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AN EXAMINATION OF NAVAHO WITCHCRAFT AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON THE THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS OF THE NAVAHO PEOPLE

by

Tarrel R. Palmer

A report submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Psychology

(Guidance and Counseling)

Plan B

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Tarrel R. Palmer

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past six years of working as a counselor with Navaho students in a boarding school situation, I have become increasingly aware of the belief, in varying degrees, of many of the Navaho in witchcraft and of its subsequent effect on their lives. I am presently working in an area described as being very active in the practice of witchcraft (Kluckhohn, 1944). Another author says of this area, Newcomb, New Mexico, "I was not surprised to find the belief in black magic one of the dominant forces in the lives of the Navajo families living around the Newcomb Trading Post." (Newcomb, 1966, p. 193)

I frequently have students with whom I am working who believe they have been witched or have come in contact with ghosts and desire ceremonials to be performed for them in an effort to counteract the problems that have resulted. Their belief in these things is strong enough that I feel the students are continually on their guard against certain acts on their part or on the part of others that would cause them to come under the influence of witchcraft. According to Kluckhohn and Leighton (1960, p. 129), even "Navahos who seem to be completely 'emanipated' from other aspects of their religion will still show tremendous fear of witches, once a situation takes on a certain coloring."

Problem

If educators are to hope to understand and deal effectively with the problems of Navaho youth, at least a basic understanding of these

beliefs is necessary. The persistent problem, however, is that most counselors, teachers, and dormitory staff members do not understand the Navaho beliefs pertaining to witchcraft and, therefore, are limited in dealing with it.

In my six years of working with Navajo students, I have found no non-Navaho with any real knowledge of witchcraft. They know only fragments concerning it and these are most frequently used in jokes or in making fun of these beliefs.

One noted anthropologist who made ethnographic studies of the Navaho covering a period of 37 years, befriended them, lived in their hogans with them, and spoke their language fluently stated:

... belief in the existence of witches is manifested in expressions of fear of individuals and of places and objects held to be associated with witchcraft. Distrust and suspicion of certain persons unquestionably influence various behaviors, and there are occasional acts of violence. Knowledge of Navaho idea patterns on this subject is essential to our total understanding of Navaho Culture. (Kluckhohn, 1944, p. 5)

Purpose

In this paper, I will strive to bring together, both from the literature and from my own experiences, pertinent information concerning Navaho witchcraft for the purpose of (1) presenting this information to the education staff at Wingate High School in the form of in-service training and (2) making this same information available to other Navaho high schools. It is hoped that this will help staff members to better understand the beliefs, fears, and emotional turmoils of the students with whom they are working and, thereby, be able to deal with them in a more knowledgeable and understanding manner.

The information presented in this paper from my own experiences was gained in counseling situations with Navaho students or in talking informally with Navaho students and adults. Names will not be mentioned in any of these cases for obvious reasons. Times and specific information may be slightly changed to protect privacy, but information basic to the concepts to be conveyed will not be altered.

The literature cited is primarily limited to research done prior to 1960. While more current research would be desirable, none has been done to my knowledge.

Definition of terms

- Call: a protection against evil or witchery
- Ghost: an evil spirit or witch of the dead
- Medicine man: one who performs religious ceremonials or sings
- Navaho: member or members of the Navaho Indian tribe
- Navajo: alternate spelling for Navaho, referring to a member or members of the Navaho Indian tribe
- Sing or singing: Navaho religious ceremony
- Singer: used interchangeably with medicine man
- Sorcery: phenomena the Navaho call inzid
- Sucker: one who performs the sucking cure for wizardry
- Sucking: a special cure for wizardry
- Were-animals: witches roaming in the skins of other animals, usually a wolf or coyote
- Witch: when capitalized will refer to one who practices witchery
- Witch: when not capitalized will refer to those who practice any of the four principle techniques of witchcraft

Witchcraft: the practice of witchery, sorcery, wizardry or frenzy
witchcraft

Witchery: phenomena the Navaho call anti

Wizardry: phenomena the Navaho call adagas

Wolfman: a common colloquial term for witch

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Origin of witchcraft

Before the creation of the Navaho as Earth Surface People or mortals, the Holy People, who were eventually responsible for the creation of the Navaho, lived under the earth. They gradually moved from one underworld to another until they eventually made their way into the world. Their coming into this world is called the Emergence by the Navaho (Reichard, 1950; Wyman, 1965).

