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Crystal Healing Practices in the Western World and Beyond

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CRYSTAL HEALING PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN WORLD AND
BEYOND

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

Humans have been using crystals for various healing and ritual reasons for centuries. Both geographically and culturally, a diverse range of groups have turned to crystals and gemstones to address diverse needs over the millennia. While the oldest legends of crystal magic date back to the mythical ancient continent of Atlantis whose people allegedly used crystals for telepathic communication (Raphael 1985), it is believed that the crystal customs continued to perpetuate in Egypt, South America, and Tibet over subsequent centuries. Over recent decades, a renewed interest in crystals and gemstones has emerged in various New Age and mainstream contexts. In this thesis, I consider the ‘explanations’ for crystal and spiritual healing in the following interest areas: Great Britain, Indian Hinduism, and among various Native American groups.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When modern Westerners think of healing, they usually think of hospitals and people in white coats. Humans have long sought ways to treat themselves and others of physical, mental, and spiritual ailments. The history of healing goes back in time as far as the origins of humankind. How humans heal themselves has evolved over time as our ancestors got assistance from spirit doctors, minerals, special ceremonies, and healing crystals. Many different factors affect the kinds of physical healing methods and paradigms chosen. Among other things these considerations may be based on religion, socioeconomic status, and the society in which individuals live.

The oldest legends of crystal magic allegedly date back to the ancient continent of Atlantis. Some new age practitioners believe that the crystal customs from Atlantis continued to perpetuate in Egypt, South America, and Tibet. Kings in Ancient India collected gems of the highest quality to protect themselves from harm. Early works in astrology, originally written in Sanskrit and dating as far back as 400 B.C., make observations of the powers of these stones. A trauma would call for a particular gem to ‘counteract the negative effect.’ Wearing talismans and amulets around the neck has been a medical practice for many ancient cultures. Specific stones are used to bring about a desired effect (Raphael 1985).

According to New Age practitioners, crystals, in their modern-day usage, can be used as a teacher or source of spiritual guidance by anyone. Yoga and meditation normally go hand in hand with New Age crystal usage. Crystals are often featured in jewelry, remedies such as love gifts, and for meditation.

Crystals' healing properties are believed to fade over time if they are not recharged. A stone or crystal can be empowered by the energies of the person wearing it, or it may have to be recharged in other ways such as placing it under the sun or in cooling water. For stones that have been severely misused, methods exist for revitalizing them. Among other things, they can be washed in a saltwater solution as an effective treatment.

While biomedicine holds particular sway in the Western world when it comes to healing, many now seek more personalized style of healing as they are somewhat unsatisfied with modern medicine and practitioners. In fact, some have looked to revive the cultural traditions of previous generations. In part, some middle and upper-class individuals can seek out this type of healing because they have the time and funds to do so. One of the healing practices I will be researching is the usage of healing crystals. Although modern esoteric or New Age healing practices, like the usage of healing crystals, can be defined as a social movement with diverse goals, they also demonstrate a variety of personal and interpersonal values such as self-responsibility, psychological growth, and creativity (McClellan 2006).

Throughout time, humans have found interest in the colorful and glittering allure of stones. Their importance is proven in archaeological records, such as the Oxus Valley of Afghanistan where mining operations for crystal gems date back to about 7,000 years ago (Johari 1988). Clearly, the properties of these gems have been utilized for a long time. Their popularity is again beginning to build and take notice in the world of holistic health and particularly the New Age movement.

In my thesis I explore the world of crystal healing and the New Age movement to explain its resurgence largely from an anthropological perspective. I do this by examining the

origins and uses of crystal and spiritual healing within various Native American, Indian, and British historical contexts. These largely distinct groups all had varying styles of spiritual healing which is evident in their mythology and enduring cultural practices.

In researching these topics and looking for scholarly writings focusing on crystal healing and its origins, it is apparent that a lack of scientific and social scientific research in the area persists. Countless books and articles have been written on how to use healing crystals, but the sources of this information tend to lack depth and clarity. Many authors and writers within this body of work tout themselves as experts in New Age healing, but not necessarily anthropology, medicine, history, or religious studies. Information about crystal and spiritual healing is found across some of these disciplines in my research and helps paint a clearer and more holistic picture of the subject.

