Demons on the Couch

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Spirit Possession, Exorcisms and the DSM-5

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“There are two equal and opposite errors we can fall into concerning demons. One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” C.S. Lewis (1942, p. 9)

“A phenomenon cannot be observed unless the observer has a metaphor through which to see it.”
(Schenk, 2001, p. 101)

“At its root, therapy derives from a word meaning ‘to hold up, to support’. Therapy gives us the satisfaction of being useful... And often therapy does some good. Yet it can also feed our sense of self-importance, and inadvertently fuel our fear of futility. Therapy is not the same as healing.” (Norris, 2008, p. 141)

“Beware of stripping a patient who can’t bear the chill of reality. And don’t exhaust yourself by jousting with religious magic: you’re no match for it. The thirst for religion is too strong, its roots too deep, its cultural reinforcement too powerful.” (Yalom, 1989, p. 165)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Vomiting, profanity, levitation, blasphemy.

The images of demonic possession have infiltrated American culture, particularly in film. Much of this is due to the enduring popularity of the 1973 movie, *The Exorcist* (Blatty & Frieden, 1973) and the subsequent subgenre that the film helped create, although other scholars have addressed the cultural continuity of possession narratives going back to at least Biblical times (Levack, 2013).

I have begun to take my children on Fridays to a combined pizza parlor and video store, the only video store available in town. While browsing through their stacks of new releases, I am amazed at the number of films that involve a storyline of possession by demons or other spirits. A recent search of the website Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2013) found over 200 titles when searching for the word "exorcism". I had recently written my thesis on this topic (Sersch, 2013) and had seen the phenomenon then, but it seems to have grown almost exponentially in the last several years. One aspect of this can be attributed to the conservative business approach within Hollywood; "if a project was successful, let us copy it until the theme no longer generates revenue". Using that model, the incredible success of *The Exorcist* (Blatty & Frieden, 1973) can help explain why, over 40 years later, the theme is still powerful. But that still leaves open the question as to why the theme of spirit/demonic possession is interesting to parts of the movie watching public, and has been so since the release of *The Exorcist*?

As Boggs has addressed (1996), themes from popular films tend to reproduce themselves, both among other films and also across society. Possession and subsequent exorcisms form one such theme in film. Rothman (1996) asked the rhetorical question, "Is God Really Dead in Beverly Hills?" when so much popular culture focuses upon the supernatural. Victoria Nelson argues in *Gothicka*: *Vampire Heroes, Human Gods and the New Supernatural* (2012) that with the steady disenchantment of the contemporary Western world, all that remains of the formerly sacred is the darkly supernatural. This includes possession stories, vampire romances and of course, zombies. This is often manifested in electronic media, of which people are consuming increasing amounts, not only of films but also television programs that include possession, such as *The Twilight Zone*, *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Supernatural,* as well as science

fiction stories that include alien possession, such as the franchises of *Star Trek*, *Stargate* and *Dr. Who*, to name only a few (see Braak, 2015).

It is possible that what we are seeing is a form of post-modern spirituality. Hoyt (1978) quotes an unnamed film executive as claiming that themes like exorcisms in media satisfy an audience hungry for "mysticism, the supernatural, and the psychic. It's a kind of pop religion" (p. 4). Taylor (2007) notes that the desire to see the (pseudo) historic or supernatural creates a *frisson* within the individual; it is a nostalgic view of the past that is somehow more appealing and meaningful than modern life. Natoli (1994) has written rather poetically that, "We are haunted by what we cannot fully identify, by what we cannot make identical to what we already are, have, and know…Nothing is discovered; everything is rediscovered" (p. ix).

It has been reported that between 2000 and 2005, between 40% and almost 50% of the American public believed demonic possession was possible (www.whatstheharm.com), and Gallop (2015) has shown an increase in belief in the devil, from 55% of the American public in 1990 to 70% in 2007. This is interestingly around the same time that there is a noted steady decrease in a belief in God, from 96% in 1994 to 91% in 2011 and 86% in 2014 (Gallop, 2015). Geography affects these trends; Possamai (2015) notes that among Americans in the South, 59% report a belief in the possibility of possession, as compared with 48% of the general American population. Ruickbie (2012) cites 95% of respondents in the Ivory Coast who believe a person can be affected by witchcraft, whereas only 15% of those in Uganda responded similarly. There has even been a two-time Republican candidate for US presidential office in 2012 and 2016, governor of Louisiana Bobbi Jindhal, who has admitted to being involved in an exorcism while a college student, although that admission has also been politically costly (Dart, 2015).

Possession and exorcism are also an area that is easily mocked. The National Public Radio Show *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me* (2014) included a satirical story, as told by Roy Blount Jr., of an American southern pastor who had stated that "health food is satanic". In response, an area organic grocery store created "Healthy as Hell Week" and included an interview with a produce clerk dressed as a possessed beet (*Wait*…2014). It is worth noting that while the story is told humorously, there are plenty within the religious world that quickly attribute satanic influences to a wide variety of factors, as shall be shown in Chapter 3. The tendency to mock the phenomenon is also widespread: when I presented my initial findings in my graduate program, I was able to show a clip of a Saturday Night Live skit with Richard Pryor playing an exorcist trading "your mama" jokes with a young possessed girl. One of my heroes, the American Trappist monk

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), made light of area reports of possession immediately after his ordination to the priesthood (Mott, 1993). He later complained, "Certainly the complex business of being a 'personality' and exorcising the public demon it involves–all this is too much" (Mott, 1993, p. 524).