The Navaho believe that First Man was the originator of witchcraft (Babington, 1950; Ladd, 1957; Reichard, 1950; Wyman, 1965). First Man and First Woman existed from the beginning of the lowest of the underworlds. They were both husband and wife and brother and sister and possessed many human as well as many God-like traits. It was their responsibility from the beginning to make conditions suitable for the Navaho to live as Earth Surface People. In spite of this, they were largely responsible for most of the disasters that occurred in the underworlds. The underworlds were filled with confusion, error, uncertainty, evil and death. Witchcraft, first originated and practiced by First Man and later practiced by First Woman, Coyote, Badger, Ant People and numerous others, was the cause of many of these underworld problems. Witchcraft was carried with the Holy People in their upward migration through the lower worlds toward the earth (Reichard, 1950; Wyman, 1965).

In the last underworld before the Emergence, a great flood occurred which drove the inhabitants of the underworld to the top of one of the

holy mountains. On the top of this mountain, a reed was planted which grew rapidly and provided passage to the roof of the underworld. This roof was between them and the earth. After attempts by Talking God, Black God, Horned Toad, Big Hawk and many others, Cicada finally dug through to the earth. Everyone emerged through the hole bringing with them the most important items from the underworlds, including witchcraft. In one version of the story, Coyote forgot his secret witchcraft and returned for it (Wyman, 1965).

One of Kluckhohn's informants reported that after the Emergence, First Woman gave anti to the mortals inhabiting the earth. She also gave anti to some animals, including the rattlesnake. The snake had no place to keep the anti and so he swallowed it. This is the reason his bite is capable of causing death today (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Witches and witchcraft

The Navaho believe witches to be individuals who possess a great deal of supernatural power. These people are evil and use their power for evil purposes. They are so powerful that they have no need to heed taboos that would be impossible for an ordinary man to break without disastrous results. They may do such things as handle the dead freely, have incestuous relations with siblings, and rob graves, all with no fear of harm coming to them (Ladd, 1957).

Witchcraft has been described as the use of supernatural and socially unacceptable techniques to influence events (Kluckhohn, 1944). It can be practiced by either men or women, but is, in most cases, practiced by men. Those who practice it can act separately or in groups to do such things as obtain the material goods of others and cause the illness or death of those

they hate (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). It is not unusual for aberrant singers to practice witchcraft (Waters, 1950). A practicing medicine man or singer can practice witchcraft under the guise of doing good without ever being found out. In this case, he will appear to cure his patients through ceremonials or singings, but, in reality, he is merely reversing witchcraft of his own doing. He will always try to hide his real nature while posing as a very kindly and pleasant person (Leighton and Leighton, 1944).

While the Navaho often speak of witches and witchcraft in general terms, which includes any of the several types of witchcraft, they also very definitely distinguish between these different types of witchcraft.

Witchery

When the term witchcraft is used by an English-speaking Navaho, he is more often than not talking about the phenomena the Navaho call anti. A direct translation from Navaho to English is not possible, but, for our purposes here, this phenomena will be referred to as witchery (Kluckhohn, 1944).

The technique of witchery is accomplished through the use of a preparation commonly referred to as corpse poison. This preparation is made by grinding the flesh of dried corpses into a fine powder which looks very much like pollen. The best medicine comes from the flesh of children. If twin children can be obtained, this makes especially powerful medicine. The bones at the back of the head cut into circle shape and any place where there are skin whorls or spirals such as thumb and finger tips and the balls of the feet are preferred (Kluckhohn, 1944). Body parts representing strength and life, such as the Achilles' tendon,

sinew, or the fetus of a pregnant woman are also used in witchery (Reichard, 1950).

