine Ridge in 1930 a white cowboy informed Mekeel that the Oglalas were “hooked on religion” (Mekeel 1930:11). It would not take long for Mekeel to witness what the cowboy meant firsthand. Observing the reverent ritual behavior of a group of Oglala friends before a feast was served in Custer, South Dakota in the summer of 1931, Mekeel (1930:5) reports, “Some of the Indians have a deeply religious nature which seems unshaken by change of form. I am sure it was not for my benefit.” Later, discussing the religious nature and philosophy of the Oglalas, Mekeel (1930:11) states, “They want to get everything absolutely straight, so when they tell it to other people it will be true. . . . Indians are more reverent and sober-minded about religious matters in general than a group of white people. They take such things seriously and must have things worked out philosophically (rather, logically) for their lives.”

Almost twenty five years later anthropologists Wesley Hurt and James Howard described religious life at Pine Ridge, writing, “Most of the *Yuwípi* men now practicing

³²⁵ For a critical presentation of Mekeel’s work, focusing on his construction of the primitive and exotic “Other,” see Biolsi (1997).

come from either the Pine Ridge or Rosebud reservations in South Dakota. These are the two most conservative of all the Dakota reservations. Well-known leaders are often called to distant reservations to conduct the ceremony. There are several *wapiye* still practicing, with a concentration around Kyle, South Dakota” (Hurt and Howard 1952:294). Hurt and Howard’s findings corroborate our position regarding the Oglalas as conservative exemplars of tradition and authenticity, as well as the importance of Pine Ridge as a hub of religious and ritual activity where beliefs and traditions were sheltered, (re)produced, maintained, and perpetuated.

Shortly after Hurt and Howard’s stint at Pine Ridge the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) appointed Robert H. Ruby to the position of medical doctor in charge of the health needs of the Oglalas at Pine Ridge. Ruby arrived in 1953 and spent eighteen months on the reservation. He was keenly interested in American Indian culture, especially religion, and he and Mekeel made some strikingly similar observations despite the time lapse between their stays at Pine Ridge (Ruby 2010:v–xiv). According to Ruby (2010:xxi), “In South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the second largest in the country, live the Oglala Sioux, still observing customs and clinging to habits that served the needs of their ancestors over one hundred years ago. They are held so tenaciously by their old superstitions that they all but refuse to accept the basic standards of modern civilization.”

Ruby further contextualized his observations:

Many primitive customs and religious rituals survive, and the old crafts are still practiced. . . . And today, although this also applies to a few other tribes in some respects, the Sioux still cling to their old superstitions and cultures with stubborn persistence. Their lives, attitudes, and practices are a mixture of primitive habits, sifted through modern teachings and

customs, which has produced a complex tribal personality. [Ruby 2010:13]

Ruby was quick to notice the Oglala religious ethos and worldview and also the significant fact that beliefs and rituals survived and were perpetuated at Pine Ridge that were lost or had gone dormant on other reservations. This tangible continuity with the past in terms of religion and ritual is what has crystalized the perception of the Oglalas as being the most traditional and authentic of the Lakota tribes. The Oglalas are looked to as authorities on religious matters and customs, steeped as they are in the traditions of their ancestors, the old way of life, and *Lakhól wičhóh'ay* that too frequently deteriorated among other Sioux tribes in the face of colonialism, ethnocide, assimilation, and other horrific historical circumstances.

Black Elk's immense contribution must also be noted here. His influence as a religious visionary is felt far and wide to this day, both on and off the reservation. Finally, many of the leaders of the revitalization of Lakota religious belief and ritual practice that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s were Oglalas, from Pine Ridge, or both. Individuals such as Frank Fools Crow, Peter Catches, Sr., George Plenty Wolf, Richard Two Dogs, and Wilmer Mesteth all call or called Pine Ridge home, providing further evidence for the significance of the Oglala role in the cultural reclamation of the 1960s and 1970s and, more generally, in the maintenance and perpetuation of Lakota religion, ritual, tradition, and cultural survival.

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Robert Ruby was insightful and sympathetic to indigenous perspectives. He quickly recognized the pragmatic Oglala tendency to synthesize religious beliefs and philosophies

from the nonnative world, incorporating useful and “true” elements from Lakota perspectives while discarding or resisting others. Following Feraca (1998:31, 42), I refer to this phenomenon as Lakota religious tolerance, an important aspect of the Lakota religious ethos and worldview. Religious tolerance implies an openness to foreign, non-Lakota religious beliefs, practices, and traditions, allowing for certain individuals to participate simultaneously in various religious practices, such as traditional religion, the Native American Church, and Catholicism, without conflict. It must be understood, however, that Lakota religious tolerance is not universal to all Lakotas. Some reject, denounce, and resist non-Lakota religions and philosophies as invasive.

Apparently Lakota religious tolerance is quite ancient. Writing of the Dakota or Eastern Sioux, Lynd states:

Nor do we find that bigoted attachment to one form of religion and suspicion of all others, so common even among Christian nations. Their hereditary religion they cling to with tenacity, and a generous skepticism arises with regard to the intrusive forms of religion among them. But those who adopt these last they never persecute nor ostracize. They are *tolerant*, but *jealous*. This last word, indeed, accounts for their hostility to those who have embraced Christianity. They can tolerate, but they dread encroachments which overturn all their religion. [Lynd 1889:168; emphasis in original]

Black Elk, Sword, and other Lakotas who adopted and adapted to Christian roles were particularly gifted religious synthesizers, interpreting their traditional native beliefs so that white outsiders could understand and appreciate them, but, more importantly, interpreting and indigenizing nonnative Christian beliefs in ways that facilitated their understanding and comprehension among their own people (see DeMallie 1984:3–74;

Walker 1991). Indeed, the Oglalas counted a number of brilliant religious thinkers among their ranks in the early reservation period and still do today.

The Oglala George Sword, for instance, adopted the white man's ways and religion after visiting Washington, DC in 1870 and experiencing a multifaceted realization that the whites could not feasibly be driven out of Lakota country. According to DeMallie:

This decision was an eminently pragmatic one, reflecting present realities rather than any crisis of faith. Although he became a staunch Episcopalian, Sword never lost his reverence for the old Lakota religion. . . . Although Sword had turned his back on the Lakota religion, he nevertheless retained his shaman's medicine bundle. He commented, "I am afraid to offend it. If a shaman offends his ceremonial outfit, it will bring disaster upon him."
[DeMallie 1991:6]

Sword's decision to become an Episcopalian mirrors the decision made by Black Elk to become a Catholic catechist years later. In both cases these were practical decisions made for the good of the Lakota people and not crises of faith (DeMallie 1984:16–27, 46–47, 58–63; 1991:6–7). They also illustrate processes of Lakota religious tolerance and more broadly reflect the Lakota religious ethos and worldview.

Feraca demonstrates various crucial aspects of Lakota religious tolerance:

The Lakotas are a tolerant and adaptable people. There has never been any real strife among the various Christian denominations, but in this respect inter- and intrafamilial strife is not unknown. They attend and often participate in each other's services with ease and enjoyment, at the same time considering themselves members of a particular church. All Lakotas think of themselves as at least nominally Christian, yet the vitality of the traditional power concept remains.³²⁶ The people who attend two masses

³²⁶ This is not necessarily the case at Pine Ridge today, as many Lakotas are consciously and vehemently differentiating and distancing themselves and their traditions from Christianity. This trend began in the late

the day following a *yuwípi* meeting are not extraordinary in their tolerance. Representations of Christ and the Virgin that are usually removed from rooms being prepared for meetings are immediately replaced at the conclusion of the meetings. At least one medicine man considers these religious items to be of great assistance to him in conducting his version of the *yuwípi* meeting. In many traditional prayers and songs the Christian Deity is invoked along with animal spirits and thunder and lightning beings. No Lakota, however, would equate *Wakíyq* with *Wakhá Tháka* any more than a Christian missionary would consider the angel Gabriel equal to the Savior.³²⁷ [Feraca 1998:81]

Although Feraca's insights do not hold universally in terms of modern life at Pine Ridge they are still generally relevant and instructive in terms of Lakota religious tolerance, ethos, and worldview.

Lakota religious tolerance is intimately connected to another significant phenomenon, namely, the hybrid nature of much contemporary Oglala religious belief, which I refer to as Lakota religious hybridity. Lakota religious hybridity is indeed a function of Lakota religious tolerance and has many, varied, and complicated roots. Although some Oglalas are decidedly not open to or tolerant of divergent religious perspectives and consciously resist hybridity, these concepts are nonetheless useful as generalizations and analytical tools for theorizing. We will discuss Lakota identity strategies in relation to religious tolerance and hybridity in the section on contemporary

1960s, as the religious revitalization began to gain momentum, and was heavily influenced by the works of Vine Deloria, Jr. (1969, 1973) and by the emerging Native American intellectual movement, spearheaded by Deloria, anthropologist Beatrice Medicine, artist and educator Arthur Amiotte, educator and tribal college president Lionel Bordeaux, and other exemplars of the first generation of college-educated American Indians (Posthumus 2008-2014). This process can also be seen more broadly as the continued expression of Lakota indigeneity and as a decolonizing strategy.

³²⁷ Interestingly some of these iconic religious and nationalist images are being indigenized in fascinating, hybridized ways today. Many members of the Native American Church have indigenized images and representations of Christ and the Virgin Mary in their homes or offices (Posthumus 2008-2014; see Swan 1999). I saw an exquisite beaded medallion featuring the Virgin of Guadalupe, along with the American and Mexican flags, at a well-known Native American arts and crafts store in Rapid City, South Dakota in 2012.

Oglala social categories. The important point to note here is that despite hybridities Oglala religious belief and ritual practice have tenaciously remained distinctly Lakota, evidence of historical continuity and illustrative of processes of Lakota indigeneity and decolonizing strategies.

Hybridity and syncretism are problematic, contested, and controversial terms among both scholars and the Lakotas themselves. Syncretism refers to the hybridization or amalgamation of two or more cultural traditions that often emerges from processes of acculturation and assimilation, particularly in response to or as a result of colonialism. Syncretism may also be understood as the mutual interaction between religions or belief systems (Holler 2000:xvi; Kottak 1999:288; Lindstrom in Barnard and Spencer 1996:539–540). Some scholars question the utility of the term in general, debating whether or not there is such a thing as true syncretism, in that all cultures comprise a variety of diffused and borrowed elements. Some resist using the concept at all, opting instead for the term hybridity, borrowed from post-colonial theory (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007; Klass 1995:145; Lindstrom in Barnard and Spencer 1996:539–540). From the perspective of post-colonial studies, hybridity “refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization . . . [and] has frequently been used . . . to mean simply cross-cultural ‘exchange’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007:118–119). The definition used herein is itself a hybrid of the definitions above: syncretism or hybridity is the mutual interaction and blending of various religious traditions and expressions that emerge from acculturation, assimilation, colonialism, and the convergence, collision, or clash of divergent religions and belief systems.

An important aspect of hybridization is reinterpretation, which may be compared to indigenization. According to anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits (1949:553), reinterpretation is “the process by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms.” In his discussion of reinterpretation or indigenization Klass (1995:140) provides a number of possible outcomes resulting from the collision of belief systems. One of the groups, he explains, “may reject the intrusive doctrine (by ignoring it, debating it, by killing those who adhere to it, etc.), or they may knowingly or unknowingly absorb elements of the new belief system into the old, or they may adopt the new either in toto or to a significant extent but still bring with them substantial portions of the old.” Hybridity raises some daunting theoretical issues. According to Klass:

. . . any variety of merger of elements from two different belief systems raises potentially enormous theoretical problems. . . . the elements of a belief system form a coherent and interrelated whole: the nature and purpose of the universe, the nature of divinity, the interrelationship of human and divine, the source of illness and death, the role of the religious officiant, the degree of control possible, and so on. By definition, therefore, a different belief system implies different assumptions about all these—and indeed other—issues. [Klass 1995:141]

Syncretism is a process that can be viewed as a concrete example of culture change. Interestingly, when syncretism takes place and people hold two seemingly conflicting beliefs, actively participating in two or more religious traditions, a sense of conflict is rarely apparent, a phenomenon that holds true in the Lakota case (Klass 1995:141–142). These insights speak to what I have termed Lakota religious tolerance and hybridity. As anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace (1966:37) suggests, “it is

commonly observed that the efficiency with which religion internalizes its values is not overly impressive, that religious values may be mutually inconsistent, that they may conflict with values inculcated by other institutions.”

Wallace’s sentiments are particularly relevant in conjunction with Ruby’s observations from Pine Ridge in the 1950s. An important aspect of Lakota religious hybridity is its pragmatism, grounded in the often harsh and oppressive realities of colonialism, reservation life, and poverty. Ruby highlights both the hybrid nature of Oglala religious belief, ethos, and worldview and the practical nature of their outward expressions:

Many Indians today belong to one or another of the denominational Christian churches. But there are few who take their religion seriously enough to abandon their old beliefs. Some adhere to Yuwipi, the old Sioux Indian religion. Others belong to the Native American Church, which incorporates the old religion and Christianity, and is also the peyote cult. The Indians are superstitious. They mix their beliefs. Some practice either Yuwipi or Native American Church, and attend a Christian church also. Many Indians like going to church; it gives them a chance to meet and congregate. They enjoy eating. And many depend on the church for clothing. [Ruby 2010:16]

Clearly Ruby recognized that religion for many Oglala people was not an either/or matter but much more complicated, dynamic, and interesting. Ruby indicates that the “superstitious” or generally religious worldview of the Oglalas factors into Lakota religious tolerance and hybridity in significant and fascinating ways.

Ruby elaborates on Lakota religious tolerance and hybridity:

Exposure to the crushing encroachment of the white man and his religion have resulted in degrees of worship for the Indian from the primitive

pagan to full acceptance of Christian concepts. As the Indian developed his tastes and accepted certain of the white man's ideas he could tolerate and understand, he likewise added fundamentals of Christianity to his basic beliefs. . . . There is practiced yet in a few areas pure mystical Indian religion whose faith is rooted in the spirits of the animals and the elements. [Ruby 1966:74]

Despite Ruby's romanticism his insights are useful. Lakota religious hybridity must be understood as part of a broader cultural-survival strategy that seeks mechanisms for successful living and the perpetuation of individual and collective life movement in the face of the rapidly shifting social, political, and economic realities of reservation life. In this sense the pragmatic adaptation of a hybrid system of belief and ritual whose ultimate goal is ethnic maintenance or the endurance of Lakota indigeneity is a clear example of a decolonizing strategy.³²⁸

Grobsmith also notes the complex hybridity inherent in Lakota religious belief and ritual practice—as well as a generally religious nature—among the Brulé (*Sičhánǵu*) Lakotas of the Rosebud Reservation, relatives and neighbors of the Oglalas. Grobsmith underscores the fact that Lakota religion is not an either/or matter, neither fully Christian nor fully traditional (Grobsmith 1981a:61):

Some scholars claim that Lakota today participate simultaneously in two separate religious systems. Others claim that modern Lakota religion is a syncretic phenomenon, that is, that elements of native religion have merged with Christianity to produce a single unique religion. Still others suggest that modern Lakota participate in both native and Christian worship, but that each system contains numerous elements of the other. [Grobsmith 1981a:61]

³²⁸ This speaks to the endless debates over whether or not Black Elk was a sincere Catholic, strictly a practitioner of traditional Lakota religion, or some hybrid of both (see DeMallie 1984; in Neihardt 2008:289–316; Steltenkamp 1993, 2009; Rice 1989, 1991; Powers 1990; Holler 1995, 2000; and Costello 2005).

Clearly the realities of contemporary Lakota religious life, refracted through the lenses of alternative, often conflicting modernities, are complex and dynamic. Lakota religious tolerance and hybridity influence and reflect the general unorthodoxy and diversity characteristic of traditional Lakota religious belief and ritual practice, in which innovation, inspiration, and revelation are central features and highly valued.³²⁹ Lakota pragmatism, as we have seen, is also significant in this regard, being typical of Lakota unorthodoxy (Feraca 1998:74). Lakota religious tolerance, hybridity, unorthodoxy, and pragmatism are all correlated to and mutually influence the Lakota religious ethos and worldview generally. Innovation and practical adaptation are significant interrelated (re)creative and (re)generative pivot processes that allows for the smooth functioning of the whole. There is great correlation, interplay, and exchange between these important concepts that constitute the foundation of the Lakota religious ethos and worldview, which, as we will see in the next chapter, are central to contemporary Oglala identity and social categories.

³²⁹ Perhaps innovation and practical adaptation are the key links between Lakota religious openness and tolerance, on the one hand, and Lakota religious hybridity, on the other. The practitioner acts as the ritual *bricoleur*, combining elements of the past and present, the two poles of Bucko's dialectic of tradition, in pragmatic ways that produce hybrid forms. As Lévi-Strauss (1966:24) suggests, "there are several solutions to the same problem. The choice of one solution involves a modification of the result to which another solution would have led, and the observer is in effect presented with the general picture of these permutations at the same time as the particular solution offered. He is thereby transformed into an active participant without even being aware of it." Paradoxically innovation and practical adaptation appear to be forces for the perpetuation of tradition, authenticity, and identity. As anthropologist Elliott Oring (1994b:218) explains, "improvisation, which has been viewed as a threat to the preservation of authentic identity, now could be viewed as the very expression of that identity."

3. OGLALA IDENTITIES: CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CATEGORIES AT PINE RIDGE RESERVATION

Since 2008 I have conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge Reservation, home of the Oglala Lakotas, in southwestern South Dakota, focusing on religious identity. Despite the dramatic revitalization of traditional religion and the turn against Christianity that has occurred during the past fifty years, little anthropological study has focused on what is undeniably a major social and cultural change. Earlier works on Sioux religious life and overly neat models of the intersection of religion and identity are in need of reassessment and updating. The dynamics of being Oglala in the twenty-first century are in constant flux, continuously renegotiated to adapt to a rapidly globalizing world composed of alternative modernities (see Gaonkar 2001).

Oglala identity has been the subject of intensive scholarly study. Among others, Haviland Scudder Mekeel (1930, 1936), Gordon Macgregor (1946), Erik Erikson (1959), Murray and Rosalie Wax (1964), Robert Daniels (1970), Paul Steinmetz (1990), Mikael Kurkiala (1997), Paul Robertson (2002), and Paula Wagoner (2002) have provided analyses of the social organization and intricacies of modern Oglala life. On Pine Ridge Reservation there are three major local social categories that Oglalas refer to as full blood, mixed blood, and white or nonnative (see Figure 19). These terms are multivalent, culturally constituted symbols, implying and encoding complex bundles of meanings. They are the major biosociocultural categories and social constructs actively manipulated by Oglalas for purposes of both segregation and integration, exclusion and inclusion, in terms of group membership and individual and collective or ethnic identity.

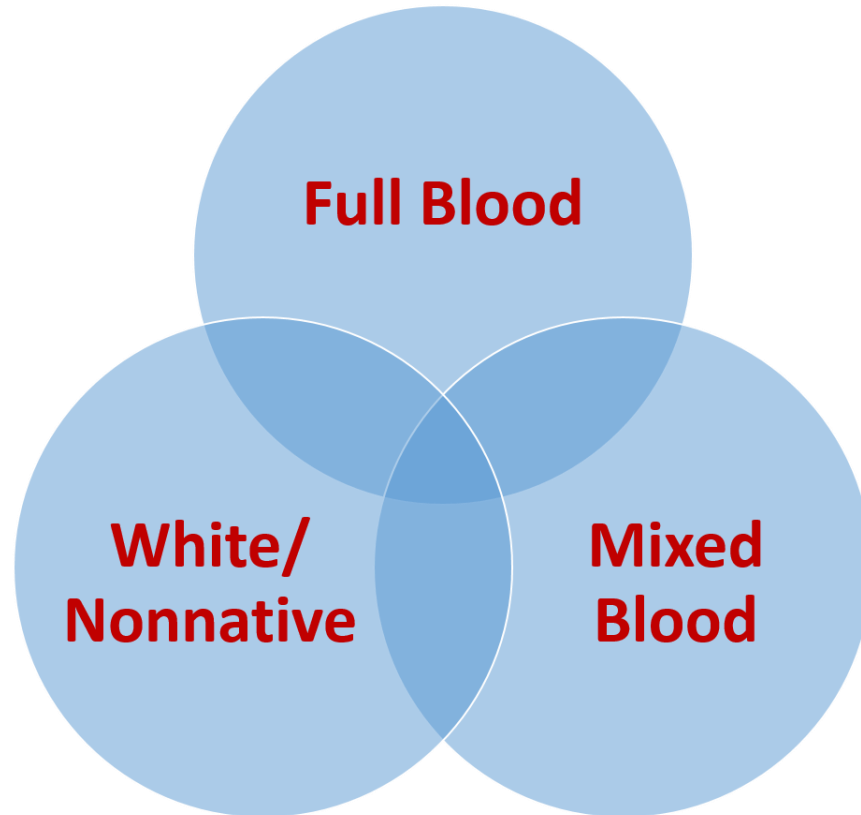


Figure 19: Contemporary Social Categories at Pine Ridge Reservation

Lakotas use the terms full blood and mixed blood to distinguish themselves, or groups generally categorized as American Indian, in opposition to whites or nonnatives.³³⁰ These categories carry both biogenetic and nonbiogenetic, racial and nonracial connotations. In everyday lived realities these identities are contingent on social, legal, and historical contexts (Wagoner 2002:57). Although these designations carry slight biogenetic connotations, in reality they have very little to do with actual

³³⁰ The first whites or *wašiču* in the area were French traders who married into Lakota families, and hence were incorporated into native society through extensive kinship systems. Later ethnically and linguistically diverse groups settled in western South Dakota seeking better lives and the American dream of land ownership. In many cases contemporary interaction between full bloods and whites is rather shallow, focusing usually on business (see Nelson 1986; Wagoner 2002:63–64).

blood quantum;³³¹ rather, they signify and encompass a broad range of behaviors, ideologies, lifestyles, worldviews, and residence patterns, all of which function as key identity symbols. These categories are neither homogeneous nor static, and the range of possible syntheses or overlap is broad.