Jenny Lawson (2015) is a blogger who writes humorously of her struggles with mental health.

> Sometimes being crazy is a demon and sometimes the demon is me. . . I suppose we're all possessed in some way. Some of us with dependence on pills or wine. Others through sex or gambling. Some of us through self-destruction or anger or fear… My psychiatrist told me that when things get rough I should consider my battle with mental illness as if I were 'exorcising a demon" and I was like, 'Well, no wonder I'm failing so miserably. I'm shit at exercising.' Then she called me out for deflecting with humor, and explained: 'You are exorcising a demon. It's not something you can do alone. Some people do it with a priest and holy water. Some do it with faith. Some do it with chemicals and therapy. No matter what, it's hard.' 'And usually people end up with vomit on them,' I replied. (np)

Brave humor in the face of the challenges of personal transformation, in the battling of each individual demon, is the heart of what this text will attempt to provide.

Soon after *The Exorcist* book and film were released, a bestselling non-fiction book was written by a former Roman Catholic priest, Malachi Martin (1976), which told of six exorcisms in a graphic manner. Literature has addressed possession frequently; including such widely different authors as the Russian, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1872, trans. 2009) and British authors such as William Shakespeare in the plays *Twelfth Night* (1623/2005), *A Comedy of Errors* (1623/2005), *Macbeth* (1623/2005), *Othello* (1622/2005), *King Lear* (1623/2005) and *King Henry V Part 1* (1623/2005). The latter play is now noted as having the possession scene, in which Joan of Arc beseeches demonic forces to come to her aid before her capture by the English, being penned by rival playwright Christopher Marlowe (Alberge, 2016). More recent English authors Aldous Huxley (1958, 1971) and William Golding (1971) also included possession narratives as a part of their writing. Further international authors with similar themes include Haruki Murakami (1994) from Japan, the Columbian Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1995), the American authors Carole Muske-Dukes (2008) and Toni Morrison (1987) and the Italian author Umberto Eco (2011). Some use possession and exorcism as a powerful symbol in dealing with family dynamics and having multiple cultural identities, as does the Cuban American author Christina Garcia (1993). Furthermore, a subgenre

of Japanese graphic novels known as "manga" frequently involves some form of demonic or other unwanted spiritual possession (Cuneo, 2001). For Kiev (1966), the experience of seeing a possession state is so moving for the audience, they collectively search for an explanation, using whatever categories are socially and culturally sanctioned. This may be one reason the trope is so often used in literature and in film.

Daniel Burke (2011) and Michael Cuneo (2001) have stated that the practice of exorcism has been steadily increasing in the last several decades. The Roman Catholic Church in the US has been making a concerted effort to increase the number of trained exorcists (Burke, 2011) although several years ago there were only 30 trained in the US (Koningisor, 2011). Protestant evangelicals, Pentecostals and fundamentalists have increased ministries involving exorcisms or deliverance prayers to drive away unwanted spiritual entities (Cuneo, 2001). Hoyt (1978) documents how the Anglican Church established guidelines for exorcisms in 1963 to respond to the increase in requests for the rite, and Levack (2013) notes that 1/3 of parishes in England had some form of deliverance ministry. Minority religious communities in the UK and the US, particularly immigrants and their children, have also brought exorcisms and spirit possession practices to further attention, as in the case of the young Hmong girl with epilepsy featured in *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1997). The situation of exorcism and child abuse among Nigerian immigrants to the UK was made into a novel by Christine Watson (2015b), due in part to her experience as a pediatric nurse seeing the increase in abuse among that population, which she attributes to the challenge of adaptation to a new culture (Watson, 2015a).

Cumo (2015) documents how there are at present three different organizations for those who are interested in the ministry of exorcism: the International Association of Exorcists or IAE (which is strictly for Roman Catholic priests, although it is not formally connected to the Vatican), the International Catholic Association of Exorcists or ICAE (which is open to Anglican, Gnostic, Orthodox and Catholic lay and priestly members), and the American Association of Exorcists (which was founded by a Baptist pastor and involves a level of licensing, see www.americanexorcist.com). Deslippe (2015) notes another school led by Pastor Bob Larson, the International School of Exorcism, although it appears that Pastor Larson, who is often wearing a Roman collar in spite of no listed denominational affiliation, may be more of a brand than an actual ministry. He appears to have an entire YouTube channel and each page of his website (www.boblarson.com) links to an opportunity to pay for the service.

The anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann (2005) has posited a theory labeled *absorption* as explaining the contemporary rise of possession, trance, and dissociative disorders. She argues that cultures always have some form of altered perception but the prevalence waxes and wanes over time. Contemporary culture needs, and is therefore allowing, a greater deal of both positive and negative dissociations within individual experiences as a way of coping with contemporary needs and stressors (see also Lewis, 2015b).