Corpse poison can be administered in many ways, but it must come in physical contact with the person in order to cause him harm. Some of the most common ways of administering it are to blow it in a person's face, usually from furrowed-out sticks, dropping it through the smoke hole in the hogan, giving it to a victim in food or in a cigarette, or putting it into the mouth or nose of a sleeping person. If the powder is blown in the face of a victim, it is usually done in a crowd so the witch will not be recognized. It may kill the victim promptly or it may cause him to waste away slowly. Usually ceremonial singings are to no avail in treating it (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

Witches are active mainly at night and very often go about as were-animals. The most common type of were-animal is the wolf. In this case, Witches don the skin of a wolf as they go about carrying out their evil practices. Navaho stories are full of instances involving were-animals. In these stories, were-animals are most commonly referred to as Wolf-men, Coyote-men, or Navaho-wolves (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Newcomb, 1966). My own experience has been that in every case where a Navaho student or adult has referred to a were-animal, it has been the wolf.

My experience has been that the connection of grave robbing with Witches is universal among those Navaho who will discuss witchery. There are many instances in the literature where mention of grave robbing is made in connection with Witches and witchery (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and

Leighton, 1944; Newcomb, 1966; Reichard, 1950). It is necessary that Witches continue to rob fresh graves in order for them to keep their medicine strong (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Incest is also mentioned by most writers who have studied witchery as being a factor common to Witches (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Reichard, 1950).

One of the prices of becoming a Witch is that the person who desires to become one must kill someone dear to him. In most instances, this must be a sibling (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944). The following excerpt from a story told to the boy's advisor by a 15 year old school boy is interesting regarding the initiatory rite of killing a sibling:

If the Navaho Wolf catches you at the meeting, they bring you inside and ask if you want to learn or die. If you want to learn, they bring you inside and say, "Who do you want, your sister or your brudder?" If you say "brudder," two days after that he will die. Then they will send you after him, like they show you, and you bring him back. It is like paying to learn, only you don't pay in money. You have to pay with your brudder or sister. (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 131).

Witches many times meet together as a group, usually in a cave, to carry out their evil designs (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). This practice is sometimes referred to as the witches' sabbath. Witches come to these meetings as were-animals for the purpose of initiating new members, eating the flesh of corpses from recently robbed graves, planning future actions against intended victims, having intercourse with dead women (this is supposed to make powerful medicine when the corpses of good women are used), and carrying on rituals which will kill victims at a distance. Dry paintings are made at these meetings and singing takes place. Singing

is done in downward rather than upward fashion as in good ceremonials (Kluckhohn, 1944). Downward singing is the witchcraft way (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930). Some of Kluckhohn's informants said that the dry paintings were images of the intended victims and that the head Witch shot a turquoise bead at a specified part of the victim's body with a bow made from a human shin (Kluckhohn, 1944). While I have heard Navaho refer to Witches' caves where the Witches meet together and where they learn witchcraft, I have never heard any of them elaborate on any of the details as Kluckhohn's informants did.

Sorcery

The technique of sorcery is carried out through the casting of a spell on the intended victim (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). Because of the Navaho belief that a part of something stands for the whole, it is not necessary for the sorcerer to come in actual physical contact with his victim in order for the spell to be effective. It is required, however, that he use some part that has at one time been in contact with the whole when reciting his spell (Kluckhohn, 1944; Ladd, 1957). Items that are associated in some way with the life of the person from which they came are most often used (Leighton and Leighton, 1944). Common items of this type used by sorcerers are hair, urine, feces, saliva, fingernail clippings, body dirt, and articles of clothing that have absorbed sweat or body oils (Babington, 1950; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1944; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Ladd, 1957; Robinson, 1960). Because of the fear of sorcery, great care is taken by the Navaho to carefully dispose of items such as those just mentioned (Babington, 1950; Kluckhohn, 1944). I have personally observed this very

often in my work with Navaho students. It is not at all uncommon for one of them to come to me and ask to go home for a sing because he feels that someone has possession of some hair or nail clippings belonging to him. Several times students have told me that at night while sleeping, they were awakened by someone pulling out some of their hair. In each case, they were frightened and felt that it would be used by a sorcerer to harm them. I have never encountered an instance where the person pulling out the hair was recognized. Whether or not the hair was actually pulled out, I cannot say with any assurity; but I am certain that the students believed that it had happened and that their fears were real.

