

Peyotism and the Control of Heavy Drinking: The Nebraska Winnebago in the Early 1900s

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This article, based on ethnohistorical research, describes the drinking practices of the Winnebago Indians from the early 1860s, when they moved into Nebraska, until the early 1920s and relates these drinking practices to the changing sociocultural environment. The major focus is on the manner in which the Peyote religion helped control excessive drinking. The discussion examines Peyotism as a native therapeutic system and compares it to other such native systems and to Western regimens. It is argued that common elements in these diverse approaches are responsible for the successful control or "treatment" of excessive drinking.

Key words: alcohol use, Native Americans, Native American Church, Peyotism, treatment systems, Winnebago

SOCIETIES VARY in the extent to which they experience problems associated with drinking and in the methods they use to deal with them.¹ Comparative analysis of such variation offers social scientists and analysts of public policy a potential for greater understanding of their own society's drinking problems. This article examines one approach to the control of heavy drinking reputed to be effective for some Native American groups: the Peyote religion or the Native American Church.

This beneficial effect has been claimed for many years by Peyotists. Quannah Parker, for example, one of the most influential Comanche Peyotists, said in 1908, "I do think piote beans have helped Indians to quit drinking" (Slotkin 1956:140). At about the same time, Oliver Lamere, a Winnebago Peyotist, observed that among his tribe, "Peyote people preached good things and gradually lost all desire for intoxicating drink . . ." (Radin 1970 [1923]:346). Peyotists have not been alone in voicing this claim; many ethnologists have also commented on the relationship. Alanson Skinner noted in 1915 that "The effect of peyote eating on the Kansa has been to abolish drunkenness among its followers" (McGlothlin 1967:13). Edgar Siskin (1983:122) reported that among the Washo, "Even peyote's strongest antagonists admitted that most of the cultists stopped drinking."

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James Slotkin (1956:41) observed that "In the post-frontier period two White disorders, tuberculosis and alcoholism, were the major health problems. Neither seemed curable by traditional means; the [Peyote] religion treated both." (See Malouf 1942:103 and Roy 1973:330 for similar comments.)

Although the relationship between Peyotism and abstinence has been widely noted, the causal connection has not been fully explicated. An early idea, since discredited, was that ingested peyote was pharmacologically incompatible with alcohol (Albaugh and Anderson 1974:1248; La Barre 1975:21, 63; Radin 1963 [1920]:49; Siskin 1983:121-122). The conclusion reached by more recent analysts is that any beneficial effects obtained in controlling drinking are due primarily to the religion's social and psychological effects, and that if the pharmacological properties of peyote are involved, they are more directly related to producing psychological insight, cathartic expression, or communicative openness than to adverse reactions with alcohol (Albaugh and Anderson 1974; Bergman 1971; La Barre 1975:21, 147; Pascarosa and Futterman 1976; Pascarosa, Futterman, and Halsweig 1976). I would like to examine these connections in relation to the case of the Nebraska Winnebago during the first decade of the 1900s, the period during which the Peyote religion was enthusiastically adopted by many Winnebago. The Winnebago example is an apt one because participation in the religion had a major impact on the extent of heavy drinking. This article is organized into four major sections. First, I will briefly describe the historical context, giving particular attention to changes in the patterns of Winnebago drinking. Second, I will consider the nature of Winnebago Peyotism during those years and what it meant to become a Peyotist. Third, I will examine the factors that helped account for the religion's success in controlling heavy drinking. Finally, I will comment on some of the implications that the case has for control and treatment options.

The Background²

In the early historic period the Winnebago were located in Wisconsin. Following several treaties and territorial relocations, a large portion of the tribe moved in the mid-1860s to a reservation in Nebraska Territory about 23 miles south of Sioux City, Iowa.³ The Winnebago land was purchased from the Omaha Indians and was adjacent to their reservation. The general goal of the Winnebago agents during the last half of the 1800s was to make the Indians self-sufficient through farming. As part of this process, some of the Winnebago land was allotted in severalty. From the mid-1860s until the late 1880s, Winnebago agricultural productivity and self-sufficiency increased. But while some Winnebago were becoming successful farmers, others chose to work for wages, helping local white *settlers* with farm work and cutting and hauling wood in the forested areas along the Missouri River. A day school was established as early as 1868, and an on-reservation and several off-reservation boarding schools later became available, but the schools had little impact due—among other factors—to poor attendance. A Presbyterian mission, which operated among the Nebraska Winnebago from 1881 into the early 1900s, was similarly unsuccessful in making converts. There was consequently less acculturation to American mainstream patterns than might have been expected. At the end of the 1880s the Winnebago agent complained that “the medicine dance or lodge [a traditional religious society] still holds the great body of these people firmly” (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1889:240).

From the arrival of the Winnebago in Nebraska in the mid-1860s until the 1890s, alcohol use was not seen by their agents as a major problem, although instances of drinking and intoxication occurred throughout this period. The comment of their agent in 1884 is typical: he observed that they “are disposed to gamble and take a drink when occasion offers” (Commissioner 1884:119). Five years later another agent, while indicating that it was remarkable that there was so little crime among the Winnebago, also noted that he had to contend with a “few plain drunks” (Commissioner 1889:239). In general, observers during this period indicated that while drinking and intoxication occurred, they did not constitute a major social problem.