This text is not an attempt to prove or disprove controversial concepts like demonic possession; there are already books and articles that purport to either prove (Kiely & McKenna, 2007; Peck, 2005) or disprove (Cortes & Gatti, 1975; Shermer, 2003) the experience. Rather, I hope to build upon those who have already reported upon the phenomenon (Baglio, 2009; Cuneo, 2001; Goodman, 1988a, 1988b; Hoyt, 1978; Wilkinson, 2007) in order to better understand it. Furthermore, a number of mental health practitioners have directly addressed spirit possession among their clients (e.g. Bull, 2001; Bull, Ellason & Ross, 1998; Crabtree, 1997a; Isaacs, 2010; Kiev, 1966, 1973, 1979; Peck, 1995, 2005). In writing this book, I hope to answer why demonic possession has held a cultural fascination for over two millennia as well as how clinicians can successfully and ethically deal with patients who legitimately believe they are possessed by a spiritual force. There is also mounting evidence that integrating a patient/client's worldview into clinical practice, including their spirituality and faith practices, increases their likelihood of getting better (Lund, 2014), which is a position I am overtly advocating.

Understanding the Phenomenon

I must begin with the assumption that demonic possession is a phenomenon that some patients believe they experience. As stated in the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association, under Dissociative Identity Disorder or DID (APA, 2013), possession is often a culturally sanctioned explanation for symptoms to which outside observers might ascribe different explanations. DID does not always translate well to other cultures, as Van Duijl, Cardeña and de Jong (2005) showed when comparing dissociative disorder understandings with traditional diagnoses in Uganda, particularly in regards to possession. We should not be limited solely to DID, however, as many other diagnoses can be understood by patients as due to spirit possession, including not only mental health concerns but also substance use and various physical ailments.

Because this text attempts to examine the phenomenological state of possession, it will use a variety of academic disciplines, including of course mental health fields like psychology and counseling theories, but also will include sociology, anthropology, literary and film theory, theology and the history of religions as well as the ever-evolving brain science. Such an approach has precedents, such as the historian Morris' (2011) examination of current Western hegemony. As he notes, while this approach allows for a breadth of vision, it is inherently limited, as no author can be expected to have a mastery of all the disciplines utilized. From a more subjective perspective, Quinones-Rosado (2010) has integrated mental health work among a diverse client population with an economic and political analysis of systems of oppression. His approach marries traditional therapy and social work with indigenous traditions native to the client, allowing the work of liberation to be unique and idiosyncratic. For an example of this integrative cross-disciplinary style within this subject, Khalifa and Hardie's (2005) research on Jinn possession among Islamic immigrants to the UK is an excellent example.

As a text that utilizes phenomenology, it is indebted to the original work of Hegel (1827/1968), who began the philosophical exploration of phenomenology, to be picked up by existential thinkers like Husserl (1900), Heidegger (1927/1968) and Frankl (1969, 1988). While Husserl (1900) helped to create the category of phenomenology, for him it was *a way of seeing* that led to transcendent truth about a *thing-in-itself* (Cairns, 1960). For existentialists, the phenomenon that is studied is wide-angled and tends to focus on a whole picture. For religious studies (James, 1995), phenomenology tends more toward examining specific rituals or beliefs, often from the perspective of those who are experiencing the particular phenomenon, a stance which has particular relevance for this study. And for others like Gabel (2013), phenomenology can be an act of not only academic importance but political and spiritual engagement, a way of looking at *The Other* that moves beyond metaphoric demonization toward an "I and Thou" relationship, in Martin Buber's terms (1970). Wolheim identifies that Buberian insight as a foundational insight in psychotherapy (2014).

All of this is a long way of stating that this is a book that looks at the phenomena of possession and exorcism as more than just pathology. The purpose of this text is to attempt an answer to the question, "*How can a culturally sensitive clinician treat a person who believes themselves to be possessed, in a manner that is both ethical and effective*?"

Layout of the Book

The book is laid out in such a manner that it can be read straight through or a reader may wish to skip to certain parts. The first section deals with a history of spirit possession in general and demonic possession in particular, from an ancient to a modern understanding. The second section is much more focused on issues of clinical concern; including the history of the diagnosis of Multiple Personality Disorder and the eventual change to Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) in the DSM-5. It also looks at mental health approaches and religious understandings in the light of post-modernity. Finally, the third section is an exploration of how clinicians can appropriately and ethically handle clients who believe that they are possessed.

It will be noticed that while most of the book is written in the passive voice common with APA style, there will be moments of personal reflection. This break in the style is designed to highlight certain personal experiences. I apologize if it is distracting, but frankly I find the dry distance of APA to be a bit dull for a reader and as a writer. There is a question of the use of sources in such a text as this. Some existing literature is academic but may be rather old, such as Oesterreich's *Possession and Exorcism* (1930). Other writers on the subject tend toward the idiosyncratic, such as the colorful character Montague Summers (1926, 1958), a man who passed himself off as a Roman Catholic prelate and wrote in an antiquated manner about the subject, viewing himself as the last of the witch-hunters (Radl, 2012). As much as possible, this work will attempt to cast a wide net to include many writers in multiple fields in order to get a sense of perspective upon the subject.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRIT POSSESSION

Before looking at the phenomenon of demonic possession specifically, it is helpful to define spirit possession from a broad perspective. Possession is defined as a trance state that includes the loss of the individual's persona and social identity, which is replaced by an alien entity, usually spiritual or at least non-human (Bourguignon, 1976; Crapanzano & Garrison, 1977; Davies, 1995). Davies (1995), in quoting Oesterreich (1930), clarifies that the persona of the person possessed is not to be understood as a normally changing, dynamic part of the original person's self. Rather, this is a completely different persona, and is usually interacted with in the context as if they are another person (see also Lewis, 1986/2003). Persona, in this sense, should not be confused with other definitions, like those of C. G. Jung (1976) who views the persona as a "mask worn" allowing an individual the chance to function in the world.

