

# Shamanic Healing in Social Work Practice

Cathryne L. Schmitz

Radford University, Virginia

Christine H. Stinson

Ferrum College, Virginia

# Overview

- Introductions
- Social work and spiritual practice.
- What is shamanism?
- Group: Two short shamanic journeys.
- Group: Brief discussion of experiences.
- Social work and shamanic work.
- Shamanic training.

# Introductions

- Brief introduction of yourself.
- Name.
- Home base.
- One sentence: what do you hope to learn this morning?

# Social work and spiritual practice

- Healing and the spiritual dimension
- Diversity of spiritual practices
- Nurturing and supporting cultural beliefs
- Searching for meaning
- Finding “answers”

# What is shamanism?

- Who are shamans?
- Where is shamanism from?
- What do shamanic practitioners do?
- How do shamans do their work?

# What defines a shaman?

- “A shaman . . .enters an altered state of consciousness... to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other people.” (Harner, 1990, page 20).
- The shaman works with one or more spirit helpers.

# Where are shamans found?

- Alaska (Turner, 1996)
- Belize (Arvigo, 1994)
- British Columbia (Cloutier, 1980)
- California (Sarris, 1994).
- Caribbean (Heaven, 2003)
- Contemporary (U.S.) clinical social work (Sifers, 1998)
- Ecuador (Descola, 1993)
- Eskimo (Cloutier, 1980)
- India (Bhairavan, 2000)
- Korea (Canda, 2003)
- Labrador (Speck, 1977)
- Mexico (Castenada, 1974)
- Peru (Dobkin de Rios, 1992)
- Siberian (Cloutier, 1980; Eliade, 1964)
- Tibet/Nepal (Mumford, 1989)
- U.S. corporations (Whitely, 2002)
- Zambia (Turner, 1987)

# What do shamanic practitioners do?

- Restoring and enhancing personal power, e.g., introduction to spirit helpers, plant medicine.
- Restoration of personal power with retrieval of soul parts.
- Extraction and removal of spiritual intrusions.
- Depossession.
- Psychopomp.
- Divination (Speck, 1977).
- Working with spirits of nature.
- Healing of the broader social and ecological community (Ingerman, 2000).

# How do shamans do their work?

- One view: upper, lower, and middle worlds.
- Journey via drumbeat/rattle (Turner, 1987), chanting (Mumford , 1989), singing (Cloutier, 1980; Sarris, 1994), adopting specific body postures (Gore, 1995), dancing (Heaven, 2003; Turner, 1996), ayahuasca (Dobkin de Rios, 1992; Descola, 1993), and other hallucinogenic plants (Amarananda, 2000).
- Sometimes several methods (e.g., drumbeat and singing, rattle and body postures, or singing and hallucinogenic plants) are used simultaneously.

# Two short shamanic journeys

- Short journey to safe place, Lower World.
- Longer journey to ask “How can I use shamanic experiences to help others?”
- We will journey using drum beat.

# First Journey

- Short journey to safe place, Lower World.
- Find entrance, go down to Lower World, come back.

# Second Journey

- Longer journey to Lower World.
- Go down to Lower World, find someone, verify that they are there to help you, and ask “How can I use shamanic experiences to help others?” Return.

# Discussion of journey experience

- Did you find an entrance?
- Were you able to go down?
- Did you experience any problems?
- Did you arrive in the Lower World?
- Did you meet anyone? Anything?
- What did they tell you?

# Social work and shamanic work

- Meaning makers--finding meaning; finding answers
- Theory--social construction, empowerment, ecological
- Personal empowerment; personal growth; building resources; supporting strengths
- Interconnection

- Healing tool; bringing lives back into harmony
- Adversity to HOPE
- Anxiety and soothing
- Finding hope
- Spiritual practice
- Building bridges to ancestral beliefs
- Individual, community, cultural, environmental

# Sources for shamanic training

- Foundation for Shamanic Studies  
<http://www.shamanism.org>
- Sandra Ingerman's web pages  
<http://www.sandraingerman.com> ("links")
- Shaman's Drum magazine  
<http://shamansdrum.org>

# Literature Cited and Bibliography

See “Notes” below.