The Navaho believe that after obtaining some of the victim's personal offal, the sorcerer may mix it with an herb and some gravel which is to be taken from an ant hill and then cast a spell which can cause illness to befall the victim (Babington, 1950). Illness or death can also be brought about by burying the personal offal in a grave, by burying it elsewhere with flesh from a grave, or it may be buried under a tree that has been struck by lightning. After the offal has been buried, the sorcerer recites his spell and often sets the time period at which the illness or death of the victim will occur. The spell is cast by repeating certain songs, reciting formulas, reciting the spell as a prayer, or by saying certain good prayers backwards. The incantation may be said while walking around the victim's hogan, making evil-wishing sandpaintings or, when wishing to bring harm to a pregnant woman and her child, after putting the intimate object in the belly of a horned toad. Some of the commonly used witchcraft incantations used by sorcerers are variants of the "Hard Flint" song, the "Two Came to Their Father" song, and a group of songs

attributed to First Man in Navaho mythology called "It Became Dead." It is very helpful to the sorcerer to use the secret name of his victim when using this last-mentioned group of songs (Kluckhohn, 1944). It is probably because of their fear of witchcraft that the Navaho are very careful not to reveal their secret ceremonial names. They consider these names very powerful and guard them closely. It is considered an offense to call a person by this name in public and a Navaho immediately becomes suspicious of anyone inquiring as to what his or a member of his family's secret name is (Babington, 1950; Kluckhohn, 1944; Leighton and Leighton, 1944). The Navaho will not step over another person even in a small hogan where many people may be sleeping. This is apparently due to their belief that spells may also be uttered while stepping over a person (Kluckhohn, 1944; Ladd, 1957; Robinson, 1966).

The Navaho have a great fear of lightning and believe that to be struck by lightning is an indication that you are pursued by an evil spirit (Babington, 1950). They are afraid to go near a tree or other object that has been struck by lightning or to go near where lightning has struck, even after the object it hit has been removed (Kluckhohn, 1944; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Robinson, 1966). This fear is due, at least in part, to the connection of lightning struck objects being used in sorcery and places where lightning has struck being used by sorcerers to bury an intimate object before casting his spell (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Some sorcerers also use the technique of making an effigy of the person to be harmed or killed from wood or stone and then sticking it with sharp objects. This is a practice which is used in witchcraft in many

parts of the world and seems to be of recent origin with the Navaho. It may have been picked up from the Spanish or from the eastern Pueblo Indians. An image in the shape of a man was reported to have been found in a witches' cave near Lukachukai, Arizona. This image was carved from a piece of lightning-struck pine with a turquoise bead punched through the heart (Kluckhohn, 1944). The Navaho fear of whirlwinds and their fear of agitating certain animals, particularly dogs and snakes (Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944) may be explained by the fact that Navaho believe that whirlwinds and these animals can also practice sorcery. Sorcery is not limited to being used against humans, but can also be used against crops, animals, automobiles or other property (Kluckhohn, 1944). I have personally known of two instances where sorcery was believed to have been used against property. In the first case, a Navaho I had known for several years had his camper picked up and damaged badly by a whirlwind. He believed that this was due to some spell and, as a result, felt it necessary to have a sing performed on him in order to prevent further disaster.