In her enlightening and useful book *“They Treated Us Just Like Indians”*: *The Worlds of Bennett County, South Dakota*, anthropologist Paula Wagoner discusses complicated racial, ethnic, and identity politics among the Lakotas:

It must be stressed that even in contemporary life, certain of the historical cultural and phenotypic generalizations that led to these categories are very apparent, and very real. Differences may be highlighted, from time to time, . . . or they may be bridged . . . Even in times of relative community stasis, old historical grievances wait just below the surface, and when they emerge, especially in community crises, they are expressed in racial terms. Particularly in a small community, such crises can be devastating, their effects passed down from generation to generation.³³² [Wagoner 2002:51]

Full blood is a wide-ranging biosociocultural category and identity symbol at Pine Ridge (see Figure 20). Full bloods are generally those indigenous Lakotas who can trace their ancestry to the pre-reservation days and highlight and revel in their kinship connections to those individuals who fought with Crazy Horse or Red Cloud against outside colonizing forces pressuring the Lakotas to assimilate (Wagoner 2002:57–58). Meanings that cluster around full blood include conservative, unassimilated, uncivilized, “backwards,” and rural or “country Indians.” Full bloods are perceived as adhering to

³³¹ Speaking of blood quantum, DeMallie (2009:193) states, “For the Sioux themselves . . . the biological basis for this classification was not definitive. Identity as full blood came to be symbolic of commitment to tradition while mixed blood symbolized the desire to adapt to mainstream American culture, primarily as ranchers or farmers.”

³³² Here Wagoner may be referencing historical trauma, a significant and emergent concept (see Brave Heart 1998, 1999, 2003; Evans-Campbell 2008; Faimon 2004; and Whitbeck et al. 2004).

Lakota traditions and social systems or kinship networks; being more fluent in the Lakota language; being less familiar and comfortable with the modern, off-reservation, nonnative world; being less educated and wealthy; and being comparatively isolated geographically or rural. These characteristics often result from or are determined by conscious individual choices to live and behave in certain ways (see Daniels 1970; Posthumus 2008-2014).

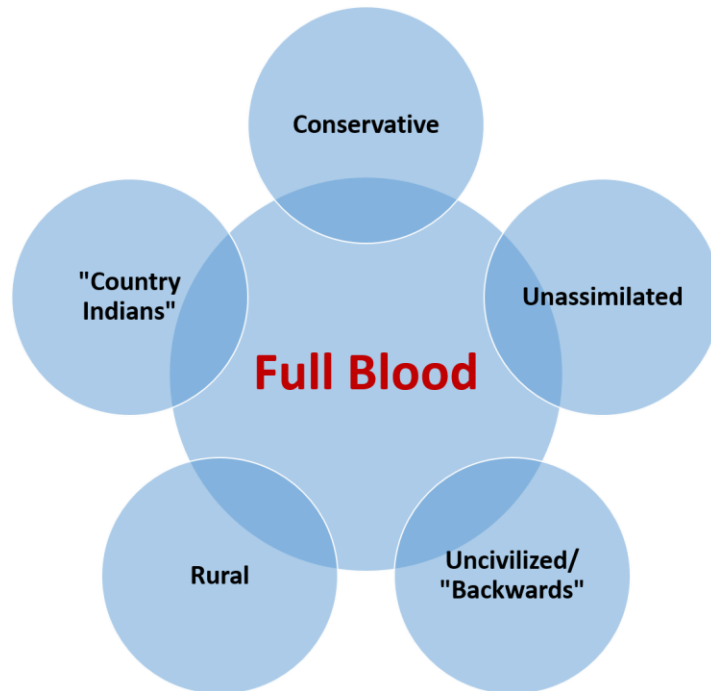


Figure 20: Full Blood

Wagoner cites anthropologist Roberts Daniels's (1970) insightful study of Oglala cultural identities. In Wagoner's opinion attitudes towards full bloods have not changed significantly since Daniels's fieldwork in the late 1960s, a discouraging and troubling phenomenon that I too can vouch for based on my fieldwork since 2008. As Wagoner suggests:

Stereotypical perceptions of fullbloods remain based on values that underlay early non-Indian misunderstandings of cultural difference. Non-

Indians and upwardly mobile mixedbloods often describe fullbloods with the rhetoric of incompetence, annuity payments, and a general lack of interest in “proper” education. In many ways, these stereotypes are analogous to those applied to marginalized minorities in other social contexts and therefore may be understood as socially structured and nested hierarchical forms awaiting content. [Wagoner 2002:58–59]

Mixed bloods occupy an ambivalent liminal space between white nonnatives and full bloods. Ultimately the mixed bloods of Pine Ridge and Rosebud are the ancestors of those white men who married native women and were absorbed into the tribe and given legal status as tribal members through the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Mixed bloods quickly became a progressive force for assimilation on the reservation, in many respects having a deleterious and fragmenting effect on the Lakota way of life. The economic history between full bloods and mixed bloods is highly personal, tenuous, and tense, with mixed bloods tending to have pronounced economic and educational advantages over their full-blood counterparts. As knowledge and power are mutually constituting (see Foucault 1980), mixed bloods tend to have a marked power advantage over full bloods in the economic field—in terms of economic capital, employment opportunities, and access to various resources.³³³ Mixed bloods are referred to in Lakota as *iyéska*, meaning interpreter or translator, in reference to the intermediate role of early mixed bloods as a bridge or broker between conceptual gaps in culture and language between Lakotas and whites. Today *iyéska* may carry derogatory, pejorative, or practical connotations, or a

³³³ In the religio-ritual field, however, this situation is reversed: full bloods have a clear advantage in terms of knowledge/power, reckoned in terms of various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) and the ability to (re)produce them. A contentious issue dividing Oglala full bloods and mixed bloods since the 1960s has been the mixed-blood move into the religio-ritual field, a strategy that many full bloods see as an appropriation of Lakota culture and traditions and a direct threat to their wellbeing and interests.

combination of these meanings, depending on context (Anderson 1973; Wagoner 2002:60–61).

Meanings that cluster around mixed blood include progressive, assimilated, civilized, and town or “city Indians,” referring both to those individuals and families who live in Pine Ridge town, the population center and government seat of Pine Ridge Reservation, and to those who moved to cities through relocation referred to as “urban Indians” (see Figure 21). Mixed bloods are perceived as being less concerned with or knowledgeable about Lakota traditions and social systems or kinship networks; being less fluent in the Lakota language; being comparatively more familiar and comfortable with the modern, off-reservation, nonnative world; being more educated and wealthy; and being less isolated geographically or more (sub)urban than their full-blood counterparts.

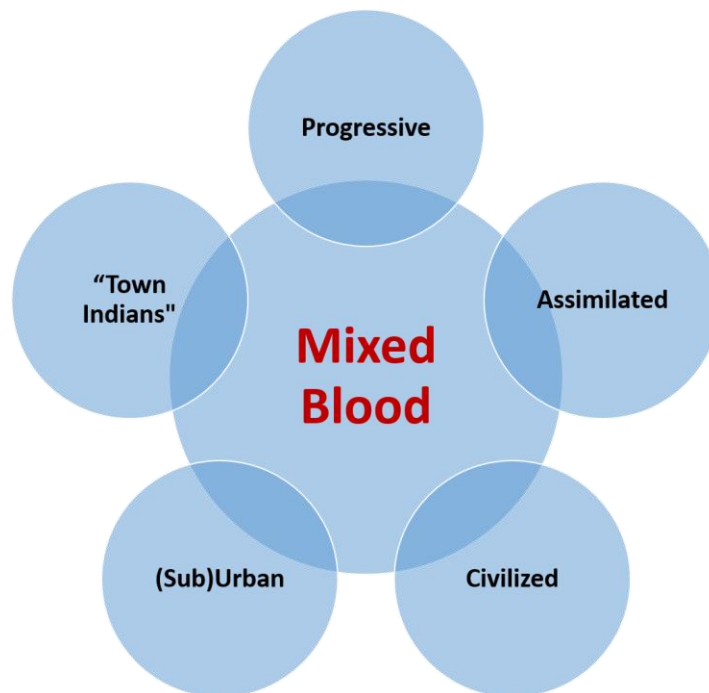


Figure 21: Mixed Blood

Wagoner (2002:61) suggests that an essential quality of “otherness” is the major characteristic of mixed-blood identity, as mixed bloods are not fully native nor white, a perennial “other” or outsider from both perspectives. The lived realities of mixed bloodedness defy simplistic binaries and categorical boundaries. And, again, history is a defining element of mixed-blood identity and relations with other biosociocultural categories. By “widening the focus,” explains Wagoner (2002:62), “it is possible to view these surviving stereotypes as largely deriving from early federal policies.”

As a result of their medial social position mixed bloods frequently employ situational variance in the terms used to identify and categorize themselves and others. As Wagoner (2002:63) reminds us, “human beings are social actors and many of them make personal choices based on both pragmatic strategies and human emotions.” Daniels and anthropologists Murray and Rosalie Wax, who conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge in the early 1960s, note the frequent usage of situational variance in the public enactment of identity. The Waxes noted the common mixed-blood tendency to refer to themselves as Indian only in the presence of whites, rarely doing so in the company of full bloods, while still clearly differentiating themselves from the latter, who they referred to as “residual families” or “backward folks” (Wax, Wax, and Dumont 1964:34 n). “Backwardness” was closely associated with adherence to tradition or *Lakǰól wičhóǰ’an* at that time, being commonly defined as “participation in ceremonials or insistence on living ‘Indian style’” (Daniels 1970:226). Daniels also notes instances of situational variance, citing a conversation he had with an observant, rural full blood, who said, “Those mixed-bloods are funny people. When they’re with whites they call themselves Indians and when they’re with Indians they call themselves Whites” (Daniels 1970:213).

Situational variance in identity politics continues to be a common characteristic of Oglala social life today, among full bloods and mixed bloods alike.³³⁴

The biosociocultural spectrum from full blood to mixed blood is the first important axis necessary to gaining a deeper, more nuanced understanding of contemporary Oglala religious identity. These terms, along with their semantic clusters of associations and articulations, are important symbols frequently negotiated in social contexts and employed for purposes of both integration and segregation. We must remember that from Lakota perspectives mixed blood and full blood are largely sociocultural categories, signifying behavior, attitudes, worldview, values, and ethos. These terms are not expressly biogenetic and are related less to blood quantum than to commitment to the *Lakǎól wičhóǎ'ay* and specific cultural ideals, life ways, and patterns of behavior.

The ideological spectrum from traditional to neo traditional is the second crucial axis in our analysis of contemporary Oglala social categories. Representing the extreme poles of a dynamic continuum, the categories traditional and neo traditional are distinctly and dialectically formulated among the Lakotas, being both historically situated and socially constructed. They are not easily reduced to the simplistic tradition/modernity paradigm characteristic of much social science and Western thought (see Geertz 1993). As with full blood and mixed blood, these terms are ultimately cultural symbols, laden with meaning, which are articulated, negotiated, employed, and manipulated by Oglalas on a regular basis.

³³⁴ For a fascinating and instructive take on identity politics and their continuing significance in the (re)articulation of various modern pasts-becoming-futures (see Clifford 2000).

Oglala people from Pine Ridge are socialized in a sociocultural milieu in which these categories are prominently featured. Tradition and traditional(ism), as we have seen, are highly complex and discursive terms, and yet they are used frequently, often indiscriminately, in daily life. Tradition is processual, largely concerned with culture, meaning, transmission, creativity, history, spirituality, ritual, and communal action or practice. The term traditional is commonly used by Oglalas to mean that an individual or social group tends to adhere in thought and action to values considered to reflect the Lakota past (DeMallie 1991, 2009).

Tradition flows on and evolves much like a stream, being continually (re)constructed and (re)negotiated, rendering distinctions between historical and contemporary concepts of traditional culture, religion, and values largely arbitrary and often meaningless. Despite significant continuities with the past, the modern world has wrought many changes in Lakota society and culture. One notable shift is the development of what some Oglalas refer to as neo traditionalism, an ethos and worldview that is in some ways outside and independent of the evolving, processual stream of tradition (Posthumus 2008-2014).

Neo traditionalism is an ongoing discursive process, marked by reinterpretation and rearticulation, which is intimately tied to identity politics. It is hybrid and inclusive in nature (see Clifford 2000; Spear 2003). Neo traditionalism is ostensibly based on local discourses of tradition and is a (by)product and reflection of the Lakota religious revitalization and cultural renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s. This revival generated a renewed interest in religion and ritual and fueled a collective retraditionalization of the Lakota people, as many sought to (re)learn, (re)claim, and, in the process, (re)interpret,

the traditions of the past. Today some expressions of neo traditionalism are gradually conforming to more standardized or conventional (orthodox or doxic) conceptions of tradition, while others continue to branch out and grow in directions that seem decidedly foreign and antithetical to Lakota culture, traditions, and values. Despite its growing acceptance in certain circles neo traditionalism and its adherents, practitioners, and representatives are controversial. Neo traditionalism plays a role in factionalism and is often divisive, (re)producing and exacerbating historically rooted social, political, and economic rifts or schisms between sociocultural groups and factions on the reservation.

Neo traditionalism and neo traditionalists tend to be characterized by syncretic or ecumenical traits and a deeply ingrained pantribalism, meaning fidelity to and identification with a general and generic conception of “American Indian” ethnicity over that of a specific tribe.³³⁵ A common catchphrase and mentality among neo traditionalists is that “all roads are good.” “In this view,” explains Jackson (2004:192), “all of the traditional teachings and beliefs of Indian Country share the same epistemological status. All are rooted in the experiences of worthy elders and ancestors. All derive ultimately from the power of the Creator and her or his ultimate concern for the fate and well-being of native people.” Neo traditionalists tend to dabble in, syncretize, and internalize many varied expressions of American Indian religious practice, such as the Native American Church and traditional religion, as well as other nonnative religious beliefs and customs, being heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian, Mormon, Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age beliefs and practices.³³⁶

³³⁵ For more on pantribalism and associated issues, see DeMallie (2009); Hertzberg (1971); Howard (1955, 1983); Jackson (2003); Jackson and Levine (2002); Nagel (1994, 1995, 1997); and Powers (1968).

³³⁶ For more on the New Age movement and its incursions into and influence on native spirituality, see Hanegraaff (1996); Heelas (1996); and Jenkins (2004).

Neo traditionalists are sometimes pejoratively referred to as BIA Indians, meaning “born Indian again,” but also referencing the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which tends to employ a higher proportion of mixed blood, neo-traditional types as opposed to full bloods and traditionalists. This reference has deep historical roots, going back to the early distinction between those Lakotas who lived near the military forts (*wágluǵhe* [loafers; assimilated Indians; progressives]) and those who denounced and resisted whites and their culture (*wathóglá* [wild, untamed; unassimilated Indians; conservatives]). This distinction is still a point of contention among many at Pine Ridge today, used to index perceived degrees of (neo)traditionalism. Semantically the split between *wágluǵhe* and *wathóglá* has expanded and developed into a polarizing discourse defining and dividing mixed bloods, the ancestors of the *wágluǵhe*, and full bloods, the ancestors of the *wathóglá* Lakotas who refused to assimilate and resisted settling at the agencies, opting instead to continue to live their customary nomadic lifestyle. Again, we must remember that today these categories are largely sociocultural, actually having little to do with biogenetics or blood quantum. The first meaning of BIA Indian, “born Indian again,” captures the zealous fervor often associated with the religious conversion experience and those who are “born again” later in life, passionately (re)adopting and (re)interpreting a religious belief system and eagerly participating in ritual life. Some Oglalas considered to be more full blood and traditional disparagingly refer to BIA Lakota types as monkeys (*waiŋčhala*), in reference to the neo-traditionalist tendency to imitate the beliefs and practices of full bloods and traditionalists (Posthumus 2008-2014).³³⁷

³³⁷ There is more to be said concerning the economic underpinnings and implications of the mixed-blood/full-blood, neo-traditional/traditional divide at Pine Ridge. Since the dawn of the religious revitalization, and arguably since time immemorial, being a Lakota ritual practitioner has been a profitable business closely tied to power dynamics, identity politics, and representation on the reservation. In many

Traditionalism, on the other end of our continuum, is not commonly associated with syncretism or pantribalism. It is considered to be essentialist, in that “nothing should be added or subtracted” from ritual practice, a common saying and mentality among Oglala traditionalists (Amiotte and Först 1994; Posthumus 2008-2014). The traditionalist view is that native cultures are integrated wholes and individuals can and should only fully and properly live within one such system at a time (Jackson 2004:192).

Traditionalists pride themselves on not blending multiple expressions of Lakota and American Indian religiosity, frequently discouraging their followers from participating in the Native American Church and emphasizing the importance of retaining the beliefs and practices of their elders without embellishment. They make a conscious effort to live in a manner that is consistent with perceived values of the Lakota past. Traditionalists may be productively compared to Geertz’s religious category, while neo traditionalists tend to be perceived as religious minded, or those characterized by everyday reflexive faith (traditionalism) as opposed to doctrinarian belief (neo traditionalism) (see Geertz 2005:10). Although both traditionalist and neo-traditionalist views exist in stronger or weaker forms, often within the same community, apparently there is a shared hierarchy of differential deference, power, and traditional authority and authenticity among contemporary Oglalas, with those considered to be the most traditional at the apex.

I want to explicitly stress that what I am positing here is my own scholarly analysis, reflecting my accumulated knowledge, as well as generalizations expressed by Oglalas from Pine Ridge. Being an Oglala religious person today is complex and

respects traditional knowledge as intellectual property is a scarce commodity on a reservation that offers little in the way of economic opportunity. For more on this theme, see Amiotte and Först (1994); Buechel (n.d.); Brown (2003); Bucko (1998); Comaroff and Comaroff (2009); and Hurt and Howard (1952).

dynamic and there are countless combinations and expressions of contemporary Lakota religiosity. New developments in religious identity are not to be understood as examples of cultural decay or disintegration; on the contrary, they are signs of cultural vitality and evidence of living traditions. The development of neo traditionalism illuminates processes of cultural (re)creation, (re)construction, (re)articulation, (re)interpretation, and, more generally, of cultural change. Neo traditionalism is a dialectical process by which continuity with values considered to reflect the Lakota past is maintained in a modern, dynamic, and globalizing world.

Utilizing the two axes we have described it is possible to plot out a number of representative Oglala religious types based on specific religious leaders or ritual practitioners (see Figure 22). Because practitioners tend to represent, symbolize, and shape the religious worldview, ethos, and identity of their congregations or groups of followers or devotees, these types can be extended to characterize Oglala religious identities generally. I refer to these groups as ritual *thiyóšpayes* after the Lakota word for band or lodge group, the extended family and historical basic unit of kinship, because today the group of followers of a specific practitioner is in many ways the equivalent of the historical *thiyóšpaye*.