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, two factors had a major impact on Winnebago life and eventually led to a reversal of Winnebago agricultural growth and to an increase in their alcohol consumption. One was the expansion of the white population in areas adjacent to the Winnebago reservation. The white population of the five counties bordering the reservation went from 21,000 in 1880 to over 54,000 in 1900 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1902:547–548), leading to increased efforts by whites to obtain Indian land and, with new towns arising on the edges of the reservation, to increased opportunities for the Winnebago to purchase alcohol.

The second major event was the passage of an act by the U.S. Congress in 1891 that allowed Native Americans to legally lease their allotted lands to whites. Although the act was intended to help individuals who possessed land but were unable to farm it themselves, it had unanticipated consequences: once a leasing option became available, it became a frequent choice of able-bodied individuals not committed to an agricultural way of life. By 1902 their agent (Commissioner 1903:240–241), disheartened by their lack of interest in agricultural pursuits, offered this assessment and analysis:

Little if any advance is being made, and in many particulars the reverse is true. Less land is being cultivated each year, and the character of the farming is poor. They are better clothed and fed than ever before in their history, but ‘they toil not, neither do they spin.’ The rentals from their leases supply all their wants. They have an abundance of land not leased, but they do not work it . . .

During this period when Winnebago agricultural interests and pursuits were waning, alcohol use rose dramatically. The increase appears to have developed throughout the 1890s and reached a high in the early 1900s. By 1904 drinking was regarded as a major problem, and a governmental investigation of the affairs on the Winnebago reservation established that a fairly large number of Winnebago had accepted the use of alcohol. Of this number, perhaps 100 to 150 men and women (12 to 18% of the adult population) drank heavily at times, with about 10 to 20 individuals doing so fairly frequently. It is also clear, however, that some tribal members seldom, if ever, drank (Hill 1985b:185–188).

Although the unpublished documents are silent on the Winnebago’s view of these activities, relevant and suggestive information is provided by the autobiography of the Wisconsin Winnebago variously called Big Winnebago, Sam Blowsnake, or Crashing Thunder. Big Winnebago was born in Wisconsin during the 1870s. He gave his life history to anthropologist Paul Radin, who published it in 1920 and then reissued it in a different form in 1926.⁴

Although Big Winnebago was raised among the Wisconsin Winnebago, he had relatives in Nebraska and visited them several times. Big Winnebago’s description suggests that alcohol use was seen as an important element in having a good time. Drinking figured in socializing or visiting (Radin 1963 [1920]: 38–39), fighting (1963 [1920]:27, 29, 33), robbery (1963 [1920]: 27, 38–39), and work (1963 [1920]:27). These drinking-related activities, in addition to offering pleasure and excitement to the participants, were compatible with some of the “traditional” values of Winnebago culture and could be used to claim or express a positive identity. Alcohol was used to help demonstrate—among other traits—generosity, friendship, sexual attractiveness, physical and spiritual power, and bravery. It is clear, however, that drinking also occurred at times of stress and was also used as a means of coping with unpleasant emotions or situations and served escapist functions (1963 [1920]: 26).⁵

Although many Winnebago approved of drinking, some did not, and would apply negative social sanctions to drunken individuals when they exceeded the limits of acceptable behavior. Big Winnebago provides several instances in which he felt the effects of negative sanctions (Radin 1963 [1920]:24, 27). (Also see Lurie 1961:35, 49.) The negative view of drinking among the Winnebago was not necessarily due to Christian or other religious influences, but developed in at least some cases on the basis of personal experiences with drunken family members (Lurie 1961:130).

Several factors appear to have played major roles in the growing and widespread use of alcohol at the end of the 1800s: a general sociocultural framework receptive to altered states of consciousness, the ready availability of alcohol, the lack of a strong ethical interdiction against its use within traditional Winnebago culture,⁶ and ample amounts of leisure time. This fairly dramatic increase in drinking-related activities does not necessarily indicate that the Winnebago population was experiencing a dysphoric reaction to massive sociocultural disorga-

nization and deprivation. A substantial portion of the increase appears to represent the outcome of traditional cultural standards in combination with a new external situation.⁷

Even though forms of heavy drinking were viewed by many Winnebago as nondeviant behavior, this does not mean that drinking-related activities were free from negative consequences. On the contrary, many drinking-related activities carried hidden liabilities that only became apparent over time. Thus, a man might engage in heavy drinking for a number of years and enjoy it very much, but as he became older, would discover that he could no longer control his drinking.⁸ As participation in drinking-related activities increased throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, these hidden liabilities—which included erratic work performances, neglect of kinship obligations, marital and family instability, addiction to alcohol, legal problems, and poor health—also increased.

In response to a growing dissatisfaction with these aspects of Winnebago life, several social forces, both internal and external to Winnebago society, developed to correct them. One of the most important internal developments, and the one on which this paper focuses, was the adoption and spread of the Peyote religion.⁹ Although some Winnebago appear to have had experience with peyote as early as the late 1880s (Meeker 1896, 1898; Radin 1970 [1923]:345), its use was not widely accepted until about 1903 or 1904 (Radin 1970 [1923]:346). By 1908 it appears that at least half the tribe had tried peyote.¹⁰ Following the first wave of enthusiastic adoption in the first decade of the 1900s, however, Peyotism seems to have lost some of its appeal.¹¹ Nonetheless, it continued to attract from one-third to one-half of the tribe into the 1920s (Commissioner 1920:9–10). About one-third of the tribe were believed to be members of the traditional Medicine Lodge¹² (Commissioner 1920:4).