Crabtree (1997a) identifies the pioneering American psychiatrist William James' (1842-1910) theory of personality as being "possessed by multiple selves" (p. 394), with various selves available depending upon the situation and the needs being addressed. Persona and personality are terms that carry multiple understandings, due in part to theoretical understanding; it is for this reason I will try and use the term *alters* or *multiples* to describe the personality as manifested in DID unless that alter is specifically understood to be a spirit.

Cohen (2008) makes a different distinction, between possession that is a replacement of the person (which she labels executive possession) and possession that leaves the personality alone but which brings illness or curses/bad luck (labeled as pathological possession). Crabtree (1997a) differentiates between *trance possessions*, which involve a separate entity being in control and often include amnesia for the person possessed and *lucid possession*, which occurs when the person is aware of and passively observes the possession. Mikles (2015) documents the universal frequency of spirit possession within storytelling traditions, including classical Greek epic poetry but continuing into contemporary Tibetan storytelling as well as West African *griot* traditions of bards.

Prothero (2010), in writing about the African diaspora religious traditions that stem from Yoruba practices, differentiates between those practices within this tradition and other possession narratives:

> Yoruba trance dancing is often referred to as spirit possession, but that is not quite right, since the *orisha* [possessing deity] possessed both the body and the spirit of the devotee. Every word, gesture, and movement of someone who had 'made the god' manifests the possessor rather than the possessed…The most common analogy, however, is to a rider 'mounting' a horse—an image that carries with it sexual connotations of a dominant male 'mounting' a submissive female. (p. 237)

Belief in possession extends to objects as well as persons, as the entire concept of hauntings and poltergeists shows. Numerous films have been made about items being possessed, such as dolls (Duppils, 2015c) or houses (Morehead, 2015d). There seems to be a special creative tension when safe possessions, such as a child's toy or the family home, are seen as somehow evil or dangerous, revealing a degree of personal and social anxiety.

Trance States

The ability to enter a trance state, however it is understood, is available to all societies, if not all people (Bourguignon, 1973; Crabtree, 1997b). It is seen by some as a key part of worship, including in the Christian traditions known as Pentecostal and Charismatic (Blumhofer, 2000; Cox, 1995; Cuneo, 2001; Goodman, 1988a; Quebedeaux, 1983), although there are others who argue that glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, should not be seen as a form of trance state (Werse, 2015b). Trance states are a common experience among African and Afro-Caribbean worshippers, both in traditional African practices (Goodman, 1988b; Stoller, 1989; Stoller & Olkes, 1987; Watters, 2011) and in overtly Christian Pentecostal forms in places like Brazil (Dawson, 2015). Numerous so called "primitive" societies engage in shamanistic trance states to deal with a variety of problems in the world, from illness to identifying animals for the hunt as well as other questions, such as divination (Kiev, 1966). In fact, Hale (2009) claims that there is not a time in the past or present when shamanistic practice has not been practiced. Luhrmann (2005) has argued that the process of trance is connected with the ability to vividly imagine what one wishes, and this skill can be heightened in certain people and in certain circumstances. Crabtree (1997a) and (2009) notes how in many alternative religious traditions in the West, such as neo-shamanism and Wicca, trance states are often a part of the religious practice (see for example Harner, 1980). Ezzy (2015)

documents how in contemporary neo-pagan practice, especially among self-identified Heathens, ecstatic trance and possession by natural entities or spirits are common. While comparisons from ancient societies to modern practice can be tenuous, Hale (2009) has shown how cultural similarities are often looked at in anthropology and archeology as a way to give a sense of how pre-historic practices were performed and understood.

Kiev (1973) describes the techniques of the introduction of the trance state by "repetitive bodily movements, reduced sensory stimulation, exhaustion, hypoglycemia, and physical stress" (p. 29). Hale (2009) notes that the use of music is common in bringing about a trance state. A person achieving this trance state may do so via the use of intoxicating hallucinogenic substances such as the ayahuasca plant in the Brazilian rainforest (Dawson, 2015). The trance itself carries with it a degree of risk, as Balikci (1967) documents an indigenous Netsilik shaman named Anaidjuq whose possessing spirit would reportedly pull on his genitals.

It is worth noting that not all trance states result in spirit possession. In writing about a Hindu healer who worked in the States, Woodward (2016) writes, "When she turned her head I noticed that her eyes were turned upward, much like the eyes of exorcists I'd seen in Africa during a trance" (p. 268). The famous scholar of religion Mercia Eliade (1907-1986) as cited by Harvey (2015), in fact separates shaman trance states from possession. As Crabtree (1997b) has noted, trance states occur with frequency in daily life (such as the mild hypnotic effects of windshield wipers on the driver of a car). They can also be understood as an aspect to all understanding: there is a relationship trance where one sees the beloved in a way that others do not, a family trance, and a social trance. Satoh, et al. (1996) even document how a trance state can develop with both a customer and a salesperson in the midst of door-to-door sales. Crabtree (1997b) recognizes the necessity of many of those "trances" but also encourages clinical work to "break the spell" of a variety of trances in order to live more authentically. This approach seems very similar to Transaction Analysis (Berne, 1964) in the examination of the "games" that people use. Kirby (2006) argues that the media, especially electronic media, help to create a "pseudo-modern" trance that robs people of intellectual originality. I can attest to seeing such a trance when my young children become engrossed in the consumption of electronic media.