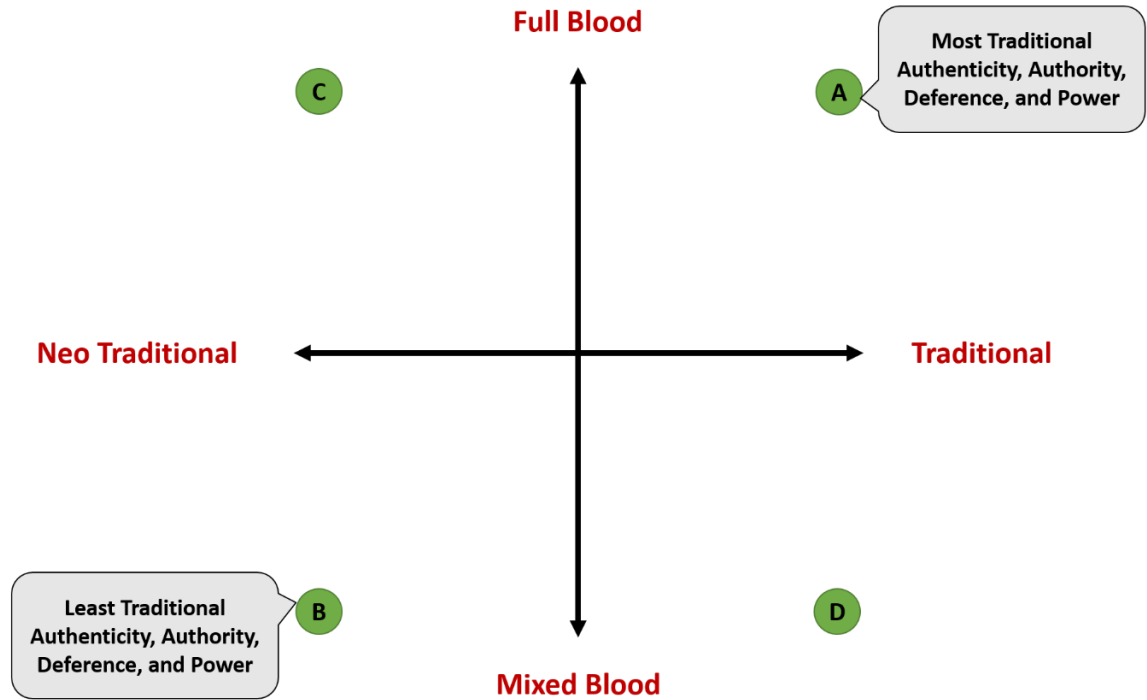


Figure 22: Contemporary Oglala Lakota Religious Identity Types

In the next chapter I will argue that ritual *thiyóšpayes* are foundational structuring elements in the social organization of contemporary Oglala religion. Ritual *thiyóšpayes* are communities or social groups consisting of a core group of usually male devotees of a specific practitioner and their families. The core males are most often apprentices of the practitioner who sing, drum, and generally help him at his ceremonies. Ritual *thiyóšpayes* also include a number of sub-core members and their families who regularly attend rituals and other social events sponsored by the group. The cohesion of these units is based largely on equality, mutual help, participation, and one-mindedness, meaning that members tend to share a common ethos and worldview. The relationship between a practitioner and his ritual *thiyóšpaye* is one of mutual influence and exchange: the practitioner shapes the beliefs and character of his followers, symbolizing the group to both its members and others outside of it, while simultaneously being shaped by his

followers as a representative of their social, psychological, economic, and religious needs, beliefs, and values (see Barrett 1996:99–106; Barth 1966; Varenne 1977:126–136; 1986:1–45). Unlike practitioners in earlier times, whose visions gave them highly specialized powers to heal or perform specific rituals and functions, practitioners today tend to be generalists, focusing on healing the sick, counseling those in need of help, and performing rituals that benefit individuals and the group as a whole, mainly the Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance, and *Yuwípi* ceremonies.³³⁸ This decline in diversity and specificity among modern practitioners has contributed to a parallel decline in religious belief and ritual diversity more generally, exacerbating the trend toward religious uniformity, dogmatization, and orthodoxy. These developments have led to new and intriguing elements and issues in contemporary Lakota religion and ritual that call for further examination.

The first Oglala religious identity type (A) in Figure 23 is modeled on an individual who has the reputation of being among the most traditional and authentic practitioners at Pine Ridge. He is considered to be both full blood and very traditional. This type tends to be non- or even anti-pantribal and may be characterized as essentialist, purposefully conservative in religious belief and practice, consciously resisting the addition or subtraction of any foreign elements. His ritual *thiyóšpaye* gathers for sweat baths and other ceremonies on a weekly basis throughout the year, if not more frequently. Old songs are sung, traditional customs and beliefs are retained, Lakota language use is prominent, and traditional foods are served at the feasts that customarily conclude Lakota ceremonies. This individual has held an annual Sun Dance since the mid-1970s, which is

³³⁸ According to Hurt and Howard (1952:293), by the 1950s the preliminary acquisition of a vision was apparently no longer necessary as a prerequisite to becoming a practicing ritual specialist at Pine Ridge.

known for the discreet absence of white participants and observers, based on the practitioner's vision proscriptions. This is illustrative of a notable contemporary trend: there is an inverse correlation in the perceptions of many Oglalas between the level of authenticity, traditionalness, and power of a given ceremony, on the one hand, and the number and visibility of nonnatives in attendance, particularly white Americans, on the other. Ceremonies in which whites participate are generally considered less traditional or more neo traditional, depending on terminology and individual vocabulary. This inverse correlation is likely an extension of Oglala oppositional identity and a reflection of Lakota indigeneity.

The next type (B) is the opposite counterpart of (A). This practitioner/identity type is perceived by other Oglalas to be socioculturally mixed blood and to epitomize neo traditionalism. Often this type has been reborn, that is, raised Christian and largely unfamiliar with traditional culture and language, and later in life embracing a variety of Lakota religion that is heavily influenced by Christianity, pantribalism, and often New Age beliefs. Many mixed-blood Lakotas turned away from their Indian identities in the early-to-mid twentieth century, returning to it with fervor after the revitalization of the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Biolsi 1992; Christafferson 2001:821–824; DeMallie 1991, 2009; Robertson 2002:172–176).³³⁹ Type B is ecumenical in the “all roads are

³³⁹ This is illustrative of a more general trend representative of the nadir of Lakota ethnic pride and interest and participation in religious life and ritual. This turn away from Lakota tradition was a direct result of colonization and missionization, as many Lakotas consciously chose to turn to Christianity as the most viable option available to them at the time. But again, these decisions were often based on practical necessity and economic realities, rather than crises of faith, reflecting the commendable adaptability of the Lakota people. Beede's Northern Lakota interlocutors maintained that church was a place where people got fed when rations were small. Beede implies that the Lakotas were not generally sincere Christians, comparing them to “Rice Christians” in China (Beede 1927). According to practitioner George Flesh, “One of the purposes of joining a Christian church is for burial purposes” (Fugle 1966:26). This nadir period lasted from around 1890, following the tragedy at Wounded Knee, until the revitalization of the late 1960s. In 1917, for instance, Walker (1917:57) writes, “influenced by education received from white people, the

good” sense and may run Lakota (neo-)traditional ceremonies, attend Native American Church meetings, and go to Catholic Mass on Sundays. Their ceremonies tend to be hybrid blends of various traditions, in which the Lakota language is not usually prominent, outside of a set of standard, formulaic expressions and sequences. Often specific songs do not match the ceremony for which they were intended, and type B and his followers tend to endure criticism from other ritual *thiyóšpayes* for this and other reasons. This type tends to be more dogmatic in terms of contemporary traditional religion, historically characterized as pluralistic and individualistic, perhaps a result of early Christian socialization.³⁴⁰

The next type (C) is considered to be biosocioculturally full blood but ideologically neo traditional. This type may live in a conservative manner, comparatively isolated from the center of population at Pine Ridge Village, and yet be involved with syncretic and pantribal blends of ceremonial features and dogmatic or doxic versions of traditional religion. Practitioners of type C might be influenced by traditions from a

younger generation of the Oglala adopted the modern form of the [Lakota] language, and abandoned the Shamans and their ceremonials, and nearly all the customs of the old Lakota.” Standing Bear comments on the condition of spiritual decline among the Lakotas in the 1930s. He laments, “There is but a feeble effort among the Sioux to keep alive their traditional songs and dances” (Standing Bear 2006b:255). Deloria’s interlocutor “Aunt Eliza” was an elderly Lakota convert to Christianity. She was about sixty-five and a staunch Christian, antagonistic toward the old beliefs. According to Aunt Eliza, traditional religion was no longer taken seriously in the 1930s and 1940s (Deloria n.d.). Colhoff reports that all ceremonial dances at Pine Ridge were largely forgotten by 1949 and that the traditional Pipe Religion was a thing of the past by 1951 (Colhoff to Balmer 1948-1953:Letters 13, 41). Flesh reported to Fugle (1966:26) in 1959 that “there are very few full-bloods who will pray with the pipe anymore.”

³⁴⁰ For more on the nondogmatic and richly pluralist nature of nineteenth-century Lakota spirituality and thought, see Rice (1998). Rice argues for the centrality of the Lakota warrior ethic in expressions of and relation to religiosity. But, arguing for an essentialist, militant, anti-syncretic vision of Lakota religion, he denies the Lakota people the characteristic practicality, adaptability, and innovation that is a constant defining feature of the Lakota experience. Perhaps the influence of Judeo-Christian conceptions of a monotheistic God in the contact zone that have become attached to the notion of *Wakǵáŋ Tháŋka* (Great Mystery) originally precipitated the switch from religion and ritual as the organization of diversity to the replication of uniformity.

variety of pantribal, non-Lakota sources, although they are usually more fluent in the Lakota language than type B.

Both types B and C have been known to mix peyotism with traditional Oglala religion, ingesting peyote during Vision Quests or Sun Dances, for instance. This may represent a recent change, considering Jesuit priest and religionist Paul Steinmetz (1990), in his study of religion and religious identity at Pine Ridge from around 1960 to 1980, found no such blending.

Finally, type D is considered by most Oglalas to be biosocioculturally mixed blood, often by choice, while maintaining a firm, essentialist, and anti-pantribalistic religious position and worldview. This type may have grown up off the reservation but still spent a great deal of time there throughout his or her life.³⁴¹ He or she may come from a very traditional and biosocioculturally full-blood family, but, for one reason or another, has been perceived of by others as mixed blood. This alternation between biosociocultural and ideological identity perceptions can often be attributed to the source and method of traditional knowledge transmission: if an individual apprentices with a well-respected, traditional practitioner, the apprentice too will be considered traditional by others when he begins his own practice. This is another example of the mutual

³⁴¹ Oglala artist and educator Arthur Amiotte discusses another common modern Lakota religious type, similar to our Type D: raised on the reservation until a certain age, this type relocated, shifting residence and moving to a non-reservation locality. In this way a synchronic, historical understanding of religion, ritual, and tradition is more-or-less frozen in time, disconnected from the diachronic, discursive flow of Lakota reservation tradition, and embodied and reflected in this contemporary, transplanted religious type. In these individuals a branch of the Lakota religious stream of tradition is in many ways cut off from its original source, often conceptualized in geolocal terms, much like a meander cutoff in a winding river, which is a natural part of a river's evolution and sometimes leads to the formation of an oxbow lake. Arguing that at least 50% of the enrolled members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe at Pine Ridge now live off the reservation, Amiotte persuasively points out that this religious type, although temporally and spatially distanced from the original source of tradition and religious belief, represents a significant and increasingly typical expression of older forms of Lakota religiosity that requires further examination (Posthumus 2008-2014).

influence and exchange between a ritual *thiyóšpaye* and its leader; how the devotees of a specific practitioner simultaneously shape and are shaped by him in terms of theological and philosophical makeup, ethos, worldview, and characteristic beliefs, practices, and other qualities. These observations also illustrate the mechanism by which these important traits—traditional and neo traditional, full blood and mixed blood—are transmitted from one generation to the next.³⁴²

Based on my research and focusing largely on my discussions with contemporary Oglalas from Pine Ridge, I have attempted here to update and refine some anthropological observations about Oglala identity, religious and otherwise. I have outlined four general Oglala religious identity types, based on actual practitioners, but I want to be clear that these are analytical models of Oglala cultural identity perceptions. They are useful generalizations, but generalizations nonetheless. There is plenty of room for individual choice and variation in these dynamic identities, and the possibilities for hybridities are abundant. Negotiating identity at Pine Ridge today involves religion, ideology, ethos, worldview, situational variance, and opposition. There are many varied ways to be an Oglala religious person today, and each is a distinct expression of the

³⁴² Anthropologist Loretta Fowler's cohort analysis theory has been beneficial to me in my studies of Oglala religious identities. Fowler's theory allows us to document diachronic shifts in the religious lives of a people, connecting fieldwork and firsthand experiences in the present with synchronic past ethnographic studies, enlarging the world of scholarly discourse, giving us a fuller and richer picture of the historical development of the present, and pointing us in promising and productive new directions for future research. Fowler's cohort analysis, based on both fieldwork and ethnohistory, examines generational changes in the interpretation of meaning. She defines a generation as "a cohort whose shared experiences significantly distinguish them from people in other age groups" (Fowler 1987:19). More generally we can refer to generational cohorts as social groups that are, according to Daniels (1970:200 n 4), "a number of people who share certain norms of behavior (and agreements concerning the application of these norms, i.e., membership) and whose interactions with each other, guided by these norms, are distinguishable in quality from their interactions with nonmembers of the group." According to Fowler, "the nature and direction of change . . . are due in large part to contrasts in the generations' interpretations of culture and history and to their efforts to act upon, resolve, or ignore contested meanings" (Fowler 1987:244). Cohort analysis, therefore, "refines the abstractions . . . [and] gives new and additional insights into how and why a particular way of life changes" (Fowler 1987:244–245).

historical forces that have shaped reservation culture and society. Now we will turn our attention to ritual *thiyóšpayes* and the social organization of contemporary Oglala religion.

4. THE RITUAL *THIYÓŠPAYE* AND THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY OGLALA LAKOTA RELIGION

In this final chapter we will examine the social organization of contemporary Oglala Lakota religion on Pine Ridge Reservation. We will briefly outline the methods and theoretical orientations that have inspired and framed the findings presented. We will discuss some of the major changes that have occurred in (Oglala) Lakota religion and ritual since the early reservation period and examine some aspects of the emergence, structure, and functions of what I refer to as the ritual *thiyóšpaye*, the basic sociopolitical-organizational unit of contemporary Oglala religion in relation to traditional culture. Finally, we will discuss some of the broader implications of the conclusions reached in this chapter.

This work has examined Oglala Lakota religion and ritual, concentrating on continuity and transformation, conservation and innovation. Specifically, based on anthropological and ethnohistorical approaches to the study of religion, ritual, kinship, and social organization, this study illustrates how twenty-first century Oglala religious organization derives largely from two institutions of nineteenth-century Lakota social and religious organization; namely, the *thiyóšpaye* (extended family or band) and the *Ihánblapi Okhólakičhiye* (religious Dream Societies). Inspired by Bucko (1998) and other theorists of tradition (see Bauman 2001; Briggs 1996; Clifford 2004; DeMallie 1991; Foster 1991; Glassie 1995; Kapferer 2003), I argue for a dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation in the diachronic development of Oglala religion. I explore ritual as a decolonizing strategy in the modern, globalized world, serving as a major focus of identity and ethnicity and providing spaces where Lakotanness, tradition, and meaning are

(re)articulated, (re)constructed, (re)generated, performed, reinforced, and transmitted from one generation to the next.³⁴³

Throughout the roughly twenty months I have spent conducting fieldwork at Pine Ridge since 2008 I have developed many reciprocal and enduring relationships with Oglala friends and adoptive relatives. As I collaborated with Oglalas as a research associate working on a Lakota language curriculum development project I discovered that people at Pine Ridge are very interested and active in traditional religion and eager to talk about it. My research and experience on the reservation has given me the opportunity to participate in the ritual networks of four religious leaders who represent a broad spectrum of contemporary religious practice, thought, and identity. I attended rituals; studied prayers, ceremonial songs, and beliefs; analyzed ritual behavior and social networks; and shared in the lives and practices of contemporary practitioners and their followers.

The primary methods I used were participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, intensive study of the Lakota language, and archival research. My work is broadly informed by Geertz's symbolic and interpretive anthropology and James Clifford's interdisciplinary approaches to the intersections of colonialism, post-colonialism, and indigeneity. My research is framed by the sensitive and compelling work of Raymond DeMallie, whose interests in the Lakotas, ethnohistory, belief, ritual, and kinship continue to serve as a well of inspiration for my scholarship.

³⁴³ Religion is one of the few available cultural institutions that remains distinct from the white, nonnative, Western world, and hence is a major point of emphasis—and contention—in the ongoing dynamics of indigeneity, ethnic group boundary maintenance, and identity politics. Naturally, many (Oglala) Lakotas seek and construct identity in and through religion (see DeMallie 1991; Powers 1982a:204).

When I first went to the field I had a strong foundation in nineteenth-century Lakota culture, society, religion, and language. What I witnessed in terms of religious life seemed at first to deviate from the nineteenth-century models I was so familiar with. The practice of Oglala religion in the twenty-first century, at least on the surface, is quite distinct from what one reads in the classic ethnographies and collections of texts on the Lakotas. I was intrigued by the modern practical adaptations and the transnational, global scope of contemporary Oglala religion. I searched the internet for “Lakota medicine man” and found a number of fascinating sites, some more elaborate and convincing than others. I smiled when I received my first text message from a religious practitioner, informing me that the rocks for that evening’s Sweat Lodge were almost ready to be loaded into the ceremonial lodge. Though I was a bit thrown at first, I persisted in my quest for understanding the deep continuities underpinning Oglala religious life, despite the clear presence of innovation and practical adaptation; the darker, more sinister splintering effects of settler colonialism; and the inescapable influences of modernity.

Aside from participant observation I also turned to the anthropological and historical literature for insights, which came in two great waves. The first wave was inspired by the work of anthropologists David Schneider (1969) and Hervé Varenne (1977, 1986) on kinship and the social organization of religious and secular groups. Their work led me to anthropologist Fredrik Barth’s (1966, 1998) writings on similar topics concerning ethnic group identity, boundary maintenance, and transactional approaches to social organization.³⁴⁴ The next wave came in a passage from a collection of essays written by religious studies scholar Åke Hultkrantz (1981), in which he states that the

³⁴⁴ Clifford’s (1988:277–346; 2000) insightful work on identity (politics) also framed and influenced this study.

religious organizations of Plains Indian tribes reflected their social organizations and environmental factors. This insight, coupled with a careful reading of anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard's classic *Nuer Religion* (1956), solidified my thinking.

Clearly religion and ritual provide an important space where Lakota identity is (re)generated, (re)negotiated, performed, and reinforced; where tradition is (re)articulated, (re)constructed, maintained, and perpetuated. Religion and ritual also clearly function as decolonizing strategies, maintaining indigeneity and the distinctiveness of Lakota identity and tradition in opposition and resistance to non-Lakota belief and practice, neocolonialism, and the demystifying, secularizing, and homogenizing effects of globalization and multiculturalism³⁴⁵ (see Kapferer 2008). But I began to notice how Oglalas were organized into relatively distinct ritual groups—usually identified by and with the name of its religious practitioner and leader—that at first seemed to be incongruent with any type of religious or ritual organization from the past.

I came to label these social groups “ritual *thiyóšpayes*,” using the Lakota word for band or lodge group, the extended family and historical basic unit of kinship. Due to the disruption and undermining of kinship and social organization caused by the confluence of colonization, the decline of the bison, forced relocation to reservations, and the General Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887, the traditional Lakota *thiyóšpaye* social structure began to fray throughout the early reservation period. The entire aboriginal sociopolitical system gradually became ineffective throughout this period (DeMallie 2009; Powers 1982b:202). I suspected early on in my fieldwork that these ritual

³⁴⁵ There is a definite interconnection between the maintenance and perpetuation of Lakota religion, ritual, language, kinship, and, more generally, tradition (Posthumus 2008-2014; see also Powers 1982a:205).

thiyóšpayes in some way reflected the old social structure and represented its contemporary equivalent, but just how this evolution developed I was unable at first to understand.

I was puzzled because these groups are not always related through blood or marriage, although certainly many of them are, and some, in fact, are known by a family name, rather than the name of the group's ritual leader.³⁴⁶ Instead, ritual *thiyóšpayes* tend to be groups of people with a clear structure who are related largely through a religious practitioner. The relationship between a practitioner and his ritual *thiyóšpaye* is one of mutual influence, reciprocity, and exchange: the practitioner shapes the beliefs and character of his followers, symbolizing the group to both members and non-members, while simultaneously being shaped by his followers as a representative of their social, psychological, and religious needs, beliefs, and values (see Barth 1966, 1998; Varenne 1977:126–136). This reciprocity and mutual influence gives each ritual *thiyóšpaye* a distinctive character, reputation, and level of social prestige within the larger Pine Ridge Reservation community.

As I began to decipher the organization of these contemporary groups—with the constant, invaluable, and generous collaboration, aid, and support of many Oglala friends and adoptive relatives—I gradually recognized the connections to past systems of Lakota social and religious organization; to what a contemporary Lakota educator referred to as *wówahečhun*, the old ways and customs of the people, also a general reference to kinship (Posthumus 2008-2014). I felt as though I was uncovering an ancient trail that had fallen

³⁴⁶ In line with the *thiyóšpayes* of the past, the backbone of some contemporary ritual *thiyóšpayes* is a group of brothers, their male cousins and close relatives, and their families. The practitioner and leader of these groups is often father, uncle, or grandfather to the group of brothers and male relatives.

into disuse long ago, yet maintained a trace of its former life. As I continued to dig deeper the connections and continuities that had been so elusive to me up to that point grew increasingly sharp and clear.