Two external developments that also exerted controlling influences were the arrival of a new superintendent¹³ for the Winnebago and the adoption and spread of Christianity among the tribe. Albert Kneale took charge of the Winnebago reservation in 1908 and embarked on a vigorous campaign to reduce the use of alcohol by the Indians. His attempts included collecting evidence on individuals selling liquor to Indians and exerting various kinds of pressures on the Winnebago to limit their drinking. The Presbyterians turned over their work with the Winnebago to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1908. Although Winnebago acceptance of this church was not as swift or as widespread as that of the Peyote religion, it gained 155 converts by 1910 and became a force in attempting to change Winnebago life (Watermulder 1910).

Under the impact of these social forces, many of the trends so gloomily described by the agent in 1902 were starting to be reversed by the beginning of the second decade of the 1900s. These changes are apparent in the superintendent's comments made in 1910:

The past year has seen the Winnebago Indians advance all along the line. Whereas last season probably not to exceed 3,000 acres of land was cultivated by Indians, and this in a very indifferent manner; they have under cultivation this season not less than 8,000 acres. Most of these 8,000 acres is in corn and is being fully as well cared for as the average white lessee cares for his crop. Drinking and drunkenness has [sic] become unpopular. There are possibly twenty habitual drunkards and outside these individuals there is little drinking. Several successful prosecutions in the County Court for statutory rape, adultery and fornication have done much toward clearing up the moral atmosphere. The complaints leading to these prosecutions were in nearly every in-

stance brought by Indians. This shows a moral awakening among the people (Commissioner 1910).

The following year 174 Winnebago were engaged in farming, cultivating a total of 11,000 acres. By 1912 the number of Indians farming had increased to 181 (Commissioner 1911, 1912).

Although the external factors were important, it is also clear that the Peyote religion played an important role in the control of heavy drinking and the more general social "regeneration" that occurred during this period. The testimonies that Radin collected from the Indian Peyotists represent one type of persuasive evidence. Albert Hensley's comments are illustrative. After returning from Carlisle (a government boarding school in Pennsylvania), Hensley began to drink. He described his own behavior:

At that time the Winnebago with whom I associated were heavy drinkers, and after a while they induced me to drink also. I became as wicked as they. I learned how to gamble and I worked for the devil all the time, I even taught the Winnebago how to be bad . . . [After joining the Peyote religion.] All the evil that was in me I forgot. From that time to the present my actions have been quite different from what they used to be. I am only working for what is good; not that I mean to say that I am good (Radin 1970 [1923]:350). (Also see Hensley 1916 and Field Matron 1904.)

Many of the Winnebago claims can be corroborated with other data. Although many local whites were actively opposed to the Peyote religion, some were not, and their statements concerning the religion are of great interest. Thomas Roddy, for example, a white man who had extensive contact with Winnebago, wrote in 1909:

I have attended several of the meetings, and have also experienced the eating and drinking of the "peyote" medicine, with not bad effects. It is very surprising, the way Indians have become familiar with the Bible, and how closely they try to follow the teachings of Jesus. . . . Many members I have known twenty-five or thirty years, who formerly had been greatly addicted to the use of liquors and tobacco, and other vices; all have quit these habits and live for their religion. I cannot see wherein their minds have become impaired, as many talk and write, but I can see great improvements and advancement among the members. They are the best business men among this tribe, and their credit is good wherever they are known (Roddy 1911:283).

The Nature of Winnebago Peyotism

What did participating in the Peyote religion entail? What did it mean to become a Peyotist? First, of course, there was participation in the peyote ceremony that was performed during an all-night meeting and consisted of praying, meditating, singing, drumming, and eating peyote. Because the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) contains over 55 alkaloids, including mescaline and other psychoactive alkaloids, visions were sometimes produced (Anderson 1980 and Furst 1976). Although the religion obviously contained "traditional" Indian (but not necessarily Winnebago) traits, the Winnebago Peyotists strongly viewed themselves as Christians: they identified Earthmaker (a traditional deity) with the Christian God, read the Bible, confessed sins publicly, and baptized new converts. The Winnebago Peyotists did not formally systematize or codify their religion's ethics in a written document, but their beliefs are apparent in the comments they made to Paul Radin when he was studying the tribe during 1908–13. It is

clear that at least the leaders of the Peyotists were actively opposed to many traditional beliefs and ceremonies, such as those associated with war-bundles (bundles containing religious objects and created as a result of contacts with spiritual beings during vision quests), the Medicine Lodge (a religious society), and the use of traditional medicines.¹⁴ After Big Winnebago had agreed to become a member, he gave up his "courting medicines." When he relinquished them, his brother-in-law, a Peyotist, told him "that Earthmaker (God) alone was holy, that all things (blessings and medicines) that I possessed, were false; that I had been fooled by the bad spirit (devil)" (Radin 1963 [1920]:57). Later, Big Winnebago himself said: "(It is false), this giving of (pagan) feasts, of holding (the old) things holy, the Medicine Dance, and all the Indian customs" (Radin 1963 [1920]:67). At the same time Big Winnebago gave up his courting medicines, he also had his long hair cut after his relatives showed him a passage in the Bible which said "that it was a shame for any man to wear long hair" (Radin 1963 [1920]:56).

Peyotists were expected to be legally married and to remain faithful to their spouses. Before Big Winnebago joined the religion he tried, in fact, to use this belief as an excuse for not eating peyote. In response to the urgings of his relatives to attend a meeting, Big Winnebago told his sister:

I would be quite willing to eat this peyote (ordinarily), but I don't like the woman with whom I am living just now and I think I will leave her. That is why I do not want to join now, for I understand that when married people eat medicine (peyote) they will always have to stay together. Therefore I will join when I am married to some woman permanently (Radin 1963 [1920]:51).