Crystal healing, the way it is utilized by new age practitioners now, has many potential origins. In my research, I found three overwhelmingly important cultures when it came to the tradition of using crystals for healing. Those three cultures were Indian, British, and Native American. India's long-standing Vedic tradition has inspired many young people in the west to broaden their spiritual knowledge. Crystal healing was popular in India as a form of holistic healing, as it is even written in their holy texts. I selected to research the British culture for its rich pagan history that has inspired many modern wiccans today. Although Wicca and New Age are different groups, there are a few points where their rituals overlap – such as crystal healing. There has also been a considerable amount of social scientific research done on alternative medicine in England that has aided to my study. Native American Crystal Healing traditions are

prevalent in New Age literature. It is clear that Native American peoples have influenced modern crystal usage along with a handful of other cultures.

For the reasons stated above, I have decided to take a closer look at Indian, British, and Native American crystal healing origins, traditions, and modern applications.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Although my thesis approaches crystal healing within both ancient and New Age contexts, I do not directly rely on traditional ethnographic data collection techniques such as semi-formal interviews and participant-observation. Rather, the methodology I employ for this study involves a heavy literature review and analysis related to some key research questions.

Questions I explore over subsequent pages are:

- 1.) How is Native American Crystal healing practiced?
- 2.) Are Vedic crystal practices still used in modern India?
- 3.) How do 'New Age' practices borrow from other cultures? Is this considered "white-washing"?
- 4.) Why are traditional and spiritual healing practices becoming popular in the Western world and what are their potential benefits in a culture of biomedicine?

Study Limitations

From my literature review, it appears evident that few critical studies concerning crystal and spiritual healing exist. Much of my research will be completed through the analysis of scholarly articles, books, and religious texts. Researching the origins of crystal healing among Native American cultures in detail may prove challenging given the significant reliance on oral history as a means of transmission.

Another limitation relates to the fact that when it comes to crystals most New Age studies lack in-depth critical explanations. Although there are many books explaining New Age practices, few include explanations of mythological, cultural, or historical origins. I will explain

New Age healing in a way that makes it easier to understand so that future researchers can determine whether the practices could be used in quantitative studies and gradually brought into Western medicine.

Current Study

The study of crystal and spiritual practices is important for many reasons. First, spiritual methods of healing predate biomedicine by thousands of years. It is important not to lose the historical and emotional importance that these practices hold. The current study elucidates some of the origin stories and reasons behind traditional healing. By researching traditional healing and understanding why it works for some and retains importance among certain cultures, findings can advance the knowledge of other fields outside of anthropology. Religious studies, biomedicine, and cultural studies can all benefit thorough explanations and understanding of different healing practices. It is a possibility that someday Western hospitals could offer ancient healing practices. In this study, I will explain the origins of crystal and spiritual healing from different perspectives and demonstrate how those ancient traditions still affect us in the modern age.

First, I will discuss Western Esotericism in the New Age and how healing crystal practices emerged in the Western world. I will then consider European Pagan crystal healing practices as well as Indian and Native American crystal healing practices. Finally, I will conclude my thesis by considering how the New Age movement is affecting modern cultures and whether or not its rituals could be considered appropriation.

CHAPTER THREE: WESTERN ESOTERICISM AND THE NEW AGE

The New Age movement is a relatively recent phenomenon in the world of religious traditions. Sometimes not even overtly religious in nature, New Age traditions vary greatly in application. Modern esoteric healing practices, or New Age, can be defined as a social movement with diverse goals, but which may be likely to demonstrate a variety of personal and interpersonal values such as self-responsibility, psychological growth, and creativity. Generally, Western esoteric tradition experienced a rebirth after a long decline in occult practices due to strong Protestantism throughout the 19th century. Esoteric tradition appealed to those interested in both magic and science. It dealt mainly with the occult, spiritualists and other pagan ritual behaviors. (Melton 2017).

As time went on, these old occult arts were transformed so that they would make more sense in the modern world and, therefore, renamed the ‘New Age Movement’ (Melton 2017). Ritual practices became more popular as more controversial rituals, such as animal sacrifice, were cast aside. Other rituals such as the reading of tarot cards and the study of astrology were popularized and made easy to understand for everyday Westerners. Now it is easy to find all sorts of materials on these topics at large chain bookstores.