I gradually realized that the contemporary ritual *thiyóšpaye* is a hybrid of the nineteenth-century *thiyóšpaye* social structure and the *Ihánblapi Okhólakičhiye* (Dream Society) religious structure (see Figure 23). Next we will explore just what that means.

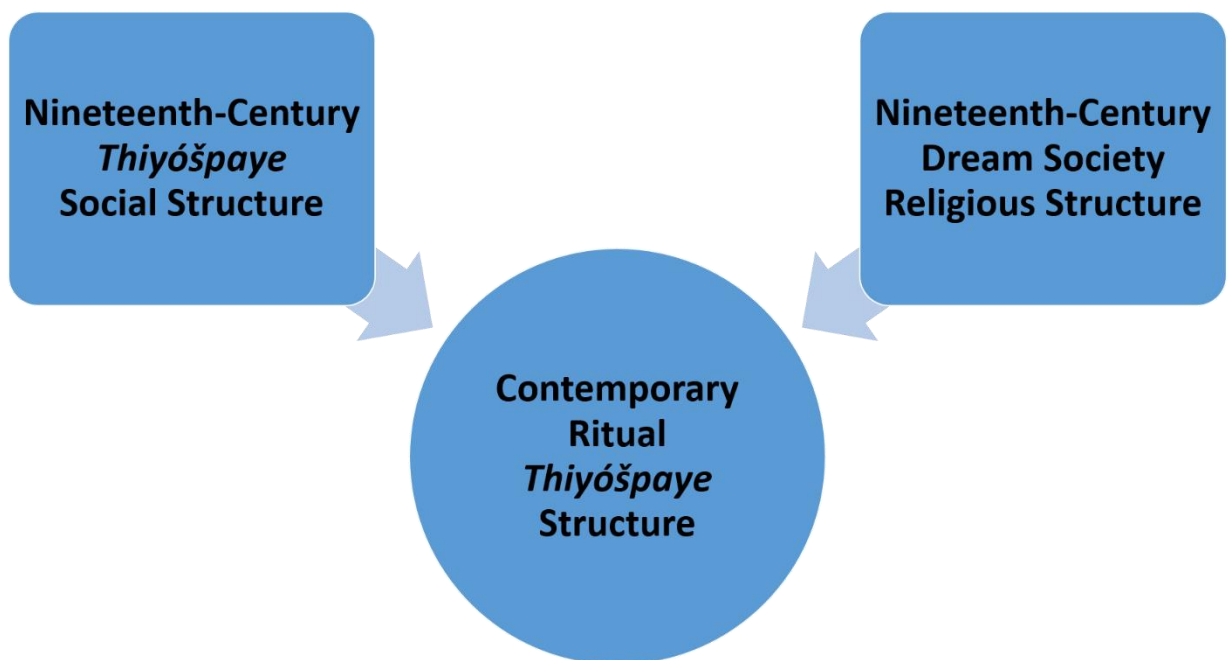


Figure 23: The Hybrid Formation of Contemporary Oglala Ritual Groups

Nineteenth-century Lakota society comprised various levels of social organization (see Figure 24). The largest, most inclusive unit was the nation, followed by the tribe, both of which are referred to in Lakota as *oyáte*.³⁴⁷ Individuals and groups identified

³⁴⁷ The term *oyáte* (people, nation, tribe), DeMallie writes (2001:799), “carried a meaning of ethnic identity as Lakota (*lak’óta*) as well as a general sense of political unity based on common relationship. Each of the seven constituent groups [of the Lakota] recognized itself as a tribe, a level of social organization that was also called *oyáte*.” Powers (1982b:33–36) mistakenly labels the nation-level division *thuywáy*. This term, a

themselves with these groups. For example, an individual may have been *Dakhóta* (nation) and *Wazíkhute* (tribe), while another may have been *Lakǎóta* (nation) and *Oglála* (tribe). Next, in descending order of generality and inclusivity, were flexible, mobile bands called *thiyóšpaye* or ‘lodge groups’, each conceptualized as a circle of tipis, each tipi housing a *thiwáhe* (family) (Walker 1982:3–6; see also DeMallie 1994; 2001:801; 2009:190–191). As DeMallie (2009:190) explains, “The nuclear family was the smallest unit of Sioux social structure. Each family had a tipi within which a small fire burned, symbolizing the family’s autonomy.” The symbols of the circle and fireplace were pervasive throughout the various levels of social organization and Lakota culture in general.

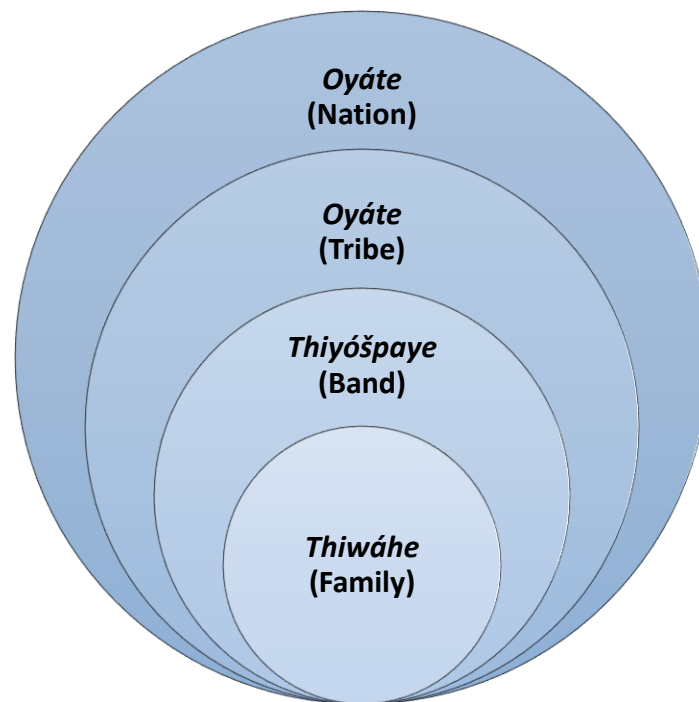


Figure 24: Levels of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Social Organization

stem meaning ‘village’ or ‘town’, indicates a more strictly geo-local division and is used to identify villages and village sites.

Nineteenth-century Lakota society may be conceptualized as a great circle composed of many *thiyóšpayes* that varied in size, each led by a chief appointed by a council of elder decision-makers (see Figure 25). *Thiyóšpayes* were designated by a prominent member's name—often a nickname—or by some memorable event associated with the group. Band membership was a matter of choice and residence, not necessarily descent. Each *thiyóšpaye* had its own identity, dialect, and corporate economic activity (see Anderson 2001:5; DeMallie 2001:799–801; 2009:190). According to DeMallie (2009:191), “Before their settlement on reservations the Sioux comprised a large number of independent bands loosely organized into tribes. The criteria for membership were common language and common kinship; the symbol for community at every level was the circle, from the intimacy of a single family's tipi, to the camp circle, and finally to the broadest identity as Lakota or Dakota.”

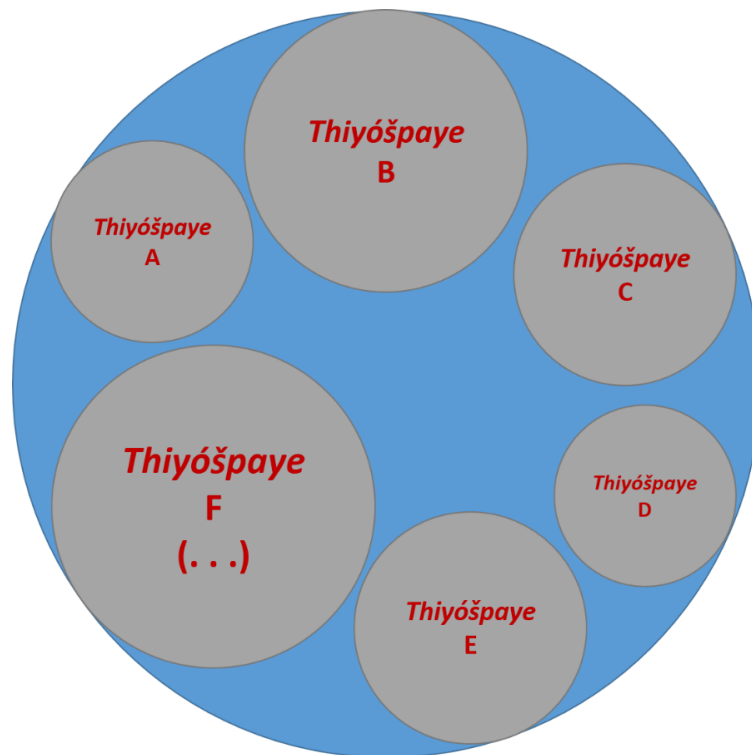


Figure 25: Nineteenth-Century Lakota Society

DeMallie writes:

All the members of a band were related to one another, many through direct ties of descent and marriage. The core of the band was usually a group of brothers and male cousins, with their families. . . . During the buffalo-hunting period the band was the most important social unit in daily life; individuals identified themselves first with their band, which, for the prereservation Sioux, may rightly be considered the basic unit of community. [DeMallie 2009:190]

Political and economic authority was focused on men, but the nexus of kin focused on women, who owned and maintained the tipis (DeMallie 2009:191). In Schneider's terms, the bonds that united the members of a social unit were based on shared natural substance, blood, residence, volition, and common identity. These were relationships of diffuse, enduring solidarity defined in terms of a shared code for conduct and behavior³⁴⁸ (Schneider 1969:120–124). Although Schneider's perspective and concepts are undoubtedly Western and non-Lakota, they are nonetheless useful.

Nineteenth-century Lakota religious organization tended to mirror sociopolitical organization, as well as ecological conditions. We will see that changes in social and political life, along with environmental and ecological adaptations, have been major constraining and determinative forces in the development and evolution of Lakota religion throughout history and into the present.³⁴⁹ As Hultkrantz writes:

³⁴⁸ As Schneider explains, "'Diffuse' because they are functionally diffuse rather than specific in Parsons' [*sic*] terms. That is, where the 'job' is to get a specific thing 'done' there is no such specific limitation on the aim or goal of any kinship relationship. Instead the goal is 'solidarity,' that is, the 'good' or 'well being' or 'benefit' of ego with alter. Whatever it is that is 'good for' the family, the spouse, the child, the relative, etc. is the 'right' thing to do. And 'enduring' in the generalized sense symbolized by 'blood'; there is no built-in termination point or termination date. Indeed, it 'is' and cannot be terminated. . . . it is supposed to endure and persevere and it is not to be regarded as transient or temporary or conditional" (Schneider 1969:120).

³⁴⁹ Anthropologist Morton Klass defines social organization as the ordering of human relationships and religion as the ordering of the universe. Klass (1995:3) suggests that what we categorize as social

These belief structures certainly reflect, in their very organization, the ancient social and political structure of the tribe: the prevalent socio-political pattern in the old days was one of a semi-independent band-organization interacting with an emergent centralized authority³⁵⁰ . . . At the same time these structures corresponded to specific cultural, social and ecological situations which challenged the balance of man and released culturally determined responses in him: the desire for success in hunting or on the war-path induced him to guardian spirit³⁵¹ quests . . . , the longing for safety in thunderstorms made him appeal to the thunderers, and the immediate need to escape from great danger forced him to call on the high god himself for help. The social and political, and partly also the ecological motivations have disappeared with the breakdown of traditional Plains culture at the end of the last century, but the religious patterns are largely intact to this day. [Hultkrantz 1981:23]

Throughout the pre- and early reservation periods, when ancestral Lakota sociopolitical organization flourished relatively unabated, that organization, paired with environmental and ecological considerations and constraints, encouraged the pluralism, individualism, innovation, and specialization characteristic of nineteenth-century Lakota religious belief and magico-ritual practice. For all these reasons historical Lakota religion was extremely diverse and complex. As DeMallie explains:

Lakotas possessed a great diversity of rituals that brought power into their lives. . . . Many rituals expressed individuals' dream experiences . . .

organization and religion “are aspects of the same thing: There are values and beliefs that underlie all social relationships, just as there are social relationships (between human and human and between human and other-than-human) inextricably entwined with beliefs about the nature of the universe and with the practices that devolve from those beliefs.”

³⁵⁰ A general, centralized authority existed more in the case of the Plains Shoshones than among the Lakotas. If we think of centralized leadership in terms of civil and religious leaders on a more minute scale, such as at the camp- and band-levels of social organization, Hultkrantz's insights fit the Lakota case quite well.

³⁵¹ According to Ella Deloria (in Bushotter 1937:Story 198), the term *wašiču* was used to refer to a guardian spirit, or “the personal spirit which a holy man has, working for him.” The term comes from *wašič* ‘to order about’ and *ču* or *ku* ‘his’, similar to the possessive prefix *tha-*. Interestingly, the term *wašiču* is the contemporary term for whites or nonnatives.

In Lakota culture, the quest for knowledge of the *wakan* was largely a personal enterprise, and it was predominately the work of men. Each individual formulated a system of belief by and for himself.³⁵² There was no standard theology, no dogmatic body of belief. Fundamental concepts were universally shared, but specific knowledge of the *wakan* beings was not shared beyond a small number of holy men. Through individual experience, every man had the opportunity to contribute to and resynthesize the general body of knowledge that constituted Lakota religion. [DeMallie 1984:82–83]

Taking our analysis a step further, we reach the unavoidable conclusion that the religious foundations and ritual practice of each *thiyóšpaye* must have reflected its specific sociopolitical organization, validating and necessitating the individualism and diversity of pre- and early reservation period Lakota religion and ritual. Although the basic underlying elements and symbols were similar, the details and specifics differed from band to band. In essence, each Lakota *thiyóšpaye* had a distinctive, idiosyncratic set of religious beliefs and magico-ritual practices that mirrored its social fabric, composed of the makeup and organization of its specific families and extended families, men's societies, civil and military leaders, and, significantly, its religious leaders and ritual specialists. We extensively analyzed and categorized nineteenth-century Lakota religious practitioners in a previous section that we will not duplicate here. We will, however, highlight a few essential characteristics of Lakota disease theory, practitioners, significant themes, and how they have evolved through time in terms of both continuity and transformation.

³⁵² Deloria writes that each *Heyókħa* or contrary dressed and painted in unique ways based on individual vision and dream experiences. "Of course," she (n.d.:82–83) writes, "each dancer was made up symbolically. But as a rule, each symbol was an emblem only to himself. There was no cut-and-dried, stereotype designs such as the Camp Fire Girls try to read into Indian material. But one thing that marked the Heyoka, was and [*sic*] zig-zag mark up and down the body. It stood for the lightning, and that my father said was the Heyoka symbol which all heyokas used, in common; beyond that, other markings were all individual. But this one was constant."

Previously we described nineteenth-century practitioners as being indexable on a continuum, one end of which being disease (sickness caused by a physical or physiological malfunction or agent) and the other being illness (sickness brought on by a patient's perception of his or her bodily state). Despite pervasive individuality and idiosyncratic practices we were able to conclude that generally medicine men or herbalists (*pñežúta wičháša*) treated disease using techno-scientific and physiological or physical methods, while holy men or shamans (*wičháša wakháŋ*) treated illness using mystico-spiritual, magico-ritual, or psychological methods. Conjurors or magicians (*waphíya wičháša*) represented an intermediate or liminal category, utilizing both methods to treat combinations of disease and illness. Conjurors were particularly identified with the treatment of sorcery/witchcraft (*h̄mún̄ḡa*), commonly using the *yağópa/yaphá/kiyáph̄a* treatment method, which involves the extraction of symbolic or spiritual sickness, usually through sucking. Although different practitioner types specialized in and were renowned for the treatment of specific sicknesses, generally holy men were considered the most potent, followed by conjurors, and then medicine men.

Holy men were distinguished from medicine men in various ways. Holy men conducted the major collective rituals of the Lakotas, while medicine men typically did not, seeing largely to individual health-related needs. Holy men were intermediaries between the common people and the spirits, while medicine men generally were not. Holy men treated the sick using their ceremonial bundles, containing the potency of and representing a specific *wakháŋ* being, while medicine men treated the sick with their medicine bundles, containing medicinal herbs, roots, and other plants, as well as tools for setting bones and other physiological medical operations. A holy man's training through

the master-apprentice model was longer and more rigorous than that of a medicine man. Holy men spoke the esoteric sacred languages of the shamans and spirits, while medicine men generally did not. Holy men danced the fourth degree of the Sun Dance and participated in the *Wakǰáŋ Wačhípi* (Mystery Dance) as rites of passage, while medicine men did not. Generally, holy men were the repositories, generators, gatekeepers, and guardians of religious and magico-ritual knowledge, the masters in the master-apprentice model for the transmission of sacred knowledge, while medicine men were not. These are the major categorical distinctions distinguishing holy men from medicine men. Again, conjurors or magicians inhabited an intermediate space in the hierarchy of nineteenth-century Lakota magico-medico-ritual practitioners, ranging in a wide space (betwixt and) between medicine men and holy men.

We noted that two categories crosscut and overlap this continuum. The human propensity for good or evil is one such category. Human nature is ambivalent, and, like spirit beings, humans may be benevolent or malevolent, social or antisocial, selfless or selfish, working toward the maintenance and perpetuation of individual and collective life movement or toward its hindrance and destruction. The second overlapping category is the dreamer category. Obtaining a vision of a specific other-than-human person served as a rite of passage but did not always or necessarily determine which type of practitioner an individual would become. Although holy men tended to dream of the more powerful celestial spirits, while medicine men and conjurors tended to dream of terrestrial animal spirits (animal doctors), this generalization does not hold universally. The dreamer category crosscuts the hierarchical organization and categorization we have developed based on practitioner type (holy man vs. conjuror vs. medicine man).

Clearly nineteenth-century Lakota religion, ritual, and magical practice were characterized by individuality, innovation, specificity, and diversity. Despite a common mythological cycle and pool of shared religious symbols and (contested, evolving) meanings, most or perhaps nearly all practitioners synthesized and developed their own versions of Lakota religious belief, cosmology, ontology, ideology, and philosophy based on their own visions and life experiences.³⁵³ Speaking of the related Assiniboine tribe, fur trader Edwin Thompson Denig (2000:99) explains that, aside from the power concept (*wakǵáŋ*), “all other religion diverges into different minor beliefs and superstitions according to the fancy of each individual.” DeMallie (1991:11) concurs, writing, “The characteristic individuality of Lakota culture, for example, the freedom for each individual to define his own religious system through vision questing rather than learning formalized doctrine, led to remarkable diversity.”

Diversity and individuality were additionally fueled by the distinctiveness of a given *thiyóšpaye*'s social fabric, as well as environmental and ecological factors inherent in the nomadic lifestyle of Plains Indians. Based on an idiosyncratic belief system each practitioner subsequently tended to conduct rituals in his own characteristic way, again usually based on visionary experiences. Even when two individuals dreamed of the same other-than-human person and shared membership in the same Dream Society ritual practice tended towards diversity and individuality. Utilizing Wallace's (1952, 2009)

³⁵³ For Turner, ritual symbols “exhibit the properties of *condensation*, *unification of disparate referents*, and *polarization of meaning*. A single symbol, in fact, represents many things at the same time: it is multivocal, not univocal. Its referents are not all of the same logical order but are drawn from many domains of social experience and ethical evaluation. Finally, its referents tend to cluster around opposite semantic poles. At one pole the referents are to social and moral facts, at the other, to physiological facts” (Turner 1969:52; italics in the original). With this understanding of ritual symbols it is not surprising that the same symbols may be variously understood and utilized by various individuals.

endlessly useful distinction, in nineteenth-century Lakota culture religion and ritual clearly functioned to organize diversity. Today we are witnessing a decisive and radical shift in the opposite direction.

Most sources agree that there were relatively few religious practitioners and ritual specialists in the nineteenth century (see He Dog in Bad Heart Bull and Blish 1967:201; Hassrick 1964:277). Denig, again writing about the related Siouan Assiniboine tribe, states:

The doctor, priest, conjuror, wizard, prophet, and divining man are all united in the same person; that is, to a divining man . . . , or divining woman . . . , these powers, or some of them, are ascribed, and they are believed to possess them in proportion as their success has been developed. Some are simply doctors of medicine, others in addition are conjurors and do tricks. Some go further, interpret dreams, reveal the future, find lost articles, etc. The whole united forms the entire divining man. The persons who profess and perform some of these things are tolerably numerous; but the effective diviner of established reputation, large practice, and possessing the whole of the foregoing powers are very few, perhaps not more than six or eight in the whole Assiniboin Nation. [Denig 2000:100]

Walker (1991:47) reported that in the early 1900s there were only five holy men remaining among the Oglalas at Pine Ridge, none other than full bloods having ever achieved that status. In August 1915 Walker lamented that his “most valued informants are all now dead” (Walker 1991:36). Later Walker (1991:50) states that “The last of the order of holy men among the Oglalas has gone before his final judge and the progress of civilization has extinguished the order.” Densmore (2001:244–245) and her interlocutors from Standing Rock particularly note that in the “old days” there was great specificity in terms of the treatment of the sick, all of which was done strictly in accordance with

visions. Densmore (2001:244) writes, “Each man only treated the diseases for which his dream had given him the remedies.”