In the second case, a close friend who is a Navaho educator related to me the following story: He had bought a new pickup truck which would not hold the road. It would suddenly dart to one side of the road or the other and several times had come near to causing him to have serious accidents. He had taken the truck to the dealer on several occasions to have it checked and each time was told that they could find nothing wrong. He became very fearful that he was going to be injured or killed as a result of the truck continuing its sudden darting. He then decided to take his truck to a Navaho medicine man to attempt to find out the problem. He

states that he was told by the medicine man that his truck had a spell on it. He was then directed by the medicine man to part of the truck's steering mechanism where he found some human hair and a flint arrowhead tied in a manner so the arrowhead would swing like a pendulum under certain conditions. This, he was told, was the cause of his problem with the truck. The objects were removed and a blessing performed by the medicine man and the truck's owner had no further problems with the truck.

The Navaho believe, as with Witches, that sorcerers must kill someone near to them as an initiation rite and that they participate in the witches' sabbath. There seems to be some sustained disagreement among Kluckhohn's Navaho informants as to whether or not sorcery is used to kill or only to produce illness. Some of his informants also felt that each sorcerer had a particular power to help him--like the sun, lightning, certain animals, etc., while others did not. Their feelings generally seemed to be, however, that witchery and wizardry are both more violent than sorcery (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Wizardry

The technique of wizardry is carried out through the magical shooting of evil in the form of some type of foreign object into the intended victim (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Reichard, 1950; Underhill, 1956). These objects are commonly referred to as witch objects (Kluckhohn, 1944; Reichard, 1950). They may be a piece of bone from a dead person, some ash from inside a hogan where a person died (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960), an arrow (Reichard, 1950), a stone burned and used for a sweat bath, porcupine quills, grains of sand taken

from a red ant hill, wildcat's whiskers, olivella shells, teeth from a corpse, or a bead, particularly if the bead belonged to the person to be witched (Kluckhohn, 1944).

In one story told among the Navaho, a feather is used. A group of Navaho bandits went to Mexico to steal sheep. They did not want to fight the Mexicans guarding the sheep so the leader, who knew witchcraft, magically shot a live eagle feather out of a special kind of red basket and killed the Mexican foreman. The other Mexicans became frightened and left the sheep to the bandits (Kluckhohn, 1944; Underhill, 1956). The following description of how a witch bead is shot was taken from a confession extracted from a man named Black Butcher, who was killed as a witch in 1887:

In their secret cave witches made a sand-painting, using ashes instead of colored sands--a picture of the man they intended to kill. Then the bead-shooter took a small witchbow and, pointing it at the figure, he laid it on the ground near the painting, with a magic bead on the string. He sung to the bead, and it began to hum and jump until at last it shot out and struck the image. Wherever the bead hit, in that same place a bead would enter the body of the victim, no matter where he might be. (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930, p. 143)

In my work with Navaho students, I have had experience with several students who felt they had been struck with witch objects shot by a sorcerer. I will briefly relate here two of these instances. In 1971, I talked with a student who said that he had quills in his head. He had stopped going to school, would eat very little and seemed to be in extreme pain. He was subsequently referred to medical doctors who could find no apparent cause for his complaints. He said that he must go to the Hopi man who could suck out the quills. The Navaho frequently go to members of Pueblo Indian tribes to seek cures for wizardry (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Arrangements were finally made for him to return home. In about two weeks he returned, but the pain had not stopped. He said that the Hopi man had taken out some of the quills, but that he was told to return if the pain persisted in order to get the rest of them. This boy made three trips in all to the sucker to have the quills removed and was then apparently cured.

In 1973 a student contacted me and was limping badly and had very little use of his leg. He said he had been witched and that he had an arrow in his calf. The leg was bandaged with an elastic bandage and there was a spot on the calf where slight redness appeared. He refused to see a doctor, but insisted that he had to see a sucker before he could regain use of his leg. He was noticeably fearful and, I believe, sincere in thinking that he had an arrow in his leg. He made a trip to a Navaho sucker and, upon his return to school, reported that the arrow had been removed. His limp was gone and he seemed to have full use of his leg.

While I personally would strongly question the actual physical existence of quills or an arrow in each of these cases, I do not question that the students were sure within themselves that they did exist; this being the case, they were real to them.