The use of liquor and tobacco were prohibited. When Big Winnebago's father described the behavior of the Peyotists, he told him that they stopped drinking. In addition, "They also stop smoking and chewing tobacco. They stop giving feasts, and they stop making offerings of tobacco" (Radin 1963 [1920]:49). (Also see page 63 and Lurie 1961:130, Stewart 1987:153-154.)¹⁵

Followers of the religion were expected to work regularly and to help one another in any manner they could. These expectations can be seen in Albert Hensley's comments on his own life:

After that I married and now I have three children, and it would not have been right for me to continue in my wickedness. I resolved that thereafter I would behave as a grown-up man ought to behave. I resolved never to be idle again and to work so that I could supply my wife and children with food and necessities, that I would be ready to help them whenever they were in need (Radin 1970 [1923]:350).

If an individual failed to live up to the religion's ethics, he was expected to repent. Public confession of these past sins was important; as Oliver Lamere, a Winnebago Peyotist, indicated: "If a person eats peyote and does not repent openly, he has a guilty conscience, which leaves him as soon as the public repentance has been made" (Radin 1970 [1923]:349).

It is important to emphasize that Peyotism appealed to the Winnebago for a variety of reasons in addition to the control of heavy drinking. During these years the Winnebago suffered from a number of diseases: tuberculosis, trachoma (an infectious disease of the cornea and conjunctiva), and venereal diseases were prevalent (Hill 1985b:217). Peyote was seen as

having the power to cure. Radin (1970 [1923]:375) noted this belief himself:

The first and foremost virtue predicated by Rave [the man who introduced Peyotism to the Winnebago] for the peyote was its curative power. He gives a number of instances in which hopeless venereal diseases and consumption were cured by its use; and this was the first thing one heard about it as late as 1913. In the early days of the Peyote cult it appears that Rave relied principally for new converts upon the knowledge of this great curative virtue of the peyote. The main point apparently was to induce people to try it . . . [I]t is highly significant that all the old members of the Peyote cult speak of the diseases of which it cured them. Along this line lay unquestionably its appeal for the most converts.

In addition, as we have seen, Peyote ethics did not focus narrowly only on alcohol use, but offered a comprehensive plan for living. By maintaining a stable marital relationship, working hard, fulfilling kinship obligations, and refraining from untoward acts such as drinking, a Peyote convert could achieve success in terms that the dominant white society would recognize.¹⁶ As a result, Peyotism offered relief for a variety of physical and psychological problems and drew members from both the "traditional" or "conservative" segment of the tribe as well as from the younger individuals who had been sent to government boarding schools off the reservation and who had missed the traditional Winnebago process of enculturation. (See Radin 1970 [1923], Lurie 1948, and Cloud n.d. for descriptions of the traditional process.) Although the religion clearly could appeal to people who were suffering from guilt, anxiety, or self-doubt, others might participate in Peyote meetings simply to satisfy their curiosity or to honor a relative's request to visit a meeting, and in the process become deeply committed to the religion due to the same social, psychological, and pharmacological forces that helped deeply troubled individuals. The spread of the Peyote religion among the Winnebago does not necessarily imply that all its members felt themselves to be greatly troubled or deprived at the time of their initial meeting.¹⁷

Peyotism and the Control of Heavy Drinking

How did participation in the Peyote religion during the early decades of the 1900s help control problem drinking? Certainly a critical element was the Peyote code's insistence on abstinence from alcohol. With the adoption of Peyotism, the requirement of avoiding alcohol was no longer merely a personal or secular call, it possessed a religious backing.¹⁸ Earthmaker or God decreed that it be this way. This new view of drinking was important because, as we have seen heretofore, many Winnebago considered drinking, even forms of heavy drinking, to be acceptable behavior. By insisting that all alcohol use was wrong, the standards of Peyotism removed the gray area concerning drinking activities and made it easier for Peyotists to negotiate Winnebago life. That is, it was no longer an individual question of deciding how much alcohol to drink in a particular set of circumstances—any amount was too much. It also gave added justification and weight to one's refusal to join old drinking comrades: "I would like to share a bottle with you, but I am now a Peyotist and am no longer allowed to drink." In addition, through participation in Peyote meetings a member developed, or participated in, a social network of like-minded

individuals who helped legitimize and enforce these standards. Since the religion spread along family lines, a newly converted drinker received social support from the individuals who were closest to him socially; all shared his new view of drinking and offered him social and psychological support in living up to it.

Participation in Peyote meetings and related religious affairs engaged members in activities that competed with the scheduling of old behavioral patterns. A person could not attend an all-night Peyote meeting Saturday night and at the same time be "chasing around" and drinking in the old haunts with his old acquaintances and friends. Indeed, during the early years when the members' enthusiasm was running particularly high, they sometimes had as many as four meetings a week. Later, it became the usual pattern to hold a meeting once a week, usually on Saturday night (Radin 1914:2, 14; 1970 [1923]:340). In any case, the restructuring of an individual's activities and social networks reduced the social pressures and opportunities to drink and developed competing activities that were at least as psychologically and socially rewarding as the old ones.