In the early 1930s Luther Standing Bear (2006b:39) wrote that “Most young men at some time in their lives tried to become medicine-men. They purified themselves and held the vigil hoping for direct communion with spirit powers, but in this few succeeded.” According to Deloria (n.d.:1), “Among the Dakotas, not everyone was Wak’á. Not everyone tried to be. Some were content to be ordinary common men all their lives—kind and generous and hospitable, but not supernatural.”³⁵⁴ In 1937, Deloria (in Walker 1991:44) intimated to Franz Boas that the practitioners were all but extinct. This decline in the number of ritual practitioners parallels the decline or nadir in terms of interest and pride in Lakota culture, identity, religion, ritual, and tradition that occurred from roughly 1890 to 1950. This decline was due to many interrelated factors, such as the horrors of colonization; the decline of the buffalo; missionization; the tragedy at Wounded Knee; economic hopelessness and dependence; allotment; social fragmentation and deterioration; the harrowing boarding school experience; anger and resentment; assimilation pressures; racism; and relocation. The list goes on and on.

In the early 1950s Ruby (1966:75–76) reported that there were six practicing practitioners at Pine Ridge, representing perhaps the early beginnings of the resurgence and revitalization of Lakota religion and ritual. In the late 1950s George Flesh told Fugle (1966:25) that “There are more doctors practicing today . . . than in the old days. The old

³⁵⁴ The unprecedented increase in the number of individuals claiming to have *wak’háŋ* power at Pine Ridge today is noted by a number of contemporary Oglalas as a major cultural shift. “I don’t understand why everyone wants to be *wak’háŋ* nowadays,” explained a middle-aged Oglala in disbelief and a little disgust, “when I was growing up, it was considered a burden. That stuff is *wókhókip’he* (scary, dangerous, powerful)” (Posthumus 2008-2014).

time doctors had more power than the present day doctors.” In the 1960s and early 1970s there were relatively few practitioners, many of whom are now famous, such as Fools Crow, Catches, Lamé Deer, and Crow Dog. With the cultural renaissance and religious revitalization that gained momentum in the early 1970s came a renewed pride in Lakota culture and identity and a resurgence in interest in and devotion to Lakota religion, ritual, and tradition. In some senses many people were born again, (re)discovering their cultural and religious identities through a dynamic process of (re)traditionalization, often taking modernizing forms.³⁵⁵

Today we are witnessing a huge spike in the number of practitioners, evidenced in the increasing number of ritual *thiyóšpayes*, reflected in the sharp increase in Sun Dances at Pine Ridge.³⁵⁶ Outlawed in 1881, the Sun Dance began to make a comeback throughout the early-to-mid 1900s, sans piercing, a central sacrificial feature. In 1960, however, piercing was revived at Pine Ridge, and throughout that decade many more individuals pledged to be pierced. From World War II until 1972 there was *one* communal Sun Dance for both Pine Ridge and Rosebud, sponsored by the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, and held at the powwow grounds just east of Pine Ridge Town. In 1974

³⁵⁵ In the modern globalized world dynamic processes of detraditionalization are continually coupled with those of retraditionalization (see Varga in Juergensmeyer and Roof 2012:295).

³⁵⁶ This sudden increase in the number of practitioners results from many varied factors, such as the resurgence in pride in Lakota culture and identity fanned by the revitalization of the 1960s and 1970s and the great economic, political, and social benefits of being a practitioner. Practitioners have great power over people, in terms of coercion, influence, and symbolic empowerment, just like religious leaders and shamans have always had. But today that power is different in some ways. There is money to be made in native medicine and religion, especially in terms of the New Age and neo-traditionalists types who actively recruit whites and other nonnatives to their ceremonies, often for a hefty fee. Generally, well-respected practitioners accrue prestige, reputation, power, and wealth both on and off the reservation. Using Bourdieu's terms, practitioners have greater access to various forms of capital (cultural, economic, social, and symbolic) and have the ability and power to (re)produce it. Additionally, in many cases practitioners have cadres of devoted followers, somewhat like the groupies of Hindu gurus, and have great influence over women in particular. From the followers' perspectives the practitioner as an intermediary is a source of and channel to these forms of capital, as well as spiritual guidance and power in general (Posthumus 2008-2014).

there were four Sun Dances held in four locations on the reservation. In 1987 there were at least fourteen Pine Ridge Sun Dances. By the summer of 1997 this figure had shot to no less than forty-three. In the summer of 2014 the number of separate Sun Dances held at Pine Ridge was estimated at over eighty, nearly doubling the figure from 1997 (Mails 1998; Porterfield 1997; Posthumus 2008-2014; Powers 1982a:95–100, 141; Roos et al. 1980:96–97; Steinmetz 1990:32–35). From 1972 to 2014, in just over forty years, Pine Ridge has experienced an unprecedented and staggering eighty percent increase in the number of annual individual Sun Dances held on the reservation.

While there was an explosion in both the number and popularity of Sun Dances at Pine Ridge—and a concomitant multiplication of the number of ritual *thiyóšpayes*—there was also an attendant and paradoxical decline in terms of diversity, specificity, individuality, and innovation. There has been a general shift away from idiosyncratic, diverse, vision-influenced, and innovation-driven methods for the treatment of the sick toward generalized conceptions of psychosomatic, spiritual healing, taking place largely through the Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance, and *Yuwípi/Lowáŋpi* ceremonies.³⁵⁷ Today ceremony is seen as a cure for all kinds of social and psychological ills, alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse, and historical trauma, all of which may be conceived of

³⁵⁷ The Vision Quest still occurs on a less-frequent basis, but the Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance, and *Yuwípi/Lowáŋpi* ceremonies are by far the most popular and visible contemporary ritual practices and expressions of Lakota religious identity and indigeneity at Pine Ridge today. There is a definite correlation between the revitalization of Lakota religious belief and ritual and the increase in the number of practitioners. Countless individuals consciously or unconsciously have returned to Lakota religion and ritual since the 1970s, rediscovering their Lakota identities and relearning Lakota traditions. This return to cultural traditions is driven by various reasons, such as mere curiosity, a (re)commitment to one's Lakota identity or to the *Lak'hól wič'hóh'anj*, or sickness (Posthumus 2008-2014; Powers 1982a:205–206). "It is symbolic illness, or Indians sickness," suggests Powers (1982b:206), "that creates a need for the sacred persons, and which brings the common people in touch with the sacred." The category of symbolic illness, which Powers refers to as Indian sickness and we have referred to as illness, creates and sustains the need for ritual practitioners at Pine Ridge today.

generally as spiritual disequilibrium, disharmony, or imbalance. Hence, much contemporary ritual is aimed at (re)centering, (re)generation, (re)orientation, (re)creation, and (re)establishing interconnectedness and relationship³⁵⁸ (see Boyd and Thin Elk 2008; see also Kapferer 2008:6). Contemporary ritual practitioners are in many ways jack-of-all trades healers and thoroughly generalized.³⁵⁹

While this may seem like a dramatic shift at first glance, in fact Lakota religion and ritual have always dealt largely with maintaining spiritual and physical equilibrium, harmony, well-being, and health. Again, Anderson's concept of life movement is useful, that is, "the aim to generate long life, blessings, and abundance for self, others, family, and the tribe" (Anderson 2001:5). Life movement combines at least two core Lakota religious values. The first and most fundamental value is *wičhózani*, or health. The stem *zaní* (to be healthy, well, whole) refers to both physical and psychological health and well-being. Lakota people value health very highly and pray for it for themselves, their relatives, friends, and tribe as a whole. Another important religious value encompassed by the concept of life movement is *wičhóičhaḡe*, or the generations, life, growth, and longevity, which captures the idea of continuing health and prosperity for the people into the future and throughout the generations and time (DeMallie and Parks 1987:211). The common Lakota ritual phrase "That these people may live" captures this focus on

³⁵⁸ Rice (1998:19–24) questions this contemporary focus on balance and harmony as a New Age, pantribal derivative of Pueblo models. He posits that Lakota spirituality instead is derived from the warrior mentality, in which "healing means mustering as much power as possible to overwhelm the force of any threat" (Rice 1998:23).

³⁵⁹ This phenomenon has been noted by Feraca (1998:26, 43), among others. Based on his experiences at Pine Ridge in the mid-twentieth century, Feraca (1998:43) writes, "Most Lakota medicine men, particularly the *yuwipi* men, are jacks-of-all-trades, including in their repertoire curing, counseling, finding missing persons or lost articles, predicting, and conjuring." The generalization of practitioners and practicing without a license, so to speak, that is, without a properly interpreted vision, are often blamed in secondary rationalizations of ritual failure, disaster, and other obstructions of life movement.

sustaining and perpetuating life movement. Sickness is believed to be caused by other-than-human forces and may therefore be conceptualized as the physical symptoms of spiritual disequilibrium or disharmony. Thus, one of the major responsibilities of religious practitioners is to treat the sick—those who are spiritually out of balance with the universe—and to restore spiritual harmony through mystical or *wakǰáŋ* means. Hence, some practitioners may be generally referred to as *waphíye* (curers, doctors, healers; literally, ‘to make over, to make anew, to renew’).

Wilmer Mesteth, a prominent contemporary Oglala religious leader, explained to me that the most significant and far-reaching changes in Lakota religion and ritual in the twentieth century began with the increased presence of the American Indian Movement (AIM)³⁶⁰ at Pine Ridge in the early 1970s and pertained to the Sun Dance and *Yuwípi* Ceremonies (Posthumus 2008-2014). It was during that time that *Yuwípi* rose to prominence as the most popular and visible expression of Lakota religiosity and ritual life.³⁶¹ “The number of *Yuwípi* and *Yuwípi*-like rituals has increased since the mid-sixties,” explains Powers (1982b:207), “and it is in these rituals that we see the dynamics of Oglala religion, even more so than in the sun dance.” During the early 1970s many individuals became *Yuwípi* men based largely on Frank Fools Crow’s model. Many young practitioners were trained by and apprenticed to Fools Crow and his acolytes, such as Dawson No Horse (see Steinmetz 1990).

Before that time the Sun Dance was still based on men’s societies and was essentially a war ritual featuring militaristic symbolism. It was directed by various types

³⁶⁰ For more on AIM, see Dewing (1985, 1995), Magnuson (2013), Roos et al. (1980), Smith and Warrior (1996), and Trimbach and Trimbach (2007).

³⁶¹ The *Yuwípi* Ceremony and its practitioners survived the decimations of settler colonialism better than many other ritual types for a variety of reasons that will not be discussed here.

of ritual leaders with diverse other-than-human power sources or spirit guardians. With the influx of AIM at Pine Ridge and the inescapable influence of Frank Fools Crow—not to mention his publications co-authored with Mails (see Mails and Fools Crow 1979, 1991; see also Mails 1998)—the single, unified Pine Ridge Sun Dance fractionated and many began running their own Sun Dances based on Fools Crow’s *Yuwípi*-influenced model. Leonard Crow Dog, the famous *Sičhánǵu* practitioner adopted by AIM as their “official” spiritual leader, is a prime example of this phenomenon (see Crow Dog 1996; Roos et al. 1980:96–98). Today most Oglala practitioners lead a Sun Dance and are also *Yuwípi* men, apparently an unprecedented development that has exacerbated and emphasized the decline in diversity, specification, and individuality and the general trend toward uniformity and orthodoxy.

According to some Oglalas literally no practitioners extract sickness via sucking at Pine Ridge today, and hence there are no longer any *yaǵópa/yaphǎ/kiyáphǎ* practitioners. The last of the Bear doctors died out in the Manderson District in the 1960s, and there are only a select few herbalists remaining. The Dream Societies are all but extinct, a topic we will explore in greater detail below (Posthumus 2008-2014). Indeed, the major changes occurring in Lakota religion and ritual since the dawn of the early reservation period—the shift from specialization to generalization and diversity to uniformity, the decline in religious and ritual innovation, the deterioration of the Dream Societies, along with the general increase in the number of practitioners and ritual groups (ritual *thiyóšpayes*, Sun Dance groups or “families,” “altars”)—all speak to great cultural change over the last century and a half that has not been adequately explored.

Based on our previous classification by method all contemporary practitioners may be classified as holy men: they do not administer medicines nor do they extract illness (via sucking) and produce the physical proof. They treat symbolic illness using largely psychological or psychoanalytic methods, manipulations, and techniques. However, the tripartite mechanism for the sociocultural production of symbolic capital (prestige, reputation, and honor [*yuónihaŋ*]) has not changed dramatically. The three roles—practitioner, patient/victim, and social group—are still essential, and the relationship between the practitioner and the group or collectivity is still the most significant. Being a religious practitioner ultimately means that a person self-ascribes and is ascribed by others as being empowered by or endowed with mysterious powers and abilities, usually through an established and recognized relationship with a spirit being. To put it another way, according to Powers (1982b:203), “The content of Oglala social relations changed; but the form, the structure, the relation between leader and follower persisted.”

Perennially contemporary Oglala religious and ritual life is manifested in the Sweat Lodge and *Yuwípi/Lowáŋpi*, which occur at least on a weekly basis among certain ritual groups. The Sun Dance organizes Lakota religious and ritual life on an annual basis, (re)generating and (re)affirming social ties, spiritual relationships, and individual and collective identities. The Sun Dance has come to be a defining and characteristic feature of individual identity that binds people to and incorporates them within a socio-ritual group or ritual *thiyóšpaye*. In many ways a ritual *thiyóšpaye* may be conceived of as a Sun Dance group or family, as they are often referred to on the reservation (Posthumus

2008-2014). The use of kinship terminology in reference to one's Sun Dance or ritual group is significant and telling.

As I have attempted to illustrate the decline in religious and ritual diversity and specificity may be read inversely as an increase in generalization, orthodoxy, or dogmatism. There are many reasons and explanations for this trend, one of which is the ascendancy of the *Yuwípi* man/Sun Dance leader model based on Fools Crow that has risen to prominence since the early 1970s. Another reason is the increasing rarity of the Vision Quest. In direct opposition to Densmore's interlocutors' insistence on the determinative role of the vision in terms of magico-medico-ritual practice, apparently by the 1950s a vision was no longer a requirement for neophyte practitioners (Densmore 2001:244–245; Hurt and Howard 1952:293). This is apparently still the case at Pine Ridge today. This shift and decline in ritual innovation and variation may be productively understood as a shift from what Geertz (2005) refers to as religiousness to religious mindedness. In any case at Pine Ridge today religion and ritual have come to function more as replicators of uniformity, rather than organizers of diversity (see Wallace 1952, 2009).

Two important and interconnected factors have exacerbated the decrease in religious and ritual diversity: (1) the deterioration of the Dream Societies, and (2) the fact that practitioners now appear to have completely appropriated the liminal role of the intermediary or intercessor between human and other-than-human beings. Essentially practitioners have usurped the function of the nineteenth-century "totem spirit" or spirit guardian, usually an animal spirit or some other natural phenomenon, which historically functioned as the intermediary between the common people and the spirits. This may at

first seem to be a deviation or loss, rather than a practical adaptation reflecting continuity. However, Lynd attests to the practice of nineteenth-century Eastern Sioux holy men, as originators and generators of religious ideology, arbitrarily assigning totem spirits to their followers, thus uniting them into ritual kinship groups or Dream Societies (Lynd 1889:161–164). In the early twentieth century Wissler (1912:82) made a similar observation in reference to the distinction between common herbalists and shamans, explaining that a medicine man obtains his medicines and ritual formulae from a shaman or “originator.”



Having explored the structure of the *thiyóšpaye* social organization; briefly outlined the duties, functions, and character of nineteenth-century religious practitioners; and discussed some of the major changes that have occurred in Oglala religion and ritual since the early reservation period, we will now move on to a more detailed discussion of the deterioration of the Dream Societies. Significant to and prominent in nineteenth-century Lakota religious life were a number of Dream Societies, associations of individuals united by dreams of the same spirit being, which functioned as the major common symbol of group identity, power, and relatedness. These collectivities were religious in nature, identified by a particular animal or other-than-human person, sometimes referred to in the literature as a “totem” (see Durkheim and Mauss 1963; Leach et al. 1967; Lévi-Strauss 1963; Radcliffe-Brown 1929; Shapiro 1991). Dream Societies were comprised of individuals who had experienced similar visions, that is, had been recognized by the same other-than-human person, and hence shared a common

wakǰáŋ power source. Co-members of a given society often shared healing, curing, doctoring, and ritual methods and techniques (Fletcher 1884b:276; Wissler 1912:81).

Alice Fletcher, who conducted fieldwork at Pine Ridge from 1881-1882, writes, “Membership in these societies . . . depends upon supernatural indications over which the individual has no control. The animal which appears to a man in a vision during his religious fasting determines to which society he must belong” (Fletcher 1884b:277). Because a *wakǰáŋ* dream was the essential qualification for membership women were also members of Dream Societies. Fletcher (1884b:277) explains, “Some societies admit women to membership, through their own visions, or occasionally by those of their husbands, but more generally by means of the visions of male relatives. The women sit in a place assigned them, and those possessing clear soprano voices are instructed in the music, and accompany in high tenor voices the men who sing in unison.” Bushotter (1937:Story 194) notes that women also provided the shrill “lililili” or screech-owl call (*uŋnágičala hotǰún*) for some men’s societies. Additionally, women prepared the terminal feast, a basic feature of Lakota ritual marking the end of ceremonial performances.

Dream Societies were rather loosely organized and informal. In Schneider’s terms, the bonds that united the members of a Dream Society into a unified group were based usually on shared identity and supernatural substance. Members shared common spiritual ties to or relationship with the society’s spirit guardian or other-than-human representative. There were also relationships of diffuse, enduring solidarity defined in terms of a shared code for conduct and behavior. Thus, membership in a Dream Society was not based on birth, shared natural substance, blood, residence, or volition per se.

Instead, membership was largely a matter of participation, self-ascription, and ascription by others in interaction in both the secular and sacred domains (see Barth 1998:5–6; Schneider 1969:120–124).

Lakota Dream Societies were composed of *waphíyapi* (conjurers, doctors, healers) and, more generally, ritual practitioners. Common *iháŋblapi* (dreamers) were also associated with Dream Societies, but all members shared a common bond with the emblematic spirit guardian or source of power, which was the center and foundation of each society (see Figure 26). As Deloria suggests, “The bear society was made up, not only of the ‘Bear-Priest-hood’ as it were, but by all who had dreamed of the bear-spirit, whether they became doctors or not; and by a large ‘lay’ membership, mostly men, who joined, and a few women who were retained as cheerers” (in Bushotter 1937:Story 199). This “lay membership,” Deloria continues, “consider themselves especially blessed, and safe-guarded, because they associate with holy men.” The spirit guardian, along with powerful, experienced, proven practitioners, provided magico-spiritual protection and good fortune for members of Dream Societies, both essential to the perpetuation of life movement. Each Dream Society sponsored and performed ceremonies composed of specific prayers, chants, songs, dances, and ceremonial acts, which varied from one society to the next (Fletcher 1884b).

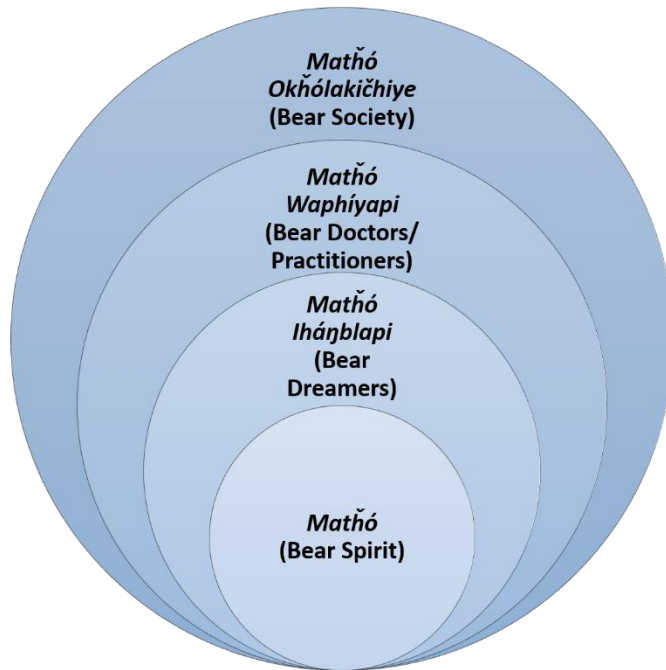


Figure 26: *The Composition of Nineteenth-Century Lakota Dream Societies*

We have already discussed the specifics of various nineteenth-century Oglala Dream Societies in a previous section (see Fletcher 1884b; Wissler 1912:81–99). Wissler (1912:81) suggests that a common vision, along with the usage of common medicines, distinguished one Dream Society from another, and that initiation into a particular association took place through the “great medicine-dance,” a reference to the *Wakhán Wáchípi* (Mystery Dance). Particularly relevant here is the fact that there were relatively few Dream Society members historically—“in most cases but three or four” (Wissler 1912:88)—and that there was great competition among Dream Societies.³⁶² According to Hassrick (1964:292), “Competition among the cults was real—partly to establish their

³⁶² If my hypothesis is correct, that contemporary practitioners have taken on the unifying role of the totemic species representative of ritual groups and symbolic of religious identity, then it naturally follows that the competition among practitioners and their ritual groups at Pine Ridge today is an extension of the competition between nineteenth-century Dream Societies. The functions of and reasons for this competition for power, capital, and the allegiance and preference of the common people have endured relatively unchanged through time and mirrors the competition among spirit beings for the allegiance of human beings in general (see Rice 1998:105–107).

mystical prowess in the eyes of the people, partly to ensure their own continued professional status.” Wissler specifically comments on the competition between the Heyokas and other groups, such as the Elk and Black-Tail Deer Societies. Apparently the Heyokas served to publicly test the legitimacy and power (“medicine”) of other Dream Society members. Wissler states that whenever the Elks performed their society rituals “the heyoka come near and try to make medicine to harm the elks and their followers, but are usually unable to do so” (Wissler 1912:88). The Heyokas were also rivals of the Black-Tail Deer, explains Wissler (1912:90), “with whom they have magical trials of powers.”