However, the effects of acute religious trance states can include incredible creativity among those who are engaged in the trance. As Goodman (1988b) states:

> I have heard hardworking, taciturn Mayan peasants, who in ordinary life had a difficulty uttering two coherent sentences in public, bringing forth

> poetry of surpassing beauty in ecstasy. Japanese religious leaders write truly enormous volumes of religious thought, again in poetic form, while possessed by their deity. . . And the pronouncements of demons, thought to speak from the mouths of the possessed, have been quoted by emperors and popes. (p. 9)

The trance state associated with spirit possession can also be associated with demonic or unclean spirits, which does not eliminate the chance for creative output (Spiegel, et al., 2011).

Certain cultures place a strong emphasis upon trance states. Uganda, for example, has experienced years of conflict that included forces initially led by Alice Auma (1956-2007), an illiterate woman from the Acholi people who are predominate in Northern Uganda (Sagert, 2015). In 1986 she began to channel "Lakwenda", a spirit she identified as belonging to a deceased Italian army officer after one of her tribespeople was overthrown from governmental leadership. She led the Holy Spirit Movement which militarily fought the government until its defeat one year later. Her troops were said to be in a trance when fighting, as well as being ceremonially covered in oil before battle to protect them from bullets and they carried stones believed to turn into grenades. These ritual magical ideas seem similar to the Native American Ghost Dance of the late 19th century, when fighters would wear tunics to protect themselves from bullets and it was believed that the White settlements would be somehow removed from the Earth (Brown, 2001), and the Boxer Rebellion in China (Thompson, 2001) at the turn of the 20th century, when forces that engaged in spirit possession by Taoist and Buddhist Deities fought against the 8 nations attempting the colonial takeover of the mainland.

A relative of Auma, Joseph Kony, reorganized the remaining forces into the Lord's Resistance Army. He identified a number of possessing entities, including "Major Bianca", "King Bruce" and "Silver". The Lord's Resistance Army has displaced over one million people and forced thousands of youths into their services, either militarily or as sex slaves. Ugandan possession states have been studied in a variety of papers, including interviews with those who were fighters in the uprisings as well as those who were displaced by the fighting (e.g. Neuner, et al.; Reis, 2013; Van Duijl, Cardeña, & de Jong, 2005; Van Duijl, Kleij, & de Jong, 2013; Van Duijl, Kleijn, de Jong, 2014; van Duijl, et al., 2013). It is interesting that possession is reported among both the fighters and those who were forced to flee from the conflicts.

Shamanic Practices

Morris (2011) has theorized, based upon studies of the early cave paintings in France and other places, that shamanism may have been the earliest expression of religion. Weiner (2011) points to the overlap between the roles the shaman helps to play within tribal societies and contemporary mental health care, including diagnoses, medication interventions, behavioral modifications, and supportive listening. Young (2018) claims that the role of shaman is often held by women, at least earlier in the historic record, although the literature includes significant male and female shamans as well as shamans who cross clear gender boundaries. Hale (2009) points to the fact that in tribal society the shaman is the only role that is exclusive, all other behaviors may be gender-based but could be performed by anyone within the tribe (such as hunting, building structures, cooking, etc.). This stands in direct contrast to the specialization that characterizes contemporary societies. While Levi-Strauss documents a shaman who in all other ways is like other tribal members (1967), it is clear that shamans often stand somewhat apart from the rest of the tribe in some way. Ambrose (1996) cites Crazy Horse's friend in the Oglala tribe Pretty One aka Woman Dress (birth and death dates unknown), who worked as a shaman as well as being a *winkte*, a person born a man but who dressed as a woman and had sexual relationships with both men and women. On the other hand, Kehoe (2000) cautions against generalized approaches across cultures when looking at shamanistic practice, viewing this tendency among scholars as a racist use of the Noble Savage myth. While shamans appear to have an important role in many societies, the role does carry some risk. In looking at pottery from the pre-Incan societies in Peru, one artifact shows shamanic characters being devoured by vultures. This has led to the theory that these were unsuccessful in their healing rites as the shaman appears to be alive while being consumed (Hale, 2009).

Levi-Strauss (1967) discusses previous research done by Boas (1930) in explaining the autobiographic writings of Quesalid (birth and death dates unknown), a Kwakwaka'wahk First Nation shaman from the Vancouver area. Quesalid began to be initiated into shamanic practices both within his tribe and a neighboring tribe. He was disturbed at the use of sleight-of-hand tricks, such as hiding a bloody piece of down inside the mouth, a form of psychic surgery (removing the sickness from the ill person), or driving hidden nails within the shaman's dwelling which appeared to cause a sacred rattle to levitate in the air. He soon challenged another shaman to a "healing duel" as a way of discovering some more illusions, and was more successful in convincing the suffering person of his power. This reportedly led the

other shaman to go mad and leave the village. However, as he continued to practice, he began to move toward a position of recognizing the healing power of rituals while affirming the inherent trickery in the practice.

Prevalence of Possession

We know that possession belief was widespread in the ancient world. The skeptical philosopher Larry Shapiro refers to possession throughout history as an example of "negative miracles" in the sense that they appear to be supernatural in a generally non-helpful manner (2016). Exorcisms by Jesus are detailed in the Gospel accounts (Davies, 1995). A long catalogue of illnesses and their demonic origins (as well as identifying angels who can counteract their effects) is used in the Gnostic text *The Apocryphon of John,* dating to before 185 CE (Wisse, 1988).