The public confession of past sins—including any excessive drinking—served a variety of functions. Through the public admission of past wrongs, and the emotional abreaction associated with such an action, an individual helped rid himself of any ambivalence he felt regarding his excessive drinking. Depending on the level of emotional arousal achieved, confession could leave a member both physiologically and psychologically better adjusted.¹⁹ The emotional nature of the act also helped develop a sense of a new beginning, a new psychological birth: "This is a new point in my life. I feel that things are going to be different from now on." Such emotional arousal strengthens the belief that it is possible for the individual to change his behavior. The public nature of the confession and the related promise to behave differently, particularly when esteemed figures were present, also helped bolster the inner resolve to live up to the new standards (Janis and Rodin 1979:518). In addition, the descriptions of past, profligate behavior by members currently exemplifying the religion's ideals presented living proof that individuals could successfully change their lives by following the Peyote way.

The role that the psychoactive alkaloids played in helping to control heavy drinking is difficult to determine. Although there was a wave of psychiatric experimentation with the use of psychedelic drugs in the treatment of a variety of psychological problems during the 1950s and 1960s, after a flurry of positive and enthusiastic reports, their use has fallen out of favor. Carefully controlled studies have not demonstrated that treatment regimens for heavy drinking that use mescaline or other psychedelic drugs are any more effective than treatment approaches without them (Ludwig et al. 1970, Smart et al. 1967). (Also see Grinspoon and Bakalar 1979:192–237, and McCabe and Hanlon 1977 for reviews and critical discussions of therapeutic uses of psychedelics.) However, the treatment populations used in these studies had cultural traditions very different from traditional Winnebago, and the sociocultural contexts of treatment were also very dissimilar. This is of some importance because the effects of psychoactive substances depend not only on the dosage and pharmacological properties of the alkaloids, but also on such variables as the personality and psychological state of the person taking the substance, his previous experiences with the drug, and the setting for consumption. The setting and rituals of the Peyote meeting clearly reflected

the serious and religious nature of the gathering. The fire, songs, drumming, speeches, and testimonials all united with the psychoactive elements to make the experience a vivid and memorable one. One would expect that the content of a vision in a meeting would depend to a great extent on the person's psychological state—if he has led a profligate life and has his guilt heightened in relation to his past behavior, his vision might be a highly dramatic and emotional one, focusing on sin, retribution, and salvation; while an upright, clean-living, and relatively contented member's experience might be personally less troubling or stressful. Radin noted individual variations among the Winnebago in the effects of peyote, and although not all peyotists claimed to have visions, Radin pointed out that they were frequent and often accompanied by vivid color sensations. Radin also said the visions fell into two basic types: those consisting of monsters chasing an individual and those composed of "more or less elaborate dreams" (Radin 1914:19). Both types tended to be interpreted individually. Although Radin did not pursue the analysis further, it seems clear that the visions or states produced had a significant impact on the Winnebago Peyotists—if not because they provided new psychological insights into their personal problems, then because they raised their confidence in the power of peyote and heightened their expectations that with its help they could deal with their problems.

By adopting a broad-based ethical code, the Peyote religion offered a workable model that could help individuals whose drinking problems stemmed from a variety of circumstances. It offered help for those who saw heavy drinking as acceptable behavior, but who nonetheless suffered from the effects of such views, by redefining that behavior. It offered help to those whose episodes of heavy drinking occurred in response to acute crises, such as the death of a close relative or the anxiety and pain associated with a flare-up of a chronic illness, by presenting an alternative mode of coping. It offered help to those whose drinking stemmed from feelings of guilt and low self-esteem due to past failures to live up to their ideal standards of behavior by exculpating the guilt and promising a new beginning. It offered help to those whose drinking was due to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt related to competing models of worth by endorsing a set that encouraged control, restraint, and responsibility rather than catharsis, self-indulgence, and the pursuit of physical pleasures. The religion was able to put a diverse set of converts on the "Peyote Road" that could lead to a more satisfying life style for them all.

Peyotism Compared to Other Forms of Therapy

When we look at treatment procedures applied to problem drinking, we discover that a large number are available, including Alcoholics Anonymous; behavioral modification programs; use of disulfiram (Antabuse); individual, family, and group therapies (with various brands of each); vocational counseling; detoxification; outpatient and inpatient programs; half-way houses; and a variety of spiritual approaches. Each major approach has its own rationale and set of procedures to bring about change in the problem drinker. In comparing alternative treatment approaches to alcohol-related problems, several fundamental questions arise. First, does any formal treatment program really make a difference in the outcome? And second, are the procedures used for alcohol-related problems different

from those used to deal with other psychological problems? With respect to the first question, if the percentage of untreated problem drinkers who “spontaneously” improve is the same as, or greater than, the percentage of treated drinkers who improve, we would have reason to doubt the efficacy of any special treatment regimen. The evidence indicates that the rates of “spontaneous remissions” for untreated “alcoholics” range from 2% to 15% depending on patients’ backgrounds (Baekeland 1977:390, Smart 1978). Treatment programs tend to have higher remission rates, but none of them is highly successful, averaging about 30% (Orford 1985:249).²⁰