Through Dream Societies and the simultaneously individual yet typical visionary experiences required for membership in them—not to mention the master-apprentice method of training and transmitting sacred knowledge that continues to be the major training method for contemporary Oglala religious practitioners—a great diversity and high degree of specialization in religious belief and ritual practice was sustained and perpetuated. The specific vision requirements, characteristic features and functions, interrelationships, and boundary maintaining mechanisms that distinguished Dream Societies fueled this diversity and acute specialization.

As Fletcher (1884c:294 n 12) suggests, “These religious societies . . . are small private circles within the great religious circle of the tribe. . . . The old religious forms and rituals are often preserved in these societies after the tribal religious ceremonies, from untoward circumstances, have fallen into disuse.” Considered together as a whole the various Dream Societies in nineteenth-century Lakota society and culture comprised much of the underlying structure of religious life (see Figure 27). Wissler, writing almost

thirty years later, confirms Fletcher’s observation, stating that some Oglalas considered Dream Societies collectively “as all parts of one great cult” (Wissler 1912:95). The renowned Oglala warrior He Dog (in Bad Heart Bull and Blish 1967:200, 274, 277) noted the tendency for various Dream Societies to combine their ceremonial performances, each playing various lead and supporting roles depending on the occasion.

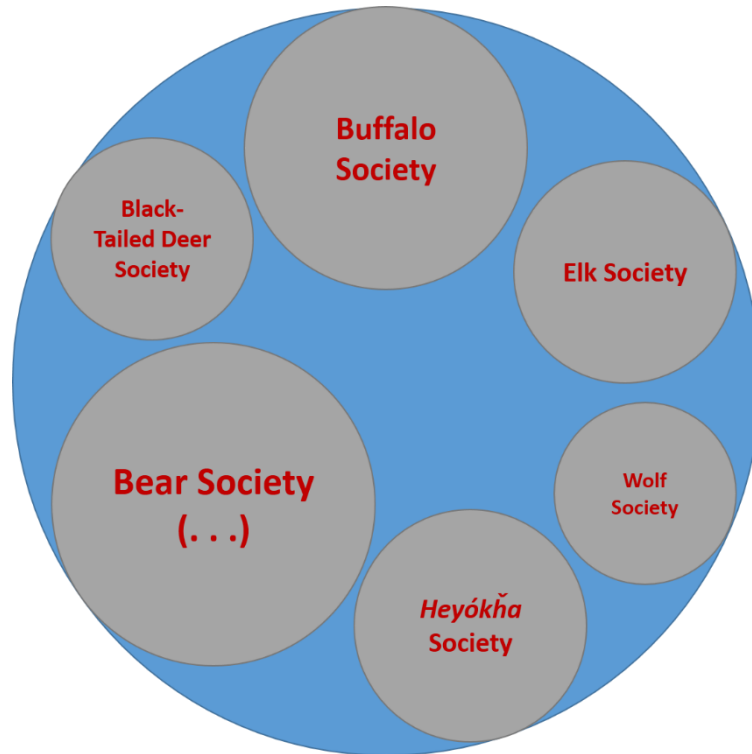


Figure 27: Dream Societies in Nineteenth-Century Oglala Religion



Now that we have explored both the *thiyóšpaye* social organization and Dream Societies we can return to the contemporary social organization of Oglala religion at Pine Ridge. Due largely to settler colonialism and many of the same disruptions and intrusions that eroded the *thiyóšpaye* social structure, Dream Societies suffered a parallel deterioration throughout the twentieth century, so that now only remnants of a few societies remain.

The last Bear doctor, for instance, is said to have passed away in 1965. Richard Two Dogs, an influential contemporary Oglala religious leader, told me that the Heyoka Society is the last remaining Dream Society at Pine Ridge, and its membership is limited and dwindling (Kemnitzer 1976:263–265; Posthumus 2008-2014).

Exacerbating the decline of Dream Societies are the shifting practical realities and contradictions of modern reservation life, which are no longer congruent with the needs of the past, such as medicine for war and hunting and the treatment of wounds. In the nineteenth century these needs were administered to by religious practitioners, but today most of the physical aspects of sickness and injury fall under the domain of the Pine Ridge Indian Health Service Hospital. Oglala practitioners today are traditional in that they base many of their practices on models from the past, but they have adjusted and rearticulated tradition and their own functions and duties to meet the changing practical needs of their people in the face of modernity. The social organization of contemporary Oglala religion has experienced a parallel shift, anticipating the present needs and dynamic realities of modern Lakota life.

With the deterioration of *thiyóšpayes* and Dream Societies a void developed in Lakota social life. I suggest that contemporary ritual *thiyóšpayes*, which have distinct names, identities, cultures, dialects, leaders, and corporate socioeconomic activities, have filled that void. No two are exactly alike, and they tend to produce like-minded people based on the model embodied by their leader. Additionally, these groups tend to mirror modern social structure. As Clifford (1988:7) reminds us, the deconstruction of particular histories and traditions inevitably leads to the construction of other, emergent histories

and traditions, comparable to the inseparability of modern processes of detraditionalization and retraditionalization.

Throughout the early reservation period the aboriginal sociopolitical system of the Lakotas began to fray. The traditional civil leaders (*itǰáŋčhaŋ* ‘chiefs’) were losing their power, influence, and credibility among their people, due largely to changing social, economic, and political realities, coupled with the destructive and disruptive influence of Indian agents, whose goals were to discredit traditional civil leaders and undermine their influence. At the same time the Ghost Dance was gaining momentum among various groups at Pine Ridge, thrusting established religious leaders into positions of prominence and power. These ritual specialists organized ceremonial practice and made decisions that would have normally been made by civil leaders in the buffalo-hunting days. Ritual leaders increasingly began attracting devoted followings and training a growing number of apprentices. They offered council on practical, everyday needs and realities, mediating and mitigating the cultural dilemmas and inherent contradictions of reservation life. They provided food, clothing, shelter, and sustenance, of the physical, psychological, and spiritual varieties. Oglala ritual leaders of the Ghost Dance period, whose reputations and power were maintained through ritual efficacy and authority, gave their people new hope for the future and inadvertently transformed Lakota social organization in the process (Powers 1982b:202–203). According to Powers (1982b:203), “the role of the *tiyošpaye* leader was now the role of the ritual specialist. The *tiyošpayes* themselves were over time transformed into the fixed communities which are today found at Pine Ridge.”³⁶³

³⁶³ This theory is by no means perfect. Sword and Walker (1991) clearly indicate that the younger Oglala generations around 1900 had turned their backs on the religious leaders. Deloria also clearly notes a nadir period in terms of interest in religion, ritual practice, and cultural pride. While 1890 may have marked a transition in terms of social organization at Pine Ridge, I believe the revitalization of religion and ritual in

The increased visibility and popularity of *Yuwípi* at Pine Ridge since the 1960s, expanded and fortified by the revitalization of the early 1970s, is also significant in terms of the evolution of Lakota social organization and the development of contemporary ritual groups. *Yuwípi* is the ultimate local and perennial expression of Lakota religiosity, identity, ethnicity, and indigeneity. “The *Yuwipi* rituals are held in the communities,” explains Powers (1982b:207), “and it is the specific relationship between the *Yuwipi* man and his adepts that replicates the relationship between the *thiyóšpaye* leader of old and his followers. *Yuwipi* is dynamic because it meets the needs of the Oglalas in their own community. Its contents are new, but its form is old.”³⁶⁴ Recall the lack of contradiction in terms of ritual as both dynamic and static, characterized by both change and stasis, as discussed by Kapferer (2008). Clearly the tenacious persistence and rise to prominence of *Yuwípi* is fundamental to the development of contemporary Oglala ritual groups.

I refer to contemporary Oglala religious practitioners and their groups of followers as ritual *thiyóšpayes* (see Figure 28). These groups are social units, organized on the basis of relationships of exchange and reciprocity, consisting of a practitioner “in the center,” a common ritual phrase, and a number of (extended) families divided into core and sub-core units (see Figure 29). A group of families comprise the core of a ritual *thiyóšpaye*, the followers of a particular practitioner. Core members are the most visible, involved, and dedicated members of a ritual *thiyóšpaye* and are considered to constitute its inner circle. They are present at most ritual and social gatherings, assist the

the early 1970s was as influential in terms of a transformational and (re)generative watershed moment. Undoubtedly great power, hope, trust, and influence were invested in ritual leaders during both transitional periods, but the development of the ritual *thiyóšpaye* in particular, the focus of our discussion here, is more closely connected to the revivification of the Sun Dance and *Yuwípi* Ceremonies at Pine Ridge, which is directly related to the revitalization of the early 1970s (see Roos et al. 1980).

³⁶⁴ Feraca argues for the antiquity and centrality of *Yuwípi* in Lakotas religion, writing, “*Yuwípi* is very widespread and embodies all the basic elements of Lakota religion” (Feraca 1998:31).

practitioner in ceremonial and other duties, and maintain close ties with him. The practitioner, as the leader, is the symbol, representative, and center of the ritual *thiyóšpaye*. Most core members are male, often the practitioner’s helpers, singers, and apprentices. Core families are often related to the practitioner through kinship ties and may live in relatively close proximity to him or to where his rituals are performed.³⁶⁵ A ritual *thiyóšpaye* may consist of any number of core families, which comprise the stable backbone of the group (Posthumus 2008-2014; see also Varenne 1977:76).

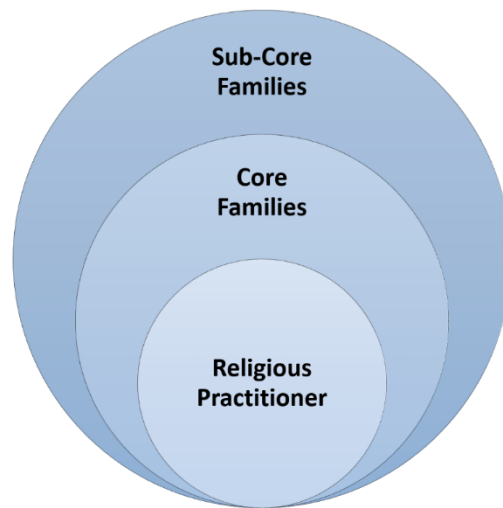


Figure 28: Composition of Contemporary Oglala Ritual *Thiyóšpayes*

³⁶⁵ An emerging trend since the revitalization of the 1970s is the ceremony house phenomenon. Ceremony houses are buildings specially constructed for ritual practice that are becoming increasingly popular at Pine Ridge today. They are often family based, or else associated with a specific practitioner, and dot the dusty hills, valleys, and roadsides of the reservation. Many families and extended families or groups of followers of particular practitioners communally pay for, build, furnish, and maintain ceremony houses. They run the gamut in terms of size, quality, and extravagance and serve as a spiritual home base or center for Lakota ritual activity. Most consist of a room set aside for ritual action and a room for socializing and food preparation. Inside these ceremony houses on any given night rites are conducted, feasts are eaten, and socializing before and after ceremonies takes place. Ceremony houses are the physical or geo-local symbol of the corporate socioeconomic activity of a given ritual *thiyóšpaye* or “altar.”

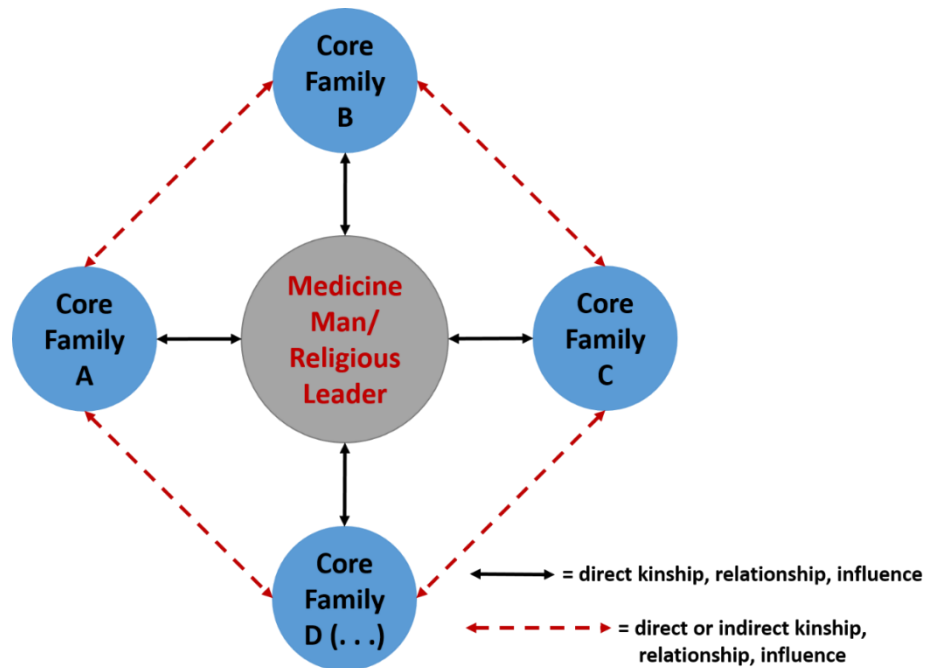


Figure 29: Contemporary Ritual Thiyóšpaye Kinship, Relationship, and Influence Networks

Ritual *thiyóšpayes* also include a number of sub-core families (see Figure 30). They are less visible, involved, and dedicated than their core counterparts and are considered to be on the periphery of a ritual *thiyóšpaye*. They are only loosely affiliated with a specific group and may attend the ceremonies of multiple ritual *thiyóšpayes*, as well as other religious gatherings, such as Native American Church meetings. Sub-core members are present at some ritual and social gatherings, do not often assist in ceremonial and other duties, and usually do not maintain close ties with the practitioner. Life-crisis or life-transition rituals and large annual or calendrical ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance, provide the major impetus for sub-core participation in a ritual *thiyóšpaye*, which may include any number of sub-core families.

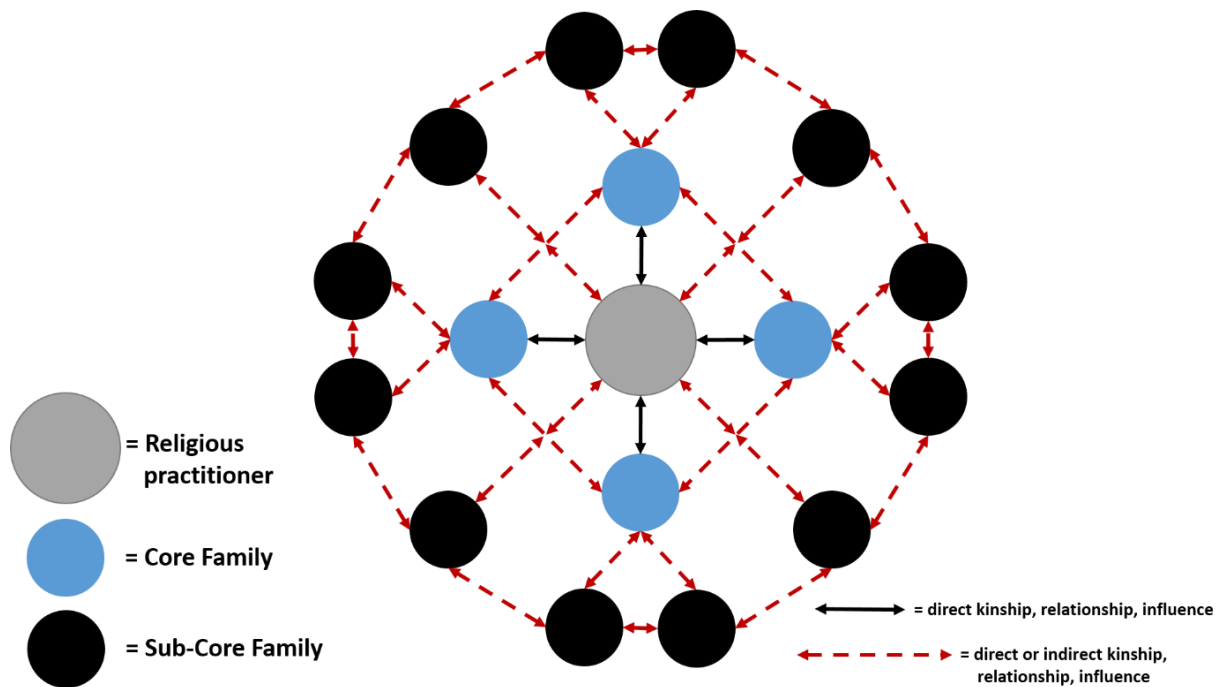


Figure 30: Contemporary Ritual *thiyóšpaye* Kinship, Relationship, and Influence

Networks

Some sub-core families become affiliated with a ritual *thiyóšpaye* through direct or indirect kinship ties or other relationships with the group’s core families, while other sub-core families participate on the basis of word of mouth or the prestige (*čhažé* ‘name, reputation’) and social standing of the practitioner, often based on reputation and ritual efficacy. Again, Lévi-Strauss’s tripartite model of magico-medico-ritual influence based on dynamic relationships between a practitioner, patient/victim, and social group is relevant here.

Pierre Bourdieu’s analytical framework is also relevant to our examination of contemporary Oglala ritual groups, conceptualized within the broader religio-ritual field. For Bourdieu (1977, 1990), field refers to a social space consisting of “a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (capital)”

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). Each field has its own players or agents, rules, internal logic, and regulatory principles and dynamics that govern the rules of the field. Agents have a stake in the operation of the field, which is a space of conflict and competition as agents attempt to monopolize the various stakes or forms of capital specific to each field. Further, each practitioner acquires and develops a distinctive habitus, predispositions that guide and constrain practice, mediating between the subjective agent and the objective realities of lived experience (see Jenkins 1992). A habitus consists of “a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16).

In order to understand Lakota ritual groups in terms of Bourdieu’s model we must first define power and discuss its manifestations and applications in the Lakota religious ritual field. Power is defined in various ways in the social sciences, from physical domination and the ability to coerce others, to symbolic empowerment and human and other-than-human influence and agency. Power is relational, relative, differential, contested, and intimately linked to knowledge. In fact, power and knowledge are mutually constituting, being continually produced and reproduced through constant social interaction and practice in a dialectical fashion (Foucault 1980; Kingsolver 2002).

Among the Lakotas power is generally conceptualized as *wakháŋ*, reflected and concretely manifested in the ability to transform beings and states and to perform miraculous or mysterious deeds, such as treating and healing the sick and communicating with and translating for the spirits. This mystical power often originates through visionary encounters in which relationships are established and powers or abilities

bestowed or taught by spirit beings. Using Bourdieu’s model, the *wakǰán* power of a Lakota religious practitioner is comprised of various forms of capital (cultural, economic, social, and symbolic), all of which are interrelated and mutually constitutive (see Figure 31). This model can enrich our understanding of how power is constructed historically, socially, and culturally among the Lakotas. Both power and capital are stakes within the religio-ritual field, vied for, attained, obtained, accumulated, manipulated, transformed, traded, transmitted, produced, and reproduced with varying success by various players utilizing various strategies.