There is evidence of Christian, Atheist, Hindu, and Buddhist influences throughout the New Age movement (Melton 2017). By the 1980s, interest in crystal healing dramatically increased after Edgar Cayce published a booklet about the potential of crystals to transform spiritual energies (Melton 2017). This increasingly popular trend resonated with many Westerners with disposable income and interest in new types of self-care. Stuart McClean tested the effectiveness of New Age healing techniques McClean is senior lecturer in the Faculty of

Health and Social Care at the University of the West of England in Bristol. He articulates the distinction between efficacy and effectiveness. To him, efficacy involves testing New Age interventions under ideal circumstances, whereas effectiveness entails testing New Age interventions under normal circumstances. He tests the effectiveness of crystal and spiritual healing in a more ‘qualitative application’ looking at effectiveness (McClellan 2006). The effectiveness of spiritual healing is tested on multiple individuals in a healing center in England with a trained healer and spectators.

Effective spiritual healing is determined by the participant’s experience, the healer’s performance, and the expectations of others present. Healers must be able to convince themselves, their client, and audiences of their crystal-healing competency. Part of this confidence comes from the performative side of spiritual healing. Quite simply, healers must be knowledgeable, likeable, and authentic.

Healers must be aware of the multiple histories and origins of crystal healing. Some crystal origins are tied back to Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, while others point to Ayurvedic traditions in India. Crystal history can also be traced back to Ancient Greece and Rome. An understanding of these histories gives healers the ability to both treat patients with confidence and demonstrate a blended personal performance of well-rounded spiritual competency. Such competency may also demonstrate parallels to Western biomedicine.

McClellan also suggests that the effectiveness of a healing procedure is directly related to a healer’s sincere performance. He explains his own experience watching someone perform crystal healing. The healer channeled the energy of a spirit doctor and would perform with different

voices and body movements. He aims to demonstrate the simultaneous sincerity and competency of the spirit doctor and the professionalism of the healer.

For crystal and spiritual healing to be legitimized by healthcare specialists, it must be proven to be effective. Stuart McClean's work is a helpful resource for making holistic healing mainstream.

CHAPTER FOUR: EUROPEAN PAGAN PRACTICES AND CRYSTAL HEALING

Anglo Saxon Paganism has its roots in Great Britain, but paganism has a diverse history across Europe. Before Christianity, many people worshipped their ancestors and had a great respect for the Earth. Crystal healing seemed to jibe well with astrology, the study of movements of celestial objects across the sky to predict events.

Peter Stockinger, author of *Stars and Stones: An Astro-Magical Lapidary* (2016:13) says this: “Although lapidaries have a long history and can be traced as far back as at least the third century BC, they generally began to fall out of favor during the 17th century. At the same time, traditional Western astrology, informed by hermetic and Neo-Platonist theories, was being marginalized by the ever-growing influence of scientific rationalism.”

Western astrology and paganism go hand in hand. Certain stones are believed to be aligned and share properties with certain planets. Ancient crystal healing in Britain, and many other places, had a lot to do with the stars. Just as elements and human-like characteristics have been attributed to the planets, so too have certain minerals and gems. For example, Mars is related to iron, Sun to gold, Moon to silver, Mercury to quicksilver, Venus to copper, Jupiter to tin, and Saturn to lead (Stockinger 2016).

Stockinger notes that trust in astrology ceded a great deal to scientific rationalism. He explains how astrological charts were created based on the time and location of the planets and stars when someone was born. For example, if many of the major star formations fell in line with the moon at someone’s time of birth, that person might be prescribed to use moon-related stones

for health reasons. Some moon-related gems would be moonstone, selenite, pearl, crystal quartz and iris.

Other cultures have also developed their own interpretations of astrological horoscope charts and specific gemstones. Ayurveda and Hinduism also use some of these practices. Brown, R. S., Jr., author of *Handbook of Planetary Gemology* (1983:1) states “An astrological horoscope charts the location of various planets at the time of one’s birth. The motion of the planets and their positions in relation to each other acts upon us throughout our lifetimes”

Practices that at one time may have been misunderstood by modern people have now been simplified. Astrology and its relation to crystal healing can be researched on the Internet or found in bookstores or libraries. Ancient European Pagan practices have been brought back to life by those searching for new spirituality.