Bourguignon (1976) surveyed the work of anthropologists who examined 488 cultures, and discovered that 437 had beliefs in altered states of consciousness (ASC) including trance, possession or both, which is 90 per cent of the surveyed cultures. This left 51 (or 10%) of the surveyed cultures without a belief in an ASC like spirit possession. Ellenberger (1970) noted no belief in possession among certain tribes in the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula or among the Aboriginal people of Australia. In commenting on these findings of Bourguignon (1976), Davies (1995) points out that it is possible that the people in those cultures may have not shared their belief in ASC with the anthropologists studying them, so the actual figures of belief in ASC may be higher. He writes:

> Possession is not a fiction, not a pretense, not a kind of folk belief. Possession is a powerful psychophysiological experience that is so widespread in human cultures that the potential for the possession experience is part of the genetic inheritance of all people. To put it bluntly, if you do not occasionally become possessed it is because you have not placed yourself in circumstances where the achievement of the possession state is possible. (Davies, 1995, p. 25)

Goodman (1988b), when writing about Bourguignon's findings (1976), notes that spirit possession is culture-specific. Cultural beliefs are not static and do change, as documented by Dien, Alexander and Napier (2008) when looking at the length of time and education attained among immigrant communities in the UK. In a study in the US among inpatient residents in a psychiatric hospital, a high number reported a belief in possession and some had engaged in exorcisms to help with their symptoms (Ross, Schroeder & Ness, 2013).

Goodman (1988b) further notes that belief in something like spirit possession necessitates a belief in individuals having a spirit that can be possessed by an alien force, which she calls "soul theory". However, this does not include experiences of delusions, which may occur among people who ordinarily do not focus upon supernatural forces. Crabtree (1997b) has argued that possession states, like other "inner mind experiences" (p. 104) such as paranormal phenomena, are particularly difficult for Western people due to the widespread dismissal of the soul theory. Crabtree (1997a; 1997b) further advances that it is not necessary for the practitioner to have any belief in the objective reality of the patient's experiences or even subscribe to the "soul theory" themselves, only to understand that it is meaningful for the patient.

Common Possession Understanding in Africa

Goodman (1988b) separates spirit possession from demonic possession by stating that while spirit possession is intended (as in the acts of a shaman), demonic possession is unintended and unwanted, a distinction that is helpful but not used in much of the literature and as such, will not be followed in this text. Goodman (1988b) further separates the African understanding of possession and exorcism from the Eurasian ones, which are found in the Indian subcontinent, Asia, Europe and large parts of the Americas, although it is seen among the African diaspora due to the history of the slave trade. Within the African concept, possession may be by a positive or negative deity. Negative possession is sometimes by a ghost of the departed or a spirit and is treated with an exorcism that mimics a burial and subsequent rebirth. This is the style used in Haiti, Brazil and other areas with a strong African connection (Brown, 1991; Harrison, 2000).

Zora Neal Hurston (1891-1960), a novelist and anthropologist who was active in the Harlem Renaissance of African American culture in the 1920s (Varlack, 2015), traveled to Haiti and described the rites involved in zombification as well as spirit possession in her book *Tell My Horse* (1938). Contemporary Ethiopia has had a reported 66 per cent of the population witness a form of exorcism (Lloyd, 2015a). This breaks down to 74 per cent of the Christian community (which includes the ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as contemporary Protestants), 44 per cent of the Egyptian Muslim community, and many who identify with one of the dominant traditions while also being involved in the Zar practices that are described later in this text (Lloyd, 2015a). In post-war Mozambique, the percentage of surveyed participants who reported being possessed was 18.6%, with 5.6% reporting more than one spirit as the possessor (Igreja, et al., 2010). Schmidt

(2015a) documents how throughout areas bordering the Atlantic Ocean, communities of the African diaspora practice variations of these sacred spirit possessions with regional differences. Leo Africanus (1494-1544?), whose family fled Islamic Spain due to the *Reconquista* and subsequently traveled widely in northern Africa, reported on Muslim exorcists who would call upon the name of the spirit and ask how it entered the possessed person. When unsuccessful in the exorcism, they would then attribute the possession to the will of Allah (Hoyt, 1978).

Lloyd (2015) states that a belief in possession by ancestors is often the explanation offered for sickness throughout much of the world. This is reported to be common among the Zulu, Xhosa, and Swazi people of southern Africa, but it has expanded to other tribes and the white community as well. The role of a diviner, who is possessed by an ancestral spirit and reveals the cause of the illness, is often reserved for women or gay men. Newell (2015), in examining the phenomena of trepanning, or creating a whole in the skull, does address the common belief that this ancient practice was often to address illnesses, although in truly ancient remains we can often only speculate as to why the procedure was performed given there is no written record. This practice is satirized in the trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman (1995, 1997, 2000), where one of the parallel universes includes frequent trepanation.