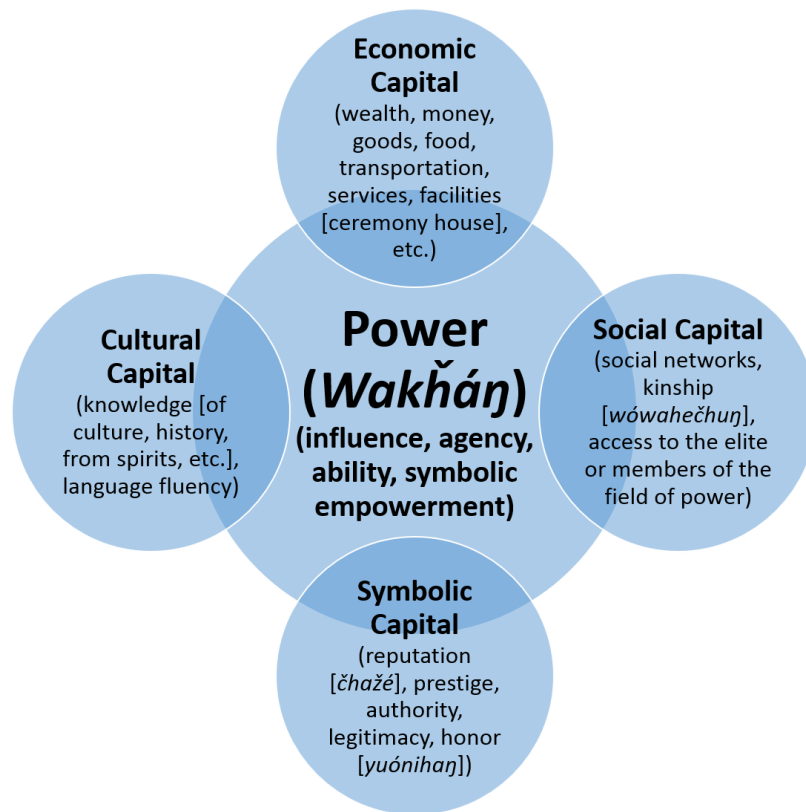


Figure 31: Power and Capital in the Lakota Religio-Ritual Field

The power of a Lakota ritual practitioner, understood in terms of *wakǰán* ability, agency, influence, and symbolic empowerment, may be conceptualized as a differential accumulation of different types of capital. Cultural capital is understood largely in terms

of knowledge and language fluency, while economic capital consists of wealth, goods, food, services, and facilities. Social capital is understood in terms of kinship, social connections and relationships, and a group of followers, while symbolic capital is reckoned in terms of reputation (*čhažé*), prestige, social standing, perceived authenticity, legitimacy, and honor (*yuónihaŋ*). Symbolic capital is often a reflection of ritual efficacy, which is a function of *wakǰáŋ* power generally. The most powerful and influential practitioners have the most access to these stakes or forms of capital, enabling for their continual production and reproduction, which is then (re)distributed among their families and followers. Again, these stakes are specific to the religio-ritual field, but may also be transformed and translated from one field to another.

The boundaries of each form of capital in Figure 32 are permeable and difficult to distinguish and demarcate definitively. These major forms of capital, along with the relations of power they construct, are mutually constitutive. Analytically, each practitioner may be conceptualized as an accumulation of power and capital. Each one has more or less power and (access to) capital, which, in turn, shapes and determines his habitus within the Lakota religio-ritual field. Power and capital, of course, are culturally, historically, and socially situated, constituted, constructed, and determined. As a general rule practitioners perceived to be more full blood and traditional are considered to be more powerful, having more (access to) capital, both qualitatively and quantitatively, while those perceived to be more mixed blood and neo traditional tend to have less (see Figure 23). Again, these power differentials tend to reflect back on the entire ritual *thiyóšpaye* as a symbol of a given practitioner's power/capital.

The strategies of the followers of a given practitioner generally involve maintaining close ties to the practitioner, who has greater access to the stakes of the religio-ritual field (power and capital) and the ability to (re)produce and (re)distribute them. In this way the practitioner truly is an intermediary between the people and the powers of the universe: he is a channel or road to power and capital, literally and figuratively, reflected and actualized or manifested in his followers. Maintaining close ties with a practitioner is accomplished largely through ritual participation and membership in a ritual *thiyóšpaye*.

Ritual practice replicates the power, and hence capital, of practitioners and their groups of followers, but power may be contested and problematic. Power differentials and dynamics exist on all levels of Lakota religious organization: between individuals, (core and sub-core) families, practitioners and followers, practitioners, and ritual groups. Again, power is relational, relative, and contested so that the perceived power of a given practitioner may be greater or lesser depending on an individual's opinion, relationship to the practitioner, or position in the field. Power and capital are maintained and reproduced through ritual efficacy, morality, and living up to the highest standards of Lakota culture and society. They may be lost or destroyed by ritual failures, aging and diminishing potency, and moral and ethical failures. Finally, power and capital may be (re)produced, transformed, and transferred through ritual participation, apprenticeship, visionary encounters, inheritance, trade, or purchase.

Of the various players in the Lakota religio-ritual field the wife of a practitioner often plays a significant role in the corporate activity of a ritual *thiyóšpaye*. She may perform various ritual functions, such as leading the women in their separate Sweat

Lodge rites or ceremonially filling and offering the sacred pipe, an essential preliminary element of all Lakota ritual practice. The practitioner's wife is often seen as the kindly matriarch, organizing, providing for, and centering the female members of the group. The female members of core and sub-core families also play significant roles in the organization and maintenance of a ritual *thiyóšpaye* in their own right. Their membership may originate of their own volition, through their significant others, or through kinship ties with the practitioner or other group members. Aside from seeing to most of the child-rearing responsibilities that allow for the perpetuation of the group, female members also engage in various forms of intrafamilial cooperation, such as shared parenting responsibilities, economic support, ritual participation, and political action. The female members of a ritual *thiyóšpaye* are also largely responsible for providing and preparing the feasts that conclude all Oglala ceremonies (Posthumus 2008-2014; see also Anderson 2001:21; Varenne 1977:77).

Aside from kinship, frequently residence and geography, the daily cycle, shared linguistic norms or ways of speaking, cultural expressions, social interaction, and shared behavioral norms determine the bonds within and differences between ritual *thiyóšpaye* member families. These commonalities and differences are forces for integration and inclusion, on the one hand, and segregation and exclusion, on the other, often determining to which ritual *thiyóšpaye* an individual belongs (see Anderson 2001:22; Varenne 1977:75, 117–120). Hence, membership in a ritual *thiyóšpaye* may be based on birth and kinship, but also on volition and a sense of common group identity (see Schneider 1969:122).

Following Schneider, I have attempted to show that there are two interconnected parts of the domain of kinship that unite the members of a ritual *thiyóšpaye*. One is in terms of shared substance or blood, defined by biology and law. The other is the conglomerate aspect of kinship or a system of person-based definitions that prescribe and pattern behavior among and between individuals and families (Schneider 1969:121–123). There are two common features in the domains of both kinship and religion, Schneider (1969:122) writes, “relationship as substance and relationship as code for conduct; the substance element is bio-genetic, the code for conduct is one of diffuse, enduring solidarity.”

Contemporary Lakota ritual *thiyóšpayes* are differentiated from nineteenth-century *thiyóšpayes* in that the defining feature for membership has shifted from shared natural substance (relatives by blood, marriage, or law) to commitment to the code for conduct. Contemporary practitioners in many cases have taken on the roles and responsibilities of historical civil leaders, providing counsel, feasts, and redistributing power and capital. Ritual *thiyóšpayes* also illustrate a pattern already observed in Dream Societies, in which the unifying principle of kinship was reckoned in terms of shared spiritual substance or kinship with a common other-than-human person (see Schneider 1969:122–123). In the Dream Societies the supernatura bond was with the spirit guardian who was emblematic of that specific society and the intermediary between members and the sacred. In the ritual *thiyóšpaye* the bond is with the practitioner himself, who in many respects replaced the spirit guardian as the major intermediary between the spirit world and human beings. In essence, the religious practitioner has become the “totemic”

representative of his group, giving it its name, identity, culture, and direction (see Figure 32).

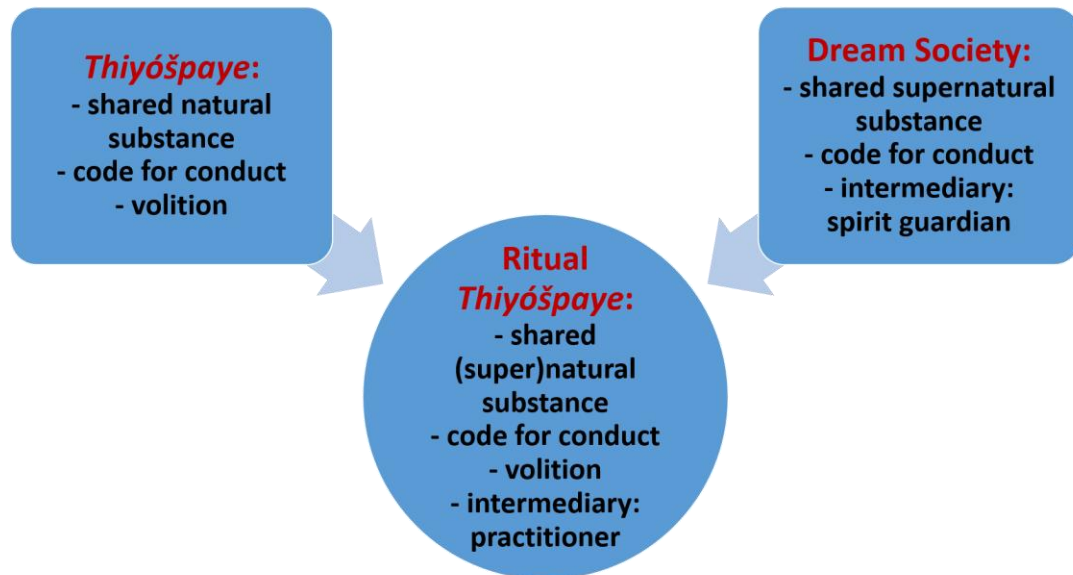


Figure 32: The Dialectical Formation of the Ritual Thiyóšpaye

The multiplicity and increasing number of ritual *thiyóšpayes* at Pine Ridge reflects broader social and political trends on the reservation. In essence, each ritual *thiyóšpaye* may be plotted on the religious identity graph in Figure 22, the two axes of which are full blood/mixed blood and traditional/neo traditional. This theoretical plotting, no pun intended, is possible because each practitioner tends to reflect and symbolize his followers and vice versa. Undoubtedly, there are definite differences and ideological and philosophical discrepancies among contemporary ritual *thiyóšpayes* and their leaders. However, from a broader perspective these groups, much like nineteenth-century Dream Societies, function to differentiate individuals and collectivities in an otherwise largely homogeneous society. In many ways ritual *thiyóšpayes* establish difference for the sake

of difference and may be productively compared to the dynamic boundary maintaining mechanisms of ethnic groups, identity politics, and processes of indigeneity (see Barnard 2010; Barth 1998). Through these ritual associations more or less incidental differences among otherwise indistinguishable groups are magnified, increasing a sense of identity, rivalry, belonging, and cohesion. This rivalry also speaks to the historical competition among Dream Societies and its contemporary expression among ritual practitioners and their groups of followers.

The unity of ritual *thiyóšpayes* is forged and (re)established not only through kinship and notions of relatedness, but also through ritual, being continually (re)generated through ceremonial processes. Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence and anthropologist Victor Turner's conception of *communitas* are useful here. For Durkheim, the totemic emblem of a totemic religious group is the representation of the community in symbolic form, a concrete, tangible symbol of collective unity providing a name, an identity, social membership, and the distinction between insiders and outsiders, members and non-members, us and them (Durkheim 2008:xix–xxi). The practitioner at the center of a contemporary Lakota ritual *thiyóšpaye* functions in a strikingly similar way.

Collective effervescence is a term coined by Durkheim to describe how temporary communal gatherings intensify, electrify, and enlarge religious experience. Collective effervescence is both communal and collective, giving rise to intense passions and emotions; it is characterized by intimacy, intensity, and immediacy; and involves will, intention, and symbolic focus. It is the social force, energy, or electricity generated by the collectivity in and through ritual practice and is often associated with innovation and

creative and generative potential. Collective effervescence has transformative power, often causing individuals to act in different or erratic ways, surrendering the ego and notions of self to the immediacy of the collectivity, or, in Durkheim's terms, the individual self to the social self. Episodes of collective effervescence punctuate group life, intensifying and reaffirming social unity, shared cultural ideals, sentiments, ethos, and worldview, and providing a dynamic space for the generation and formation of new beliefs and ideals. For Durkheim, religion, which he equates with society itself, emerges from the crucible of collective effervescence and is symbolic of a group's collective life (Durkheim 2008:xix–xxi, 157–158, 162–164, 283–285; Law 2011:49–51; Olaveson 2001).

Turner's notion of *communitas* is also instructive in our examination of the processes that unify, maintain, and perpetuate ritual *thiyóšpayes*. Turner, his mentor Max Gluckman, and other anthropologists were heavily influenced by Durkheim. Religious studies scholar Tim Olaveson (2001) persuasively argues that Durkheim's and Turner's models of ritual and social process are quite similar. Both scholars believed that ritual is central to religion and society, functioning as a (re)generating mechanism, and both granted ontological status to religion and ritual. Turner's *communitas* is similar to, but also distinct from, Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence, in that, for Turner, *communitas* exists wholly outside of society or structure as anti-structure in liminal interstices, whereas for Durkheim collective effervescence is the essence of religion, conceived of as a representation of society (Turner 1969; see also Olaveson 2001). However, Olaveson suggests that collective effervescence and *communitas* are “functionally equivalent concepts” (Olaveson 2001:99). Both are conceptualized as

ontological realities, not epiphenomena or fantasies. Both are capable of ritual and social renewal and revitalization. Both are seen as ambiguously dangerous and subversive to established normative social hierarchies and structures. Both incite humans to action as well as thought.

Communitas is transitory and temporary, dynamic, spontaneous, and immediate. “It is timeless,” explains Olaveson (2001:105), “the eternal now, a moment in and out of time.” Communitas is an essential and generic human bond, collective in nature. It denotes an unstructured and undifferentiated community of equal individuals experiencing intense feelings of social equality, solidarity, and belonging. This occurs when a group of people collectively experience liminality, marginality, or inferiority, often in connection to ritual practice. Turner opposes communitas to structure, conceptualizing the two as being in a dialectical relationship, and notes the ambiguous nature of communitas, having both creative and destructive potential. Communitas has a socially stripping and leveling effect on group members, and, like collective effervescence, involves consciousness and volition, being characterized by creative, generative, and transformative potential (Turner 1969; see Olaveson 2001).

The work of Kapferer (2003, 2008, 2013), who was heavily influenced by both Gluckman and Turner, is also relevant here. He prefers the concept of dynamics to Turner’s process and virtuality to Turner’s liminality. Kapferer argues for the existential transformative and generative power of ritual as a kind of phantasmagoric, self-contained imaginal space, a dynamic allowing for all kinds of potentialities of human experience. Kapferer maintains that the virtual dynamics of ritual are not essentially rational or irrational, but rather, occupy a space outside of or beyond the rational/irrational binary.

Ritual is part of actuality or the really real in that it slows down the chaotic flow of everyday reality, engaging with the compositional structuring dynamics of life.

In Turner's liminal and Kapferer's virtual ritual dynamics the individual becomes an anonymous aspect of the collectivity as a whole, surrendering the self and ego to incorporation into undifferentiated community. Often submissive and silent in ritual contexts, the members of a ritual *thiyóšpaye* may be conceptualized as blank slates, submitting to the authority of the group, its leader, and Lakota tradition in general. This loss of self occurs, for instance, in the Sun Dance, Vision Quest, and other Lakota rites through sacrifice, sensory deprivation and overload, and exhaustion. The group is the repository of collective attitudes, knowledge, norms, ideals, sentiments, and values (ethos and worldview), all of which are inscribed on group members through ritual and collective behavior (see Turner 1969:103). Paradoxically, and illustrative of liminal reversals and transformations, both individual and collective identities are strengthened and reaffirmed through such ritual dynamics upon the reemergence from the virtual, a process which van Gennep and Turner refer to as (re)incorporation. After a long and trying ritual experience it is good to return to the established and familiar ways of one's culture and society. In these ways Durkheim's collective effervescence and Turner's *communitas* can help us understand the unifying power and cohesion of contemporary Lakota ritual groups.

The contemporary Lakota religio-ritual field may be conceptualized as a number of discrete ritual *thiyóšpayes*, some large and some small, with more or less power/capital (see Figure 33). The landscape of contemporary Oglala religious and ritual life in general changes and shifts with the ebb and flow, the formation and segmentation, of the ritual

thiyóšpayes that comprise it. Typically the development and multiplication of new ritual *thiyóšpayes* is not the result of revolutionary or tumultuous events or movements. Rather, these processes are quite logical and can usually be traced historically³⁶⁶ (see Figure 34). As a ritual *thiyóšpaye* grows and its leader gains an increasing number of followers through reputation and ritual efficacy, the leader begins to train more neophyte practitioners through the master-apprentice model. Naturally, as people come together in increasingly larger groups, minute differences begin to function as diacritics differentiating one group from another and cliques develop. Some of these cliques—or emergent, burgeoning ritual *thiyóšpayes*—naturally identify with and gravitate toward a specific apprentice of the leader of the original ritual group.

³⁶⁶ Durkheim and Mauss (1963:32–33) discuss similar processes of segmentation in terms of totemic classification and organization: “when segmentation of a clan becomes necessary, it is individuals grouped around one of the things classed in the clan who detach themselves from the rest to form an independent clan, and the sub-totem then becomes a totem. Once begun, moreover, the same process may be continued for ever [*sic*]. The sub-clan which emancipates itself in this way takes with it ideologically certain things, other than that used as its totem, which are considered solidary with it. These things play the part of sub-totems in the new clan, and if there is occasion may similarly become centres around which new segmentations may later be produced.” Again, if my hypothesis is correct, viz., that the contemporary ritual practitioner has taken on the role of the totemic representative of historical Dream Societies, and if we substitute “practitioner” for “totem,” “apprentice” for “sub-totem,” and “ritual *thiyóšpaye*” for “clan” in the quote above, Durkheim and Mauss’s insights become quite useful to our exegesis.

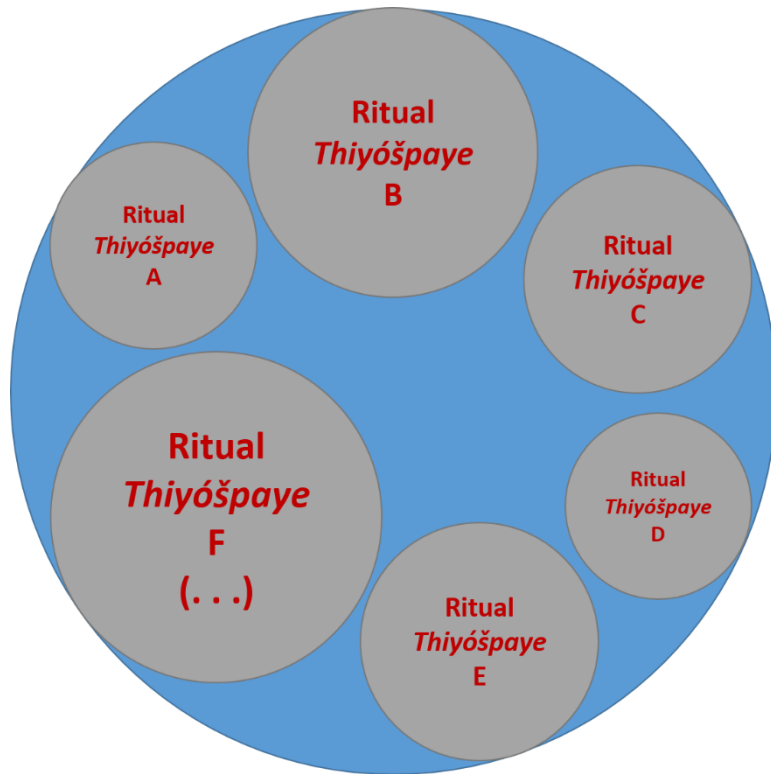


Figure 33: Ritual Thiyóšpayes in Contemporary Lakota Religious Organization

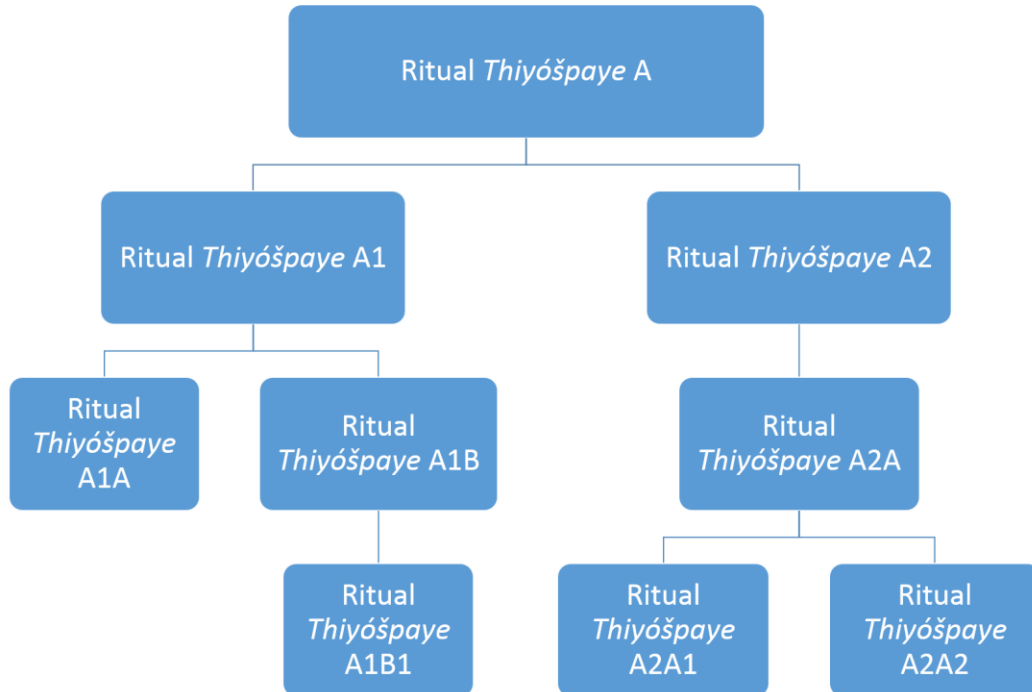


Figure 34: The Hypothetical Diachronic Segmentation of Ritual Thiyóšpayes

This gravitational process occurs for a variety of reasons, such as kinship, common values and sentiments (shared ethos and worldview), charisma, geo-local or residential considerations, historical connections between individuals and families,³⁶⁷ reputation, and ritual efficacy, among others. Indeed, many of the same reasons that drew individuals and families to the original ritual *thiyóšpaye* leader in the first place. Identity also plays an important role in the composition of various ritual *thiyóšpayes*. The biosociocultural categories mixed blood and full blood and the ideological categories traditional and neo traditional explored in Chapter 17 tend to have powerful determinative influences upon the makeup of Lakota ritual groups. In general, common types tend to cluster together, so that, for example, traditional mixed bloods tend to cluster with other traditional mixed bloods around a leader of a similar character, while neo-traditional full bloods, traditional full bloods, and neo-traditional mixed bloods all tend to follow a similar trajectory. The most significant attributes of a ritual leader that draw followers to him and ensure the maintenance and perpetuation of his ritual group are reputation, evidence of ritual efficacy or spiritual power to heal, wisdom, and the ability to provide for people in a very broad sense, economically, socially, psychologically, and spiritually. In other words access to power and capital and the ability to (re)produce and (re)distribute them.