Crystal Healing Practices in Modern Great Britain

One great resource about the healing practices in modern Great Britain is *An Ethnography of Crystal and Spiritual Healers in Northern England* (2006) by Stuart McClean. His research in this book focuses on the renewal of alternative health practices in the Western world.

McClean used healing crystals in his youth and decided to use his experience as the basis of his doctoral degree. He received his Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the University of Hull. McClean explains that in modern times there is much social pushback to alternative medicine. He felt that the users of spiritual healing techniques needed more of an explanation as to why they use the practices they do without being casted

aside as medical fiction. McClean pursues his one year participant observational research at the Vital Energy Healing Center in Granby, England; a very rural area with high level of unemployment. At this institution, he not only learns about the relationship between spiritual healing and biomedicine, but also the stories of the healing center's founders.

One argument for spiritual medicine's recent resurgence is the failure of biomedicine to meet the needs of some people, particularly during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. Spiritual healing traditions became popular during this time in Western Europe, Canada, and the U. S. Today, the state continues not to recognize crystal healing practices in the same way as biomedicine. Healers and sociologists alike started to use the term complementary medicine and not alternative medicine, hoping to become recognized by the government as a legitimate form of medicine. McClean refers to these healing practices as CAM (Complementary Alternative Medicine).

It is assumed that biomedicine holds viability because science is a largely Western cultural trend that is relatively new. While spiritual healing and CAM are more popular worldwide, biomedicine tends to have more efficacy as a treatment. Despite such differences many people still rely on spiritual healing. Some are looking for different care options and now have more access to information through the Internet. Many are deciding to use both spiritual and biomedical health practices.

Crystal healing is typically among a more affluent clientele that can afford spending money on better quality crystals. Practitioners of CAM are trying to bring levels of professionalism and affordability to the field so that it becomes more widely recognized and

sought after by clients. Practices like reflexology and chiropractic techniques are already widely used and accepted by everyday consumers (McClellan 2006).

Since the mid to late 19th century, according to McClellan, biomedicine has held social, economic, and ideological dominance over the field of public health in Western societies. Biomedicine is a highly depersonalized view of health. Personal responsibility for health grew in the 1980s, so consumers started to do a lot of their own research which led them to CAM.

During McClellan's 12 month stay at the Granby healing center he spoke with the owner, Teresa. She would emphasize individuality to the other teachers at the center, but wanted them to stay grounded in the traditional course structure. Healers are mainly concerned with demonstrating competence in their practice, so that they appeal to everyday consumers who are more accustomed to depersonalized and de-spiritualized medicine. CAM is showcased to customers in ways that make them feel as if they are receiving a real service and not being tricked.

Healers usually rely on an existing set of beliefs or structures when they teach. Often structures and vocabularies come from one or more religious traditions. Some CAM healers emphasize their healing on the principles, symbols, and vocabulary of science.

When it comes to crystal healing, healers first must decide which crystal would be most beneficial. Next, healers rely on their own intuition to determine which crystal would work best for their client. The crystal healer must demonstrate expertise that certain crystals would work better for the client than others. After purchasing a crystal, it is typically cleansed with sea salt to remove impurities. Another method of crystal purification involves running cool water over it and laying it in the sunlight to re-charge.

CAM is largely focused on appealing to consumers, demonstrating validity, and recognizing personal style. here does not seem to be any clear 'rules' in the world of crystal healing as seen through a 'New Age' perspective. A distrust of scientific medicine and a desire to bring individualism and spirituality back into healing in Great Britain and other places in the West brought about this subculture.

McClellan's work strives to normalize and legitimize the art of complementary alternative medicine. His ethnography brings us into the world of holistic healing, as he explains the everyday lives of healers and their own personal healing practices. McClellan explains the reasons why everyday people in the West may be turning to CAM. Studies such as McClellan's could be instrumental in making holistic healing an everyday practice in Great Britain.