It is generally conceded that wizards are, in almost all cases, old men. Like Witches and sorcerers, they must kill a sibling or some other close relative in order to be admitted to the cult. They, like other witches, are able to break taboos such as handling the dead, committing incest, and going near lightning-struck objects and whirlwinds without apparent harm. There is some question among different Navaho as to whether wizards participate in the witches' sabbath, although some feel that they do.

Frenzy witchcraft

In the technique of frenzy witchcraft, a group of plants, of which datura is mentioned most often, is used. They may be administered to the victim in cigarette, by direct contact with the person, by kissing, in food or by having the victim touch an object which has been in contact with the plant or plants. In order for the technique to work, the plants have to be gathered in a prescribed way that resembles Navaho chant practice (Kluckhohn, 1944). Parts of the Prostitution Way Chant are sung, as part of the witching technique, and the same chant is used as a cure for frenzy witchcraft (Kluckhohn, 1944; Reichard, 1950). The datura, a narcotic plant, is administered primarily for the purpose of gaining success in gambling, in trading, and in seducing women (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Reichard, 1950). Some authors feel that it was used primarily in times past almost exclusively against foreign gamblers, women, traders, etc., but that it later was turned against members of the Navaho tribe (Kluckhohn, 1944). Knowledge of this type of witchcraft is not necessarily socially unacceptable as are the other types previously mentioned, but can be useful when used only against foreigners. It does, however, become unacceptable if it is used against other tribal members and is always feared because of its possible misuse. It is used primarily against other Navaho for the purpose of gaining desirable women who otherwise would not have the witch and for gaining material wealth. Its use makes rich people very foolish in trading and gambling and, thereby, makes it easy for the witch to gain their material goods (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Frenzy witchcraft is very different from the other three types dealt with previously in that its practitioners do not participate in the witches' sabbath and in that its techniques are connected with the use of plants

rather than corpses. It is, however, similar to the others in its initiation price, which requires the killing of a sibling and its close connection with incest.

Ghosts

To the Navaho, ghosts are the bad part of a dead person. They may be described as the witches of the world where the dead dwell. This is a place completely beyond the reach or control of anyone who is living. Some mortals have great power and some, like witches, use their powers for evil purposes, but they can be killed or their powers controlled in some ways, but a ghost can in no way be harmed by a mortal (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). Needless to say, ghosts are greatly feared by the Navaho (Babington, 1950; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Reichard, 1950). In fact, one author has said that the two things the Navaho fear more than anything else are ghosts and witches (Kluckhohn, 1944).

The Navaho's fear of the dead or anything connected with the dead is well documented (Babington, 1950; Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Newcomb, 1966; Reichard, 1950; Underhill, 1956). This fear of the dead is largely due to their fear of the dead person's ghost. A dead person's ghost has power around his grave or around his former dwelling (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Reichard, 1950). Because of this, great care must be taken to avoid places of the dead. When a Navaho dies, his hogan is burned or a hole is torn in the north wall causing the roof beams to fall in. This is a sign that someone has died in that place and that it should be avoided at all costs. A Navaho would rather freeze or die

of exposure than use wood for a fire from a dwelling where someone has died or to use the dwelling for a shelter. The Navaho are very careful not to camp in a place where they do not know the history. It is just as bad to camp in a place of the dead unknowingly as it is to do so with full knowledge and the consequences can be just as severe. Many times illness and death are ascribed by a Navaho diagnosis to have been caused by a person's unwittingly approaching a place of the dead (Reichard, 1950).

Dead humans and animals are buried as soon as possible after death. Even to look on a dead animal that has not been killed for food is believed by the Navaho to put him in great danger. One of the greatest favors a white person can do for a Navaho is to bury their dead for them (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). I was personally asked to help bury a Navaho medicine man in 1973 and this experience I have found is very common for whites living on or near the reservation. During the preparation of the body and the burial, the body was never touched by a Navaho. Two very fluent English-speaking Navaho, one a student at Brigham Young University, instructed another white person and me exactly how to arrange the clothing and the jewelry on the body, but they never once touched the body.