Offshoot ritual groups leave the fold of the original group under the auspices and direction of their new leader, now finished with his apprenticeship, and begin performing

³⁶⁷ Turner (1969:153) explains that “social structure is intimately connected with history, because it is the way a group maintains its form over time. Structureless *communitas* can bind and bond people together only momentarily.” Paradoxically, temporary periods of *communitas* or collective effervescence unify and strengthen contemporary Lakota socio-ritual groups, allowing for their maintenance and perpetuation through time and history.

their own rituals, such as the Sweat Lodge, *Yuwípi*, and Sun Dance ceremonies. The processes of differentiation and difference for the sake of difference outlined above often become increasingly acute in such cases, as each new group must establish its own identity apart from its parent group. Emergent ritual *thiyóšpaye* also begin to share in common socioeconomic and political activities, forming transactional support networks characterized by mutual beneficence, reciprocity, and exchange. As this process of segmentation (re)occurs the original ritual *thiyóšpaye* necessarily loses some members but usually retains the majority of them.

This process also takes place upon the abdication (“retirement”) or death of a ritual-*thiyóšpaye* leader, unless an apprentice takes over for his mentor and the composition of the group remains relatively unchanged in a smooth transition of identity and power/capital. Otherwise, the ritual group may splinter into a number of smaller groups led by various people. Normatively though, older ritual leaders are replaced by new younger ones, ensuring the continuity (collective life movement) and security of Lakota tradition and religious life. Oftentimes apprentice or heir-apparent and ritual leader live and practice together for a short time in the same community, so that old and new overlap and there is less jarring separation between past and present (Powers 1982b:207). In general, the religious landscape at Pine Ridge, composed of various differentiated ritual groups, reflects the sociopolitical landscape of the reservation, which is often characterized in terms of schism, fragmentation, and factionalism.

While ritual *thiyóšpaye* is my own analytical designation, based on the conglomeration of the *thiyóšpaye* (band) social organization and the Dream Society ritual organization, the phenomenon we are exploring here is often referred to by contemporary

Lakotas as an “altar.” The historical significance and continuity associated with this term is both manifold and enlightening, but it will not be examined in any great depth here.³⁶⁸ Suffice it to say that altars have always been essential Lakota ritual staples since the pre-reservation era, only multiplying in significance after the rise to prominence of the *Yuwípi* Ceremony and its practitioners with the AIM insurgency at Pine Ridge in the early 1970s.³⁶⁹ *Yuwípi*, along with the Sweat Lodge, has become the most common ritual at Pine Ridge, and nearly every religious practitioner today may be considered *Yuwípi* in some form or another. The central feature of the *Yuwípi* Ceremony is the ritual altar, composed of a number of symbolic elements, through which ritual mediation and mitigation occur (see Fugle 1966; Kemnitzer 1969, 1970, 1976; Powers 1982b; Ruby 1966). According to Fugle (1966:8), the earthen altar is directly tied to *Yuwípi* practice as a ritual space to receive the sacred stones associated with *Yuwípi*. Hence, practitioners who do not practice *Yuwípi* do not require earthen altars.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ I am currently preparing a paper examining the historical development and symbolic evolution of the Lakota ritual altar.

³⁶⁹ AIM enhanced the social and religious prestige of the more traditional full-blood types. Before, during, and after the occupation of Wounded Knee in February 1973 AIM strongly, even militantly, endorsed and directly and indirectly fostered traditional ceremonies and practices, those based on shared conceptions of the Lakota past, and condemned Christianity. AIM members participated in Sun Dances as both dancers and security and publicly and forcefully denounced the use of the pipe by Jesuit priests at Pine Ridge Sun Dances and other hybrid practices fueled by the ideology of fulfillment theology that was popular in the wake of the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II. AIM played a role in the resacralization or retraditionalization of the Sun Dance at Pine Ridge, eliminating the commercial elements that had developed since World War II. AIM's presence also advertently and inadvertently led to an increase in the practice of the Sweat Lodge, often providing the small amount of surplus resources necessary to conduct the ceremony. But AIM's influence was perhaps most instrumental in regards to the increased frequency and popularity of *Yuwípi* at Pine Ridge. *Yuwípi* is a life-crisis ritual or rite of affliction performed to mediate and mitigate tension and uncertainty and recreate and regenerate balance and equilibrium. Considering the period of the AIM occupation of Pine Ridge and the siege of Wounded Knee was an intensely stressful and precarious period, the number of *Yuwípi* meetings understandably increased significantly. Also, in some respects AIM chose *Yuwípi* as the favored expression of Lakota religiosity and ritual life of the future through participating in and publicizing *Yuwípi* practice and selecting Leonard Crow Dog, a *Yuwípi* practitioner, as their spiritual leader (Roos et al. 1980:96–98).

³⁷⁰ Few if any contemporary practitioners at Pine Ridge conduct ceremonies today without some form of ritual altar.

Contemporary usage of the term altar is complicated and multivalent. Altar may refer to the physical (mellowed-)earth altar, carefully prepared and consecrated at contemporary *Yuwípi* meetings. It may also refer to the earthen altars created to the west of the Sacred Tree at Sun Dances. Altar may also refer to a buffalo-skull altar, common in many Lakota ritual contexts. But today the term is frequently used in reference to the entirety of a ritual group or Sun Dance family, what I have labeled ritual *thiyóšpaye*. From this perspective altar refers collectively to the ritual practitioner or leader; his group of followers, composed of core and sub-core families; the practitioner's ritual implements and paraphernalia, including his suitcase or *wóphiye* and physical altar; as well as the entire range of corporate activities collectively carried out by the leader and his group, especially those of a religious or magico-medico-ritual character. Each altar may also be conceptualized as a distinct accumulation of power/capital within the greater Lakota religio-ritual field.

Altars are spoken of in terms of a calling, obligation, or duty. They are often said to be bestowed upon individual practitioners by the spirits themselves through visions or other religio-mystico experiences, charging the recipient with great responsibility and demanding great sacrifice. Altars, like ritual *thiyóšpayes*, are commonly identified by the leader's name, the name of a prominent member family, geo-local or residential factors, or by the spirit guardian who is the emblem and symbol of the group. Altars are often associated with specific magico-medico-ritual practices (*Yuwípi*, *Lowánpi*, or Sun-Dance altars) and symbolized by and identified with particular spirit beings, so that there are Spider altars, Black-Tail Deer altars, and Stone altars. Apparently the number of altars and range of emblematic spirit representatives are inexhaustible, representing an open

system, as opposed to a closed one. The connections between modern conceptions of the ritual “altar” and our hypotheses that (1) ritual *thiyóšpayes* are the contemporary expression of Dream Societies, and (2) ritual practitioners—the leaders and symbols of ritual *thiyóšpayes*—have taken on the role of the totemic spirit representative should be apparent.

Lakota ritual *thiyóšpayes* developed out of the dynamics of a distinct sociocultural and historical setting. As an expression of central, formal social structure they connect constituent social units comprising the Lakota community at Pine Ridge. This emergent socio-ritual organization is dynamic, creative, and generative, revealing how social life is instrumental in regulating Lakota (religious) leaders and social groups. Like the Arapahos and Comanches the Lakotas reorganized their traditional belief system and ceremonies in the face of settler colonialism and genocide in two ways: (1) for practical purposes, conforming to changed economic and social conditions; and (2) for subversive purposes, maintaining and perpetuating Lakota religion, ritual, and tradition, reflecting processes of indigeneity and decolonizing strategies in resistance to Euro-American domination and oppression (see Foster 1991:171–174, 205 n 3; Fowler 1982:118–122; Moore 1974, 1987). Foster (1991:172) insightfully notes “how important a focus on community organization and historical context can be for understanding the continuity of American Indian identities. Even though most Plains peoples have been subject to many of the same social conditions, each has adapted by innovating interactive means that make sense in the context of their own community and history.”

Lakota ritual *thiyóšpayes* simultaneously represent continuity with the shared Lakota past and adaptation, innovation, and transformation. Clearly the Oglalas continue

to construct their community and identity apart from and in the face of the dominant Anglo community of the United States. What is clear is that being Lakota continues to work today as a successful adaptive strategy and culturally constituted way of life. Applying Foster's insights on the Comanches, the basis for a separate Lakota community and identity "likely will continue to exist as long as its members maintain a sufficient frequency of interaction to allow them to regulate individual and group behavior in public gatherings. This depends, of course, on their having sufficient economic support for those public gatherings of community members" (Foster 1991:173). Again, Fowler's notion of cohort theory is useful here. Paradoxically, the authority and legitimacy of tradition is mediated and determined in reference to shared notions of the Lakota past, while ultimately the impetus for the continued existence of the Oglala community, its culture, and traditions must spring from each succeeding generation as they face modernity. The phenomenon of the contemporary Oglala ritual *thiyóšpaye* explored in this chapter is a clear indication that Pine Ridge community members continue to interact in culturally meaningful ways, focused on and grounded in religion and ritual. The ritual *thiyóšpaye* provides evidence for the continuation of Lakota identity and indigeneity and assurance of the perpetuation of the Lakotas as a distinct people steeped in their cultural traditions into the mysterious and expansive plains of the future.

Anthropologists and interdisciplinary scholars studying American Indians over the past forty years have largely focused on political and economic topics, avoiding religion and ritual, perhaps because they are perceived as too sensitive or complex. This has led to a lack of scholarly studies of American Indian religious traditions since the late twentieth century. Yet religion is unquestionably a major focus of American Indian

identity and ethnicity, utilized in heritage claims and debates over authenticity and indigeneity. My collaborative studies with contemporary Oglala religious leaders and their organizations serve to document the continuity of traditional Lakota beliefs. Contemporary ritual *thiyóšpayes* are a clear reflection of the persistence of Oglala indigeneity and, serving as decolonizing strategies, resistance to Western materialism and other deleterious nonnative influences.

Although settler colonialism and the changes wrought by modernity deteriorated nineteenth-century Oglala social and religious organization, past traditions live on in emergent forms. Today ritual leaders and their followers have rearticulated tradition and social and religious structure based on past models. Although membership criteria have shifted away from kinship per se and the role of the intermediary has evolved from tutelary spirits to practitioners, the modern conglomerate adaptation of the historical *thiyóšpaye* and Dream Society is still composed of core families, thus uniting people into social groups, and (re)affirming individual and ethnic identity through religious belief and ritual practice. Therefore, contemporary Oglala ritual *thiyóšpayes* ensure the perpetuation of the central roles of family, kinship, religion, ritual, and life movement in Lakota society and culture and frame and inform what it means to be Lakota in the twenty-first century.

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1991 *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

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1916 *General Discussion of Shamanistic and Dancing Societies*. *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. XI, Part XII. New York.

Witherspoon, Gary

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1980 *Language in Culture and Culture in Language*. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 46(1): 1–13.

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EDUCATION

Indiana University (Bloomington, IN):

2007-2015 Ph.D. Department of Anthropology (April 2015)
Linguistics minor. Areas of specialization: American Indian anthropology, focusing on the Plains, specifically the Lakota; sociocultural anthropology; anthropology of religion and ritual; linguistic anthropology; American Indian languages; ethnicity and identity; ethnohistory; history of anthropology/anthropological theory; qualitative methods and analysis

Dissertation: "Transmitting Sacred Knowledge: Aspects of Historical and Contemporary Oglala Lakota Belief and Ritual."

2011 M.A. Department of Anthropology

Michigan State University (East Lansing, MI):

2007 B.A. Interdisciplinary Studies in the College of Social Science
Areas of specialization: American Indian studies; history; religious studies; psychology

Thesis: "The Pipe Religion, Spirit World, and Lakota Spirituality" completed under the supervision of Dr. Robert McKinley

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sociocultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, belief and ritual, ethnohistory, ethnicity, identity, history of anthropology/anthropological theory, American Indian anthropology, Native North America, Northern Plains, Lakota/Teton (Western) Sioux

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of South Dakota (Vermillion, SD)

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (Spring 2015)
Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology

Introduction to Native Studies (Spring 2015)
Assistant Professor, Native American Studies Program

Introduction to Archaeology (Fall 2014)
Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology

Indiana University (Bloomington, IN):

Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies (Spring 2014)
Associate Instructor, Department of American Studies (As AI I designed and sole-taught this course)

Revitalization Movements in Native North America (Fall 2013)
Associate Instructor, Department of Anthropology (As AI I designed and sole-taught this course)

Indians of North America (Spring 2013)
Assistant Instructor to Raymond J. DeMallie, Department of Anthropology

Elementary Lakota (Sioux) Language (2010-2012)
Teaching Assistant to Douglas R. Parks, Department of Anthropology

Intensive Study of Lakota Culture (Fall 2009)
Teaching Assistant to Raymond J. DeMallie, Department of Anthropology

RELATED EXPERIENCE

2008-2013 Lakota Language Project (LLP)
Researcher/Graduate Assistant/Teaching Assistant/Resident Liaison
Duties: edited language textbooks and other curriculum materials;
compiled vocabularies; researched, wrote, designed, and edited historical sketches; worked with Lakota native language speakers; worked with Lakota language teachers implementing curriculum; resident at Pine Ridge Reservation as LLP liaison/research assistant from 2011-2012; wrote, designed, and edited Lakota language reader

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2014 College of Arts and Sciences Fall Travel Grant, University of South Dakota
- David C. Skomp Summer Research Feasibility Study Award, Indiana University, Bloomington
- 2013 Indiana University, Bloomington College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Travel Award
- American Society for Ethnohistory Student Travel Grant
- Indiana University, Bloomington Department of Anthropology Graduate Student Paper Presentation Award
- 2012 Indiana University, Bloomington Department of Anthropology Graduate Student Paper Presentation Award
- 2011 Indiana University, Bloomington Department of Anthropology Graduate Student Paper Presentation Award
- 2010 David C. Skomp Summer Research Feasibility Study Award, Indiana University, Bloomington
- Indiana University, Bloomington Department of Anthropology Graduate Paper Presentation Award
- 2009 American Society for Ethnohistory Student Travel Grant
- 2007-2010 American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI) Graduate Fellowship, Indiana University, Bloomington

PUBLICATIONS

- 2014 Review of *Sober Indian / Dangerous Indian: A Story of Empowerment through Sobriety*. In *The Volante* [Vermillion, SD] 17 November 2014 (<http://volanteonline.com/2014/11/sober-indian-dangerous-indian-undeniably-powerful/>) and 19 November 2014 (Print).
- (Contributor) Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Complete Edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

2008 (Contributor) Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Premier Edition. Albany: State University of New York Press.

In press:

“Hereditary Enemies?: An Examination of Sioux-Arikara Relations to 1830.” *Plains Anthropologist*.

“*Pté Oyáte* (Buffalo Nation): Lakota Perspectives on the American Bison.” Chapter in an edited volume (title pending) to be published by Texas A&M University Press.

In preparation:

“Proselytization and Tradition: Oglala Religious Resurgence.” To be submitted to *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*.

“*Tuwá Ogná Wičhákaayapi* (Those They Bring the Pipe To): Nineteenth-Century Lakota Religious Practitioners.” To be submitted to *Plains Anthropologist*.

LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

2015 “The Social Organization of Contemporary Oglala Lakota Religion.” Delivered at the 2015 Central States Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, St. Paul, MN.

“The Social Organization of Contemporary Oglala Lakota Religion.” Lecture given at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center/Betty Strong Encounter Center, Sioux City, IA.

2014 “Calling Songs: Music in Lakota Religion and Ritual.” Sound Experience Station (media-enhanced poster session) presented at the 2014 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.

“Rearticulating *Wakǰáŋ*: Contemporary Translations of Oglala Lakota Religious Concepts.” Delivered in a session I organized titled “Contributions of Native Language Studies to Northern Plains Ethnohistory” at the 2014 American Society for Ethnohistory Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN.

“Arthur Amiotte and the Contemporary Lakota Sun Dance.” Lecture given on April 10, 2014 in American Indian Spirituality course at Indiana University, Bloomington.

- 2013 “Contemporary Identity at Pine Ridge Reservation: Being Oglala in 2013.” Delivered at the 2013 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.
- “Proselytization and Tradition: Oglala Lakota Religious Resurgence.” Delivered at the 2013 American Society for Ethnohistory Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA.
- “Western Sioux (Teton Lakota) Religion.” Lecture given on March 21, 2013 in Indians of North America course at Indiana University, Bloomington.
- 2012 “Hereditary Enemies?: Sioux-Arikara Relations to 1815.” Delivered at the 2012 American Society for Ethnohistory Annual Meeting, Springfield, MO.
- “The Lakota Language Project (LLP).” Delivered at the 2012 Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference, Helsinki, Finland.
- 2011 “K-12 Comprehensive Lakota Language Curriculum.” Delivered at the 2011 Tusweca Tiyospaye Lakota-Dakota-Nakota Language Summit, Rapid City, SD.
- “Hereditary Enemies?: Sioux-Arikara Relations to 1815.” Delivered at the 2011 Plains Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, Tucson, AZ.
- “The Extermination of the Buffalo from Lakota Historical Perspectives.” Delivered at the 2011 CIC American Indian Studies Consortium Conference, Detroit, MI.
- 2010 “The Lakota Language Project (LLP): Pitfalls and Possibilities.” Delivered at the 2010 Plains Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, Bismarck, ND.
- 2009 “The Extermination of the Buffalo from Lakota Historical Perspectives.” Delivered at the 2009 American Society for Ethnohistory Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA.
- 2008 “Lakota Religion.” Lecture given on October 30, 2008 in Indians of North America course at Indiana University, Bloomington.
- “Wolves in the Oglala Lakota Spirit World.” Delivered at the 2008 CIC American Indian Studies Consortium Conference, West Lafayette, IN.

“Wolves in the Oglala Lakota Spirit World.” Delivered at the 2008 Central States Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN.

“Wolves in the Oglala Lakota Spirit World.” Delivered at the 2008 Anthropology Graduate Student Association Graduate Student Symposium, Bloomington, IN.

LANGUAGES

Lakota (speak, read, and write with basic proficiency)
German (speak, read, and write with basic competence)

AFFILIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

American Anthropological Association (AAA)
American Indian Studies-Great Plains Consortium (AIS-GPC) (Board Member)
American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI) (Research Associate)
American Philosophical Society (APS) (Research Associate, [The Franz Boas Papers](#))
American Society for Ethnohistory (ASE)
Central States Anthropological Society (CSAS)
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REFERENCES

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