CHAPTER FIVE: INDIAN CRYSTAL HEALING AND AYURVEDIC PRACTICES

Vedic texts give us a great deal of information about the significance of crystals in India. The *Garuda Purana* and *Graha-gocara Jyautisha* are the specific religious texts that give us insight about where crystals come from and their individual significance. The Vedic demon Vala plays a large role in the origin story of ayurvedic crystal healing practices. One day, Hindu Demigods decided to trick Vala into attending a ‘pretend’ sacrificial ritual performance. Allowing himself to be tied to the stake for this performance, Vala found that the demigods were not pretending any longer. The Demigods dismembered Vala and his body parts became gem seeds, falling into rivers and oceans as well as onto forests and mountains. All of the gems contain talismanic powers which are made more powerful by purity of the gem.

The Ruby is the blood of demon Vala that had spilled upon the Earth. Blood dropped into pools of water, now known as the sacred Ganges River. An example of a ruby’s talismanic powers relates to blood circulation. Rubies help bring out one’s courageousness while also removing sadness and sensuality.

Pearls are representative of the teeth of Vala that fell into the sea. They are used for calming the mental state. Yellow sapphire is the skin separated from Vala’s body. It promotes a general well-being and helps with stages of pregnancy. Hessonite is the fingernails. Hessonite is thought to avert disaster and insanity, while also helping the minds of those who work in the sciences. Emerald is the bile of Vala that helps with psychic powers, learning ability, and clairvoyance. Diamond is the bone and induces purity, creativity, and worldly happiness. It is also useful for diseases of the sex organs.

Cat's Eye is representative of the war cry that that Vala unleashed at the time of his arrest. Cat's eye is meant to assist with protection from enemies, drowning, intoxication, and government punishment. Blue Sapphire was the eyes of demon Vala. It keeps away the evil eye and protects one while traveling. Coral is the intestines – and the gift that Coral brings is the ability to remove obstacles and money-related issues. Red Garnet is the toenails of Vala and It has the same talismanic properties of Ruby. Jade is the scattered fat of Vala, and when in fine quality, it has the greatest ability to remove bad karma. It shares similar properties with Emerald.

Rock Crystal is Vala's semen, with the same powers as pearl. Bloodstone was Vala's complexion, with the same talismanic properties as Coral. The importance of each crystal is magnified by where it was sourced from on the demon's body. Ayurvedic practices assign these stones to their corresponding chakras, calling upon them for their healing properties.

In the summer 2017, I visited Dharamshala, India. This mountainous part of India is more rural than urban cities farther south like Delhi and Mumbai. During my time there, I met practitioners of many religions including Hinduism, Sikhism, and Tibetan Buddhism. In every store I entered, I was greeted by crystals of every color and shape. After investigating a bit and speaking to many people in town, I found out that crystal usage in Northern India is still very prevalent today among people of all local religions.

Tibetan refugees studying and practicing Buddhism used the stones in meditation as *malas*, or prayer beads in the form of necklaces and bracelets. Young Hindus and Sikhs alike admitted that their mothers and grandmothers still prescribed healing crystals when one needs safety, bodily healing, or the mending of a broken heart. Therefore, it is evident that modern people are still using age-old techniques to fix their problems.

When modern medicine does not work, or if it is too expensive, people still turn to the age-old practice of crystal healing paired with meditation. As it is deeply ingrained into the Hindu religion and Indian culture, it makes sense that crystal healing practices would persist through time in India. Young people in India bring the practices to the West and young Western travelers see these traditions in India and bring them back home.

CHAPTER SIX: NATIVE AMERICAN CRYSTAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

Yet another historical epicenter of crystal healing comes from Native American culture. Although much of the original information on the origins of crystal healing have been lost to time, rituals and rules of healing have been passed down by word of mouth. In *The American Indian Secrets of Crystal Healing* (1997), Luc Bourgault, explains that “The teachings (of crystal healing) have, until quite recently, always been passed on by word of mouth, in line with the didactic tradition particular to the American Indians of the Cherokee and Apache tribes.” (Bourgault 1997:7) A didactic tradition of teaching is a method that follows a consistent scientific approach or educational style to engage the student’s mind. Nearly all teachings about crystal healing within Native American groups, particularly the Apache and Cherokee tribes, have been taught orally and directly to a group of students.