The percentage improved for problem drinking is in line with the results obtained with other psychological problems treated by psychotherapists. Some researchers argue that such a result suggests that despite apparent differences in psychotherapeutic approaches, all must include a common core which has roughly the same effect on the variables critical to treatment outcome. Torrey (1986), for example, in comparing psychotherapeutic techniques cross-culturally, argues that the effectiveness of all approaches is due to four basic components: first, a similar world view being shared between the client and therapist; second, the therapist’s personal qualities, such as empathy, nonpossessive warmth, and genuineness, that interact with those of the client’s to advance client improvement; third, raising the client’s expectations that his problems will improve; and fourth, increasing the client’s sense of mastery, giving him the knowledge and confidence that he needs to effectively deal with the problems confronting him. Although Torrey recognizes that the specific techniques of psychotherapy can, in themselves, have an impact on treatment outcome, he believes that this influence is negligible when compared to the four basic components and that the effectiveness of a specific regimen depends on the extent to which it incorporates these components. Orford (1985), who has critically examined treatment approaches to excessive behaviors, takes a similar view and claims “that most if not all ‘treatments’ for excessive appetites, whatever their form, work in the same way, principally by virtue of the commitment which the patient makes to entering and undergoing some form of ‘therapeutic’ procedures the purpose of which is to help control the excessive behavior” (Orford 1985:299).

Such a perspective is appealing for it allows us to account for not only “professional” treatment regimens, but also for folk and non-Western curing approaches as well. With this view, the critical variables in successful treatment reinforce the problem drinker’s belief that he needs to change his behavior, help him to become deeply committed to making those changes, and aid him in developing strategies and behavioral patterns that support his altered behavior.²¹ As we have seen, the Peyote religion utilized a set of techniques that greatly increased the chances of effecting those changes in the Winnebago problem drinkers who attended peyote meetings. However, the religion would be effective in controlling heavy drinking only to the extent, and only for the length of time, that it exerted a moral force on converts, provided strong social support, and offered a blueprint for behavior that led to a more successful life style.

Individuals who tried Peyotism, but continued to believe that heavy drinking was acceptable behavior, or individuals who wished to change their drinking behavior, but remained with relatives and friends who did not support the new standards

and behavior, might well continue to drink. Those who aspired to become successful farmers, but who were unable to acquire sufficient land due to the fractionalization of their allotments among many heirs, or who did not have sufficient funds to purchase draft teams or mechanized farming equipment, could become discouraged and turn to alcohol for consolation. And indeed, as the Winnebago moved further into the 20th century, the influence of Peyotism on the tribe lessened and heavy drinking again increased, even among those who claimed to be Peyotists. Radin (1963 [1920]:49) noted “that as Rave’s personal influence decreased and as the membership increased the number of people who drank liquor and ate peyote at the same time increased.” The relationship between Peyotism and abstinence continued to weaken, and by 1950, Nancy Lurie (1952:232) found that “the peyote members who renounced alcohol are in a small minority.” A similar situation prevailed among the Christian denominations. Among all groups (Christian and Peyote), there was a “small nucleus of earnest believers who [were] socially, economically and individually stable, along with the greater number of ‘back sliders’ and casual members” (Lurie 1952:234).²²

Discussion

The Nebraska Winnebago represent a case in which the amount of heavy drinking changes markedly over time, growing from a minor feature of social life during most of the latter half of the 1800s to a major problem by the beginning of the 1900s. As indicated, this increase in heavy drinking does not necessarily mean that the Winnebago population was experiencing a dysphoric reaction to massive sociocultural disorganization and deprivation. Rather, a substantial portion of the growth may have represented the outcome of traditional cultural standards—which defined *some* forms of heavy drinking and intoxication as acceptable behavior—in combination with a new external situation.

As “chasing-around” and heavy drinking increased, however, the liabilities associated with these activities also increased. These liabilities coupled with the prevalent diseases and the growing disruption of traditional Winnebago enculturation processes set the stage for the rapid spread of the Peyote religion because it was able to meet a variety of felt needs, including a desire to control problem drinking. Among the elements that made the Peyote religion successful in controlling heavy drinking are the following:

1. The religion defined all forms of drinking as unacceptable and thus helped to counter the drinking standards held by many individuals in the population.
2. The religion pulled like-minded individuals into common social networks that helped reinforce and sustain the new drinking standards.
3. The religion engaged former heavy drinkers in new activities that made it difficult for them to participate in their old drinking-related activities.
4. The religion offered problem drinkers successful role models who had controlled their drinking and had achieved a satisfactory life style by following the “Peyote Road.”
5. The religion provided a belief system and process through

which existing guilt and dysphoric emotions could be dissipated.

6. The religion with its comprehensive code for "right living" helped resolve underlying problems that in some cases led to heavy drinking as a coping mechanism, and in cases in which the underlying problems were either intractable or recurred periodically, the religion provided alternative ways of dealing with the accompanying psychological distress.
7. The religion's code helped strengthen a set of values or identity ideals that were incompatible with those embodied in "chasing around" or "hell-raising" activities and encouraged individuals to make the transition from youthful hell-raising to adult responsibility.
8. The religion with its ceremonial use of singing, drumming, meditating, testifying, and eating psychoactive peyote, helped set the stage either for psychological insight into converts' problems or a "conversion" experience, while at the same time, demonstrated the "power" of the religion (or peyote), and thereby raised the converts' expectations that they could quit drinking or otherwise deal with their personal problems.

Any movement or group capable of achieving these effects would be a potent force in controlling and preventing heavy drinking.