Eurasian Possession Understandings

Within the Eurasian model, possession can be by many entities, including ghosts (Kiely & McKenna, 2007) and in Islamic cultures, Jinns or what used to be called in the West "genies", such as in Aladdin (see Khalifa & Hardie, 2005). Within Pentecostal communities, a wide variety of ailments like lust or addiction (Cuneo, 2000; Kraft, 2010) can be seen as a form of possession. Eurasian possession is often seen as negative and almost always unwanted, except in a few cases reported of those associated with occult practices (see, for example, Martin, 1976). A specific example is cited by Hanley & Brown (2014), who examined postnatal Arabic women who described possession by Jinns; their descriptions of sadness, anxiety, and physical malaise match a Western medical understanding of post-partum depression. Hinduism includes positive possessions by deities and negative possession leading to a variety of illnesses (Fibiger, 2015). In a recent study in Turkey of 618 women, over 2% reported a personal belief that they had been possessed in their life (Sar, Alioğlu & Akyüz, 2014).

A personal situation may help to explain Eurasian possession, as I understand it. My neighbor is a Hmong shaman, as was her husband. The

Hmong are a people who had lived primarily in Laos as subsistence hunters and farmers, practicing a spirituality focused on animistic and shamanistic practices. They joined US forces fighting against the Laotian government in the Vietnam War, an expansion of the war which was not well known in the US (Donnelly, 1994). After the fall of Saigon, many left for Thailand where they lived in refugee camps until some were able to immigrate to the US, a difficult process as subsequent generations attempt to hold onto important cultural beliefs while also adjusting to post-modern American life (Fadiman, 1997). After my neighbor's husband had passed away she found herself in a period of prolonged grief and bereavement. Unable to get out of her dark space, the family invited another shaman to the home as well as her clan and neighbors. This fits with a solid rule within shamanistic practice, as noted by Hale (2009), that the healing can only be done by a shaman to others, a shaman cannot bring healing upon him/herself. An exorcism was performed so that the ghost of her deceased husband would leave her. She was then expected to do the cleanup from the gathering, which was substantial as both a hog and a cow were butchered in the backyard. (Blood was literally flowing down our shared alley, but as I got to enjoy some of the feasting, I was not too upset.) The expectation of the (formerly) possessed person to do the work after the Hmong healing ceremony has also been cited in DuBois (2009), and at the gathering it was explained to me that this helps her to re-enter the community.

Signs of Possession

What does possession look like? The classic Roman Catholic definition holds that the possessed can speak other languages not otherwise known, possess superhuman strength, and have knowledge beyond the person (Midelfort, 2005). Burke (2011) notes that using the formal Catholic definition results in very few instances of demonic possession being found, in spite of the fact that Catholic exorcisms are steadily increasing. In almost none of the contemporary texts reviewed in this study can these symptoms be observed or verified, they are often not even reported (e.g. Baglio, 2009; Cuneo, 2001; Peck, 2005; Wilkinson, 2007). What is reported in contemporary reports includes some banal experiences, an unnamed exorcist is quoted as saying that one possessed person repeated "Hickory Dickory Dock" (Koningisor, 2011) while another included coughing fits (Baglio, 2007).

Some traditions within Islam have included physical illness and mental illness (including the hearing of voices) as symptoms of possession (Eneborg, 2015). Levack (2013) has shown that the classical definition

within Catholicism was not always strictly observed and differed from many Protestant traditions which, at least among Calvinists, tended to emphasize personal sinfulness. American Puritans observed a number of possessions associated with witchcraft that included fits, seizures, and hallucinations (Demos, 2008). Cited texts by Levack (2013) include commonly observed phenomena such as muscle rigidity and/or flexibility, pain, convulsions, levitation, swelling, vomiting, catatonia, and immoral gestures and actions including revulsion at sacred items and blasphemy. The tendency to vomit foreign objects is often associated with extreme self-harming behaviors and, according to Walsh (2014), usually is seen among the very psychologically ill as a coping strategy, such as prisoners who then are sent to the infirmary. While parallels in this category over vast time-frames and among culturally different people might be hard to draw, it is reasonable to assert that the consumption of foreign objects has historically been a sign of extreme distress.

In an interview with Malcom Poussaint, a Benin emigrant who works as a traditional exorcist among the African Diaspora in London, Tahir (2005) documents behavior among children which might trigger parents to seek out Poussaint's rituals: "running around, screaming, making noise, acting abnormally, hitting things, hitting people, jumping on the sofa" (n.p.). (As a parent of two small children, it is hard to imagine that my own children do not meet these criteria at some times on most days.) The ritual that Poussaint uses includes having the parents hold the child while he and they recite prayers, often after the child is bathed. The child is also anointed with oil and often all those who are gathered enter into a trance state, aided by Poussaint's drumming.

Possession and the Body

Bourguignon (1976) differentiated between spirit possession (the replacement of the self with another) and possession belief (which attributes an illness or other physical symptom to the influence of the spirit). Possession has long been connected with physical as well as psychological disease. The figure of Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra, circa 1500? BCE) is widely considered a shaman and exorcist and his influence included significant use of these rituals in Persia (Hoyt, 1978). Hoyt (1978) documents how all illness for ancient Egypt was tied to possession by evil spirits or Gods, and the role of exorcist was often combined with doctoring. A frequent type of ritual would include bread, beer, incense, and a statue of the god invoked. A stela (a stone inscribed by hieroglyphs) was discovered in a temple of the god Khonsu. It claims to date from the famous Pharaoh

Ramses II (circa 1303-1213 BCE) but was more likely created around 500 BCE. The stela tells of the possession of a foreign princess by a demon and her eventual healing when the statue of the god was transported, a story that seems to convey a sense of the power of the Egyptian Empire and Gods (Mansen, 2015). Duppils (2015b) notes how cultures as different as the Navajo (2015a) in the American Southwest and Sweden through history identify illnesses as caused by contact with spiritual forces.