Among different Native American groups, many traditions and secrets of crystal healing have been passed down for generations by word of mouth and lost, likely due to the endangerment and extinction of indigenous languages. Bourgault explains that there are two very important principles of crystal healing. One is meditation and the other is respect. Meditative practices vary from person to person, but it is important to meditate on good thoughts and have a healthy mindset before handling crystals (1997:17).

Respect for crystals is important because, there is a great respect for the Earth and all beings on it in most Native American religions. Stones are considered an entity that must be shown honor. The Earth provides life, nature, food, and important crystals used for healing. The book suggests being more mindful about waste produced in daily life. It is helpful to remember

to recycle cans and paper when possible. This shows respect to the earth and, in turn, the crystals.

According to Native American traditions, crystals can be utilized in various ways. Stones are carried by practitioners to benefit from the healing vibrations. Tinctures of a stone can be made with water and administered internally. Several crystals may also be worn simultaneously to benefit from all the healing properties, but the crystals themselves should not be allowed to touch.

Some rituals of using the healing crystals that are used by New Age practitioners are considered 'seriously disturbing' by Native American Apache Tribal communities and some others, and from his perspective, particularly the Apache (Bourgault 1997:8). Some of these practices are:

- 1) Placing crystals on the ground in a geometric configuration and sitting in the middle to meditate.
- 2) Placing crystals directly on one's energy centers (chakras). This practice is particularly dangerous when carried out on several chakras with several crystals. (Bourgault 1997:8)

The practice of putting healing crystals on all seven chakras is an eastern tradition. Placing crystals on the ground and meditating is more of a pagan/occult tradition. There seems to be a bit of tension or controversy surrounding the origins of New Age practices. (Bourgault (1997:19) compares the Meditative practices of Native Americans to the same practices of the Tibetan Buddhists. He notices that the spiritual principles and general form of meditation are nearly identical.

Perhaps these cultures have borrowed rituals from one another. It is also possible that the traditions are so ancient that they predate human history. Especially in the case of Native American crystal traditions that were never written down and much of their native languages have been lost. These traditions are still used today by native peoples and by New Age practitioners who may or may not be following the traditions as they were intended. Bourgault (1997:8) explains that Native American people are particularly concerned with the misuse of crystals. Native American peoples care for their crystals and purify them for correct usage.

It is possible to make a mistake with crystal tools if used incorrectly. Some examples of incorrect usage are not being in a state of perfect balance, or not being able to sense the level of healing necessary for a patient. To work with crystals in the Native American tradition, the fundamental laws of healing must be followed. Those laws are unconditional love, non-attachment, and intention. This is similar to principles found in many Buddhist crystal practices. Bourgault mentions that Native American meditative practices are very similar to those of Tibetan Buddhist monks (Bourgault 1997:19). When programming a crystal for usage, the process requires complete focus. Deep breaths are directed to the crystal with good intention. This gesture is found in many creation myths where a god will breathe life into an object, making it whole.

Native American crystal healing origins may be mysterious and magical in nature, but certain parallels are drawn between cultures. Still, Native American healing holds strong to its roots and does not allow for too much mixing of crystal healing practices. More scholarly writing in the field of Native American crystal healing would be useful in painting a clearer picture of

where traditions came from. For now, new age practitioners take bits and pieces of the tradition and use it as needed.

A Study of Natural Healing Practices with Native American Peoples

With Westerners showing more interest in traditional healing practices – emergence of naturopathic doctors and Chinese healing specialists becoming more and more common on the frontline of healthcare for everyday people. A hospital named Min No Aya Win Human Services Center in Cloquet, Minnesota is considering offering traditional healing services. Since it is located in an area near many Native American people, a study was done to see if healing rituals actually worked on patients – and if they were even desired.

Researchers Greensky, Stapleton, Walsh, Gibbs, Abrahamson, Finnie and Hooten published an article called “A Qualitative Study of Traditional Healing practices among American Indians with Chronic Pain.” This fascinating article explains what types of natural healing techniques were used, if they were accepted at all by Native American people, and how well the techniques were working at alleviating chronic pain. Twenty-one participants (10 women and 11 men) with chronic pain were studied for the article. The following traditional healing practices were utilized: burning sage, sweat lodge, ceremonial tobacco, feasting, pipes, storytelling, and contact with a traditional Native American healer.