Concluding Comments

The early history of Winnebago Peyotism carries a number of implications for the design and implementation of treatment and prevention programs; I will conclude by briefly commenting on two of them. First, in an environment in which forms of heavy drinking are widely viewed as acceptable behavior, an individual decision of—or even a more dramatic "peak" or "conversion" experience to—abstinence will be difficult to sustain without other corresponding changes in the convert's socio-cultural situation.²³ As we saw, one of the major reasons the Peyote religion had the impact that it did was because it often effectively restructured the convert's social network to provide greater support and changed not only the convert's drinking standards but those of his family and friends. In addition, for some people the control of drinking will be related to solving, or at least dealing more effectively with, other problems in their lives. Treatment programs that are based solely on individual therapy and that do not have the flexibility to deal with different types of problem drinkers will not be as effective as they could be. Although the Peyote religion did not directly attempt to transform the economic, political, and educational structures of mainstream America that constrained Winnebago life, the Peyote "program" was not narrowly limited to a single type of problem or person, but offered help for a variety of difficulties that were sometimes related to heavy drinking.

Second, whenever possible, treatment and prevention programs should build on the existing standards and life-style transitions within the local community that initiate and support the desired changes. For example, among contemporary Winnebago after young men and women marry and have children—even though they may have been heavy-drinking "hell-raisers"—they are expected to "settle down" and become responsible

"family men" and "homebodies." Although some drinking may be expected to continue, it ideally should not interfere with their roles as husbands, wives, and parents (Hill 1974). Such a naturally occurring life-style transition represents an ideal time to try to involve the community in treatment and prevention programs. Indeed, one can argue that in at least some cases the Peyote religion helped "formalize" or "ritualize" a rite of passage that already existed within Winnebago society.²⁴ For a variety of reasons, the ideal transition did not always successfully occur, and the belief system and ceremonies of the Peyote religion—through the procedures discussed—helped make that transition work.

In sum, we still have a great deal to learn about treatment and prevention from non-Western religions and therapeutic systems like the Peyote religion. We should not expect, however, to discover a set of procedures that will be successful with all cases or that can be applied in all sociocultural settings. Rather, our goal should be to try to identify the general principles at work within the specific treatment approach and to learn to apply those insights in a manner that is both culturally and individually appropriate.

NOTES

¹ The literature on drinking patterns is a large one. For recent reviews and bibliographies see Ablon (1985), Bennett (1988), Bennett and Ames (1985), Gordon (1985), Heath (1983, 1985, 1987, 1988), Heath and Cooper (1981), Hill (1985a), Leland (1981), Maida (1985), Mail and McDonald (1981), Marshall (1979), and Waddell (1985).

² This section and the next one draw on a previously published paper (Hill 1985b) that offers a more detailed discussion of the events described. Basic sources on the Winnebago include Jones (1974), Lurie (1952, 1978), Radin (1970 [1923]). See Hill (1974, 1978, 1980) for discussions of contemporary Winnebago and Santee Dakota drinking patterns and Grobsmith (1989) for a discussion of drug use and criminal behavior among imprisoned Native Americans in Nebraska and the treatment programs available to the inmates.

³ The beginning of the separation that ultimately resulted in the Winnebago being divided into the Nebraska and Wisconsin groups dates from the 1830s when a portion of the tribe refused to leave their lands in Wisconsin for the Neutral Ground in northern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota. The Winnebago who remained in or continued to return to Wisconsin became known as the disaffected bands and eventually won official recognition by the U.S. government in the 1880s. Lurie believes that the Winnebago who remained in Wisconsin were less receptive to acculturative influences (Lurie 1952:114-135).

⁴ See Arnold Krupat's foreword and appendix to the 1926 edition (Radin 1983) and Krupat (1985:75-106) for discussions of the issues raised by the various versions and the inconsistencies present in Radin's publications. Also see Lurie's comments (Lurie 1961:96-98, 1972). I have used the 1920 edition (Radin 1963) exclusively.

⁵ For differing interpretations of the drunken comportment of Native Americans see Hallowell (1946), Hill (1978), Lithman (1979), Lurie (1971), MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969), and Robbins (1973).

⁶ In the early 1800s some Winnebago were influenced by Tenskawatawa, the Shawnee Prophet. One of his major pronouncements was that alcohol should be abjured. When Radin conducted his field research (1908-1913), he obtained a Peyotist's version of what the Prophet told the Winnebago. If the Prophet's teachings influenced Winnebago drinking standards at the end of the 1800s, or if they were used as a moral incentive to control drinking, one could justifiably argue that certain "traditional" Winnebago "religious" beliefs did interdict the use of alcohol. If this was the case, the question then becomes: What force did the teachings have and among which segments of the tribe?

See Radin (1970:21–26), Jones (1974:84–117), Forsyth (1911:273–279), and Edmunds (1983).

⁷ I am not arguing that this pattern developed for the first time in the late 1800s; clearly, many of the elements date from the days of the fur trade period. See Lurie's comments (1952:285–286).

⁸ This was apparently the case with Big Winnebago's father (Radin 1963 [1920]:18).

⁹ For discussions of the Peyote religion see Aberle (1982), Anderson (1980), La Barre (1975), Radin (1914), Slotkin (1956), Stewart (1948, 1974, 1980a, 1980b, 1987).

¹⁰ Oliver Lamere asserted in 1908 that "almost half the tribe belongs to our religion" (Radin 1970 [1923]:350). Albert Hensley (1908) said that "Mescal Winnebago" probably numbered 300. Superintendent Kneale (1909) estimated that "fully fifty per cent" used peyote.