A frequent example of possession stated in the literature is the confusion of epilepsy and possession. One of the miraculous exorcisms documented in the Gospel of Luke (9:39) is of an epileptic man. In a current study of school teachers and university students in Saudi Arabia, 40% and 50% respectively reported that epilepsy (in Arabic, *saraa*) is due to possession by "jinn" (Obeid, et al., 2012). As shown by Islam and Campbell (2014), this is not inherent in Muslim thought nor is it endorsed in the Quran, and thus it is more likely a symptom of a cultural belief. This association does not only occur in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Baxendale (2003) documents how it is also common in Western film. This combination of epilepsy and possession is ancient, going back to the Greeks and it continued even after the widespread adoption of the bodily humor theory of Hippocratic physicians (Scull, 2015).

Nakken and Brodtkorb (2011) hypothesize that epilepsy accounts for a larger amount of religious experience and writing than has previously been thought. Examples abound, including Salzman's (2001) novel *Lying Awake*, about a contemporary nun who is emotionally shattered to discover her visions of the divine were related to a temporal lobe tumor which is causing seizures. Kugel (2011) speculates that the theory that religious states (either of the divine or demonic) as stemming from temporal lobe seizures, such as those that occur in epilepsy, may have the relationship inverted; what the person with epilepsy is experiencing is a window into the spiritual world, or at least another experience of reality.

Hoyt (1978), who appears to believe in possession states in general, points to the exorcism of two boys, Theobald and Joseph Burner. The boys lived in the Alsace region between France and Germany and in 1869 underwent an exorcism, although the writer clearly felt their symptoms were likely undiagnosed epilepsy. It is interesting that a stone column was reportedly erected to remember their "liberation from possession" (p. 59) in a region that has historically been such a sight of territorial conflict. I could not find any evidence of the column still standing.

Worldviews

The mid-century theologian R. Richard Niebuhr (1962, 1999) theorized that there are four main worldviews: mechanical, magical, malevolent, and malleable. Of the four, the mechanical is the only one that categorically eliminates the "soul theory". It is also the approach most closely associated with modernity and the scientific worldview (Greenblatt, 2011; Morris, 2011). Greenblatt (2011) associates the success of the Western world with the scientific worldview, the mechanical approach that dismisses the "soul theory" and consequently, the possibility of an outside force possessing that soul. Given this mechanical presumption, any person who reports being possessed by an outside spirit becomes labeled as mentally ill (Spiegel, et al., 2011). However, this is but one of the existing worldviews.

It ought not to be presumed that Western psychological insights are exclusive, or even superior. It has long been noted that schizophrenia and other forms of psychosis appear to have much in common with religious experiences; including visions/hallucinations, a focus on the divine and demonic, and a sense of time and perception that differs from the norm. Burton (2015) states that both religious experiences and psychosis include activity in the right hemisphere of the brain. As Watters (2011) has argued, when looking at the results of the World Health Organization's study of recovery rates of schizophrenia (Hopper & Wanderling, 2000), societies that have a strong belief in spiritual forces affecting a person's mental health are more effective than Western medical approaches in dealing with persistent mental illnesses. Some anthropologists, such as Michael Taussig, have suggested that Western approaches toward possession act as a form of colonization (Cumo, 2015b). Every other culture has an understanding of the human condition, often using different worldviews (Ivey, D'Andrea, & Ivey, 2012). Carroll (2014) states:

> Yet moderns make a mistake by dismissing the long-ago-conjured images of space, time, origins, personified forces, and fate as mere naiveté. An assumption of the superiority of our more critically considered worldview may lead us to miss the ingenious character of the old imaginings as sensitive penetrations to an impressive depth of the perennial mysteries of existence. (p 86)

Western approaches to mental health and illness may be dominant due to Western cultural hegemony. However, current cultural and economic superiority from Western societies should not be presumed to be preordained, everlasting, or a given (Morris, 2011). For example, China's economic growth is neither based upon Western values nor presumptions,

but it is quickly becoming the world's largest economic force (*Economist*, 2012a). Brain scans have shown that people from China and other Asian cultures have different ways of seeing the world, their brains light up in other patterns that are different from the tendency of Western brains (Ivey, D'Andrea, & Ivey, 2012; Morris, 2011). Fox writes, "One becomes 'sick' or 'crazy' in a well-defined, cultural way…Primitive societies and religious healing groups often have the edge on hospitals in that they more often incorporate the sick person into the society and indeed often utilize the sickness in some cultural sphere" (1967, pp. 255-256). This does not prove the "soul theory", the possibility of spirit or demonic possession, or any sense of cultural superiority; it does however point to the fact that the world is experienced by each person mediated through both numerous idiosyncratic and socially ordained ways.

Anthropologists like Elms (1970) have pointed out that societies (including distinct counter-cultures) can collectively believe items that otherwise sane persons would reject. White (2006) rather helpfully clearly indicates that while contemporary society tends toward a post-modern understanding, persons may either be operating from a pre-modern, modern, or post-modern worldview. When approaching a client, from whatever culture or counter-culture they are from, it is important to remember their unique and personal experiences of the world. As Spiegel, et al. (2011) have noted, a patient's belief in spirit or demonic possession does not necessitate that the therapist holds the same belief, only that the practitioner respects such a belief as valid from the worldview of the patient.