Practices differ between Native American groups for healing, but the emphasis on traditional healing practices is very important to this day. Native American people have higher prevalence of chronic pain than other groups in the United States, perhaps due to laborious jobs.

It is believed that there may be a cultural reluctance to get biomedical help within the Native American community.

All patients in the study were recruited from the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center located in Cloquet, Minnesota. Qualitative information was obtained through interviews. During interviews, 66 per cent of the participants described using traditional practices for healing in their own home. These participants explained a need to become grounded spiritually to feel better.

Participants who were not raised in a native lifestyle were not familiar with these traditional practices but were open to trying these new tactics. One rural participant mentioned that his traditional medicine man gave him a large rock to meditate and pray with – and that is his preferred way to heal. According to participants, these sessions with a traditional healer did not just improve mental health states but also physical states and lessening of pain. Frequent use of traditional healing practices in modern times has been traced to Navajo, Sioux, Blackfeet and Tlingit tribes. This study helped to bridge the gap between Native American people and ancient healing techniques they may or may not be familiar with.

Individuals who had a more “White” cultural identity, living in urban settings, were more hesitant about the inclusion of Native American traditional healing into biomedical practices. The main reason for the study was to see if traditional healing options should be offered to Native American patients at the Min No Aya Win Human Services Center. In the end, specific traditional practices to offer at the health center were not identified, as Native healing culture differs a lot among tribes and among those who have had a more “white” upbringing.

It is clear from the study that there is still a real interest from modern Native American people to implement traditional healing into their healthcare routine, especially in those Navajo, Sioux, Blackfeet and Tlingit tribes. Therefore, it is important to recognize Native American practices and make them more accessible. For those who desire to practice crystal healing, it is evident that the results are remarkably positive.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NEW AGE PRACTICES

Many questions arise when considering the New Age movement from a critical social scientific perspective. As previously mentioned, Western esoteric tradition experienced a rebirth after a long decline in occult practices under the thumb of protestant rule in the 19th century. Esoteric tradition followed science as well as magic and appealed to a great deal of people (Melton 2017). Magic and science began to mix and grow, creating what is known now as the New Age movement. Neo-Pagan Wicca was one of the first Western religions to pick up the trend of using both science and magic to explain life on Earth.

Contacting the spirits of the deceased sprouted a movement called ‘Spiritualism’ that began in Hydesville, New York and spread across America and eventually into England and France. Over time the Esoteric and consequently New Age movement changes and branches off into many directions. Followers of occultist, spiritualist, and esoteric traditions were searching for a new outlook – which they created over time.

Evidence of Christianity, Atheism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and more, can all be found within New Age traditions. New Age promised the transformation and enlightenment of individuals. Occult tools such as astrology, palm reading, and meditation would be used to achieve these goals. In the 1980s the New Age movement hit its peak of popularity as it now attracted followers of older esoteric traditions and therefore many of the followers consider themselves New Age.

Old Occult arts were re-worked so that they would make better sense in the modern world. Crystal healing emerged as a prominent spiritual tool after the publishing of a booklet by Edgar Cayce in the 1980s about the potential of crystals to transform spiritual energies (Melton

2017). Quickly, New Agers caught on to this and started to use crystals the way they are used today by these communities.

Many people claim to have a transformative experience after deciding to follow New Age rituals and behaviors. The manipulation of crystals and spiritual energies are age-old occult traditions that have been brought into new light by dedicated and inspired individuals in the New Age community. Despite criticisms from the church and older adherents of Western esoteric traditions, the popularity of New Age has continued to spread and evolve ancient traditions.

New Age practices in our world today seem to come from the desire of people wanting to connect with their more spiritual self. When entering Avalon, a New Age ‘metaphysical gift and book’ store located in Orlando, Florida USA, one gets a definite taste of the New Age culture and its variances. The walls are lined with shelves decorated in statues of holy figures. Candles depicting catholic saints can be found right next to metal statues of Ganesh and a golden Buddha. This new spiritualist store speaks to a very specific and yet diverse clientele.

Surrounded by plenty of hip vegan restaurants and holistic healing centers, Avalon sits in the middle of a community that is truly coming into its own. In the store, one can find self-help books, take classes on how to read Tarot, and collect beautiful cultural talismans inspired by peoples around the world. At the center of it all, and in my opinion the true heartbeat of the store, is its crystal collection.