¹¹ Radin (1970 [1923]:374) said: "It appears now as if the Peyote cult has run its course. Some of the members have recently returned to the old pagan customs, others have practically become Christians, and many have become indifferent." Although Radin's monograph was published in 1923, the manuscript was completed in 1913 (Radin 1970 [1923]:xvi). These developments may simply reflect the lessening of tensions between the Peyotists and "traditionalists" referred to in note 14, rather than a rejection of Peyotism as Radin implies. It is also clear that the Peyotists did not see a conflict between Peyotism and Christianity and that Christian elements were present in Winnebago Peyotism from the beginning. See Stewart (1948:30–42, 1974, 1980a), Page (1915:206–208), and Radin (1970 [1923]:348, 352).

¹² For descriptions of the Medicine Lodge or Dance, see Radin (1911, 1945).

¹³ The position of Indian agent was abolished in 1903, but was replaced by that of superintendent (Commissioner 1904:204).

¹⁴ Omer Stewart (in a personal communication) suggests that the Winnebago Peyotists did not perceive any conflict between the Peyote religion and "traditional" beliefs and practices. Also see Stewart (1980a:192–195). Although I suspect that not *all* Winnebago saw such a conflict, unless we completely discount Radin's views and the words of his Winnebago informants, it would appear that during the period Radin conducted his field research (1908–1913), *some* Winnebago saw such a conflict. It should be remembered that Radin's attempts to obtain information on the secret ceremonies of the Medicine Lodge probably exacerbated tensions between the two groups. (See Radin 1945:35–39.) How long such feelings remained in the population is another question. Certainly by 1950, when Lurie conducted her field research among the Nebraska Winnebago, attitudes of antagonism and exclusivism had receded (Lurie 1952:231–232).

¹⁵ Stewart (1987:154) says, "Radin described that Winnebago Crashing Thunder (Radin 1923:409) took a vow of nonsmoking during his conversion about 1908. It is not clear whether it was Crashing Thunder's vow not to use tobacco which started Winnebago peyotists to prohibit tobacco in the peyote ceremony or whether his vow was simply an expression of a rule already established and seldom mentioned." But the quote in the body of the article stating that Peyotists stopped smoking and chewing tobacco was what Big Winnebago's father told him *before* he was converted (Radin 1970 [1923]:353). (Also quoted in Radin 1963 [1920]:49.) It seems clear that the rule prohibiting tobacco use was already established before Big Winnebago's conversion. Parenthetically, it might be noted that in Radin (1970 [1923]) the passage in question is titled "J.B.'s Peyote Experiences" although it is attributed to Sam Blowsnake or Big Winnebago in his autobiography. This is an instance of the inconsistencies that occur among some of Radin's publications. (See note 4.)

¹⁶ It should be noted that Winnebago Peyotism had, in Aberle's terms (1982), a strong "redemptive" quality. The Peyote religion was more concerned with changing the Peyotists themselves—putting them on a path that would lead to health, psychological peace, and correct *behavior*—than with attempting to transform the institutions of white America that shaped their lives.

¹⁷ See Gerlach (1974) and Hine (1974) for similar arguments in relation to Pentecostalism.

¹⁸ Or the religious support was regenerated with new vigor if one believes that the Shawnee Prophet's message from the 1800s still had a moral force. (See note 6.)

¹⁹ See La Barre (1947) for a discussion of confession in Peyotism and as a widespread psychotherapeutic technique among aboriginal societies in the New World, Lex (1979) for a discussion of the role of arousal ("ritual catharsis") in attaining a new autonomic balance of the nervous system, Scheff (1977, 1979) for discussions of catharsis and abreaction, and Prince (1982) for a series of articles examining the role of endorphins in the body and in altered states of consciousness.

²⁰ Baekeland's figures are summary ones based on several studies using different measures of improvement and varying periods of follow up; Orford's figures are also based on several studies but are limited to improvement rates at six to twelve months following treatment.

²¹ Many researchers have tried to identify the elements of particular treatment approaches to problem drinking that make them effective or have considered the similarities and differences among approaches. See, for example, Adler and Hammett (1973), Antze (1987), Brown (1985:280–290), Galanter and Buckley (1978), Jilek (1974), Jilek and Todd (1974), Jilek–Aall (1981), Madsen (1974:154–197, 1979), Rodin (1985), Sadler (1977), Singer (1982), Singer and Borrero (1984), Slagle and Weibel-Orlando (1986), Sutro (1989), Wallace (1959), Weibel-Orlando (1989), Westermeyer (1981). Even if one adopts the view taken in this article—that a common set of factors underlies effective treatments—a therapist still faces the formidable task of correctly identifying the particular set of techniques or procedures that will, in fact, effect the desired changes in a given sociocultural setting and with a particular drinker. Given the great amount of biological, psychological, and sociocultural diversity present within a single society, let alone cross-culturally, no single treatment regimen is likely to effectively manipulate all the critical variables for all drinkers.

²² A full consideration of the decline of Peyotism and the continuation of "hell-raising" life styles among contemporary Winnebago extends beyond the scope of this article and will be addressed in future publications. See Lurie (1952:175–251) for a description and interpretation of events to 1950.

²³ McCabe and Hanlon (1977:244), after reviewing the literature on the use of psychedelic drugs in psychotherapy, comment: "The limitations of the high-dose approach to psychedelic psychotherapy that relies on the reintegration powers of a single peak experience have become increasingly apparent. Findings to date indicate that such an experience, albeit conversion-like on occasion, is not the sine qua non of personality reintegration, nor does it ensure freedom from symptoms or permanence of behavioral change."

²⁴ See Hill (1985b:192, 214, note 74) on this point and Weibel-Orlando (1984) for a discussion of Indian "treatment programs" as flawed "rites of passage."

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