When a Navaho undertakes a burial, he is extremely cautious to do everything in the properly prescribed manner, for not to do so could bring the wrath of the dead person's ghost down on him. A certain amount of the dead person's material goods are buried with him and the Navaho believe they must be certain to never bury too little with the body. If these things are not done or if the grave is disturbed, the ghost will

return to the place where he once lived or to his grave and cause trouble for the living (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960). Any promise made to a living person about what will be done with his personal things after death must be carried out exactly or the ghost will return for them and cause trouble for the offender (Ladd, 1957). After a burial, there must be four days of mourning by living relatives of the deceased. If any of the relatives fail to observe this mourning period, they run the risk of having the ghost return to haunt them. There are exceptions to this period of mourning. The Navaho believe that people who die of old age, babies who die before they utter a sound, and stillborn infants do not have ghosts; therefore, no danger is incurred by the living for not observing the four days of mourning (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

The Navaho have many fears, not only of Navaho ghosts but also the ghosts of all aliens (Waters, 1950). Even though old Pueblo cliff dwellings are abundant on some parts of the reservation, the Navaho are careful not to go near them (Babington, 1950). The Navaho will not comb their hair at night because they believe this is when ghosts comb their hair (Ladd, 1957; Robinson, 1966). They also feel it is dangerous to whistle after dark because ghosts do this and a human who does so may attract them (Babington, 1950; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957). The Navaho fear darkness because this is when ghosts are about and, because of this fear, it is not unusual for adult Navaho to refuse to go out alone after dark (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Leighton and Leighton, 1944). Ghosts may take many forms, such as coyotes, owls, spots of fire, mice, humans, or the ever-present desert whirlwinds. They appear either after dark or shortly before someone in the family is to die (Kluckhohn and Leighton,

1960). This fear was brought home strongly to me in 1972 when an owl decided to rest in a tree beside a dormitory housing Navajo students where I was working. This was in the late afternoon and, as the word spread through the dormitory, the students became noticeably upset. When staff members realized what the problem was, they scared the bird from the tree, only to have him return in a few minutes. This happened several times before the owl finally left for good. Each time he returned, the students became more uneasy and some even requested to sleep in another dormitory that night. For several days following this incident, I had students request to have calls made to the trading posts nearest their homes to be sure no harm had come to members of their families.

To the Navaho, bad dreams of any kind are the result of ghost activities, usually former family members trying to lure their relatives into ghost land. If a ghost is seen in a dream, it is a sure sign that either the person having the dream or some family member is going to die (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

In 1973, I had an interesting experience verifying this belief. A student came to me saying that he was frightened and wanted to talk. He related how for the past two nights his father, who was deceased, had come to him in a dream and talked with him. When his father left each time, he beckoned for the student to come with him. This same dream continued for about two weeks and each time after its occurrence, he would come to talk with me about it. Each time he came, he was noticeably more frightened and kept saying, "I love my father, but I don't want to die." During this time, the student insisted that he did not believe in Navaho ceremonials and did not want to go for a sing. Then one day he came in

and requested to go home for a sing, not because he believed in them but because his mother wanted him to and he did not want her feelings to be hurt. He returned home, the sing was performed, and the dreams stopped.

How are witches distinguished from others
and how are they dealt with?

Suspicion of witchcraft is incurred immediately by a Navaho who commits incest, has no fear of lightning, whirlwinds, or the dead, and these suspicions are confirmed if the person in question is caught robbing graves or is made to confess. Even the rapid acquisition of wealth, having physical deformities, or being very old may be reason for one to be thought to be a witch (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Reichard, 1950).

When a Navaho burial takes place, many material goods are buried with the deceased, including a good deal of silver and turquoise jewelry. The reason for suspicion of one who has rapidly gained wealth is the Navaho belief that one of the reasons witches rob graves is to obtain the wealth that can be gained from selling the valuables buried with the dead person (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Newcomb, 1966). A good example of this belief is an incident recorded on a reservation school.