To me, Avalon is the perfect example of the good that New Age is trying to bring to the world. It promotes peace within religions, good diet, good mental health, and plenty of other things that attract a young clientele – or a clientele looking for deeper meaning in their daily lives. There does not seem to be a way to describe the New Age in a neat way. The culture is

broad, overwhelmingly accepting, and seeming to grow across many places in the West. Once immersed into this culture, it becomes easier to see why it has become an attractive form of healing.

While completing this thesis, I have also been introduced to several complaints surrounding New Age culture, spiritualism, and healing practices. It is felt by many people that New Age culture appropriates foreign cultures. It has been blamed for white-washing certain practices and normalizing ways of life that were not as ‘cool’ when they were done by immigrants or native peoples. I believe that these criticisms of the New Age are entirely valid, and it is worthwhile to at least consider this side of the coin when exploring different religions through the New Age. It is always good to practice respect and mindfulness when learning about others’ ways of life. I believe that it is a blanket statement to say that all practitioners of New Age are doing so in a way that is appropriative.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Crystal and spiritual healing has been present throughout a large portion of human existence. Humans have always sought out ways to feel better, to bring luck, and to cure illness. In modern times, the world of healing is overwhelmingly biomedical. Despite the spread of popular culture in medicine, some people are still seeking a more spiritual experience – either due to failure of biomedicine or a desire to add spirituality to their life.

The origins of crystal healing are vast and mysterious. Historically, crystals have been a large influencer of healing in British Pagan, Indian, and Native American cultures as well as many more not covered in this study. Although, the practices between these cultures differ, many of the meanings and purposes of the stones are the same. Whether this common knowledge was passed along physically or by the divine, the world of crystal healing is important to study for cultural anthropologists, archaeologists, biologists, doctors, sociologists, psychologists and doctors of religious studies.

It was made clear to me during my research that there have not been many scholarly studies done on the origins of crystal healing. I believe that this topic will see growth in the coming years as more people seek out spirituality and New Age rituals to fulfill the spiritual aspects of their lives while not feeling barred by the rules of religion. As religious speech is taken out of the school system and much of the media, people may seek out spirituality in a new way.

Native American crystal healing is not practiced in the same volume that it once was, but those who remember the traditions have passed them along orally or in books. New age practitioners are taking some of their inspiration from Native American tradition and in order to

do so respectfully, more literature should be made available. Rekindling the fire for Native American people to rediscover and share knowledge about their healing practices is a big focus for some researchers. Native American Crystal healing has a huge emphasis on respecting the earth and mindful meditation.

New age practices borrow from Indian, Pagan, and Native American religions. Sometimes a single book on crystal healing from the ‘New Age’ section of the bookstore can contain rituals from multiple religions. Throughout my research, I have realized that new age practices are an attempt by Westerners to enrich their lives ritually by many different means. It is easy to call this “white-washing”, and in many instances, this would not be wrong. I believe that it is possible to borrow rituals and practices from another culture without being disrespectful – just be mindful of the origins of the cultural practices.

Vedic crystal practices are still very much alive in modern India. Practices and traditions are used by older and younger populations, as the healing practices are closely related to religious texts. India is a popular destination for Western travelers to visit for spiritual learning. Therefore, it is clear that many eastern traditions have been brought to the west and popularized.

Traditional and spiritual healing practices are making their way to the West by means of migration, the Internet, Interest in spirituality, and a desire to rekindle ancient healing practices. With access to so much information via books and the Internet, people have realized that they have a world of options when it comes to healing. When biomedicine fails (in the form of medication side-effects, failures, allergies, etc.) holistic healing appears to be the next best thing. In a world where biomedicine dominates healing regimes, there are many benefits to the spread of holistic healing practices. If people find crystal and spiritual healing to be effective, they may

spend less money on healthcare. They may also feel more fulfilled spiritually and emotionally – leading to better mental health.

Although the culture of crystal and spiritual healing is an ancient practice, it is being recycled in a way where the rules and rituals are shared from across cultures, bringing together a new group of spiritualists. For whatever underlying reason, more people are seeking out spirituality and I believe that it is important to talk about where healing crystal practices come from so that this priceless information does not become lost over time.

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