The other day a teacher asked how a man can get rich, and William or James wrote on the blackboard, "Be a Navaho Wolf." When a Navaho Wolf unburies a dead man, he takes away his silver belt and sells it at Farmington, or away over at Phoenix. They don't sell it to the traders near where they dig up the man because the people know about it. They sell it far away. (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 132)

There is no doubt in my mind that the profit motive could be a strong one. While I have only been involved in the burial of one Navaho,

a medicine man, I would estimate that a minimum of two thousand dollars worth of jewelry was buried with him.

The Navaho believe that if a person is definitely found out to be a witch, it is proper for him to be killed immediately (Babington, 1950; Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930; Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Newcomb, 1966). This belief has caused some feelings between the Navaho and the white authorities. To the whites, witchcraft is not recognized as a crime, while to the Navaho, it is the worst of all crimes (Kluckhohn, 1944). Because of these conflicts in belief, the punishment of a witch is kept from the white government officials whenever possible and handled in the Navaho way (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1950; Kluckhohn, 1944). When government officials do happen on to a case where someone is killed for witchcraft, there is a legal trial. Following is a short description of one such trial for murder.

A Navaho medicine man from Chinle, Arizona who was very wealthy was thought by many of the people in the area to be a witch. Because of his wealth, the animals he owned were taking up more and more of the grazing area and his neighbors resented this. Finally some of his sheep were driven off a cliff and he poisoned a water hole in retaliation. Some sheep died from the poison and a child who was herding them became ill. Shortly after this, the mother of the poisoned child became sick and died. Her husband and his brother then went to the medicine man's home and her husband split the medicine man's head open with an ax. Government officials found out about the incident, arrested both men and they were brought to jury trial before a federal judge. The men freely admitted the killing but seemed to feel they had done nothing wrong. Their only

defense was that the medicine man was a witch who had been doing much harm in the area and that they had been assigned to kill him. If they had not killed him, someone else would have been assigned to do so. Their attorney argued that according to Navaho tribal law, witches should be killed and that the men should not be punished for following tribal law. In spite of a seemingly undisputable case of murder presented by the prosecuting attorney, the trial resulted in a hung jury. Finally, after many delays, the men were paroled without another trial to the Fort Defiance Indian Agency who guaranteed they would not kill anyone else (Newcomb, 1966).

Cures and ceremonials related to witchcraft

No attempt will be made in this section to go into detail concerning Navaho ceremonials, since to do so would take volumes.

Devil-worship, as with all primitive people, still survives in the form of witchcraft; but upon it has been built a pantheism so complete that it compares with the religion of the Greeks. In its twenty-seven major chants there is an elaboration of ritual that staggers the finite mind. No man, red or white, can learn it all in a lifetime. (Coolidge and Coolidge, 1930, p. 141)

Ceremonials will be mentioned here only briefly to show their use as cures for and protections against witchcraft.

The Navaho believe that the techniques of curing were given to the Earth Surface People by the Holy People to make things easier for them. These techniques were not only for witchcraft, but for many other ills as well (Ladd, 1957). When a Navaho needs a ceremonial, he is responsible for seeking out a singer or medicine man and requesting the type of ceremony needed and one within his budget (Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Waters, 1950). Ceremonials are expensive and may cost up to one thousand dollars for one of nine day duration (Wyman, 1957).

The ceremonial a Navaho chooses will depend to a large extent upon his symptoms and how he believes himself to have been witched. If the cause is not known and the symptoms uncertain, but he suspects witchcraft, he may first contact a diagnostician. The most common means used in diagnosis is hand trembling (Kluckhohn, 1944; Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Wyman, 1957). In this technique, the diagnostician offers prayers to the Gila Monster Spirit to help him discover the cause of the illness. His hand then begins to tremble uncontrollably and makes religious symbols on the floor. When he has found the cause, he tells his patient what it is and recommends the proper ceremonial and may also recommend a singer to perform it (Leighton and Leighton, 1944). The singer is then contacted, the ceremonial paid for in advance, and a time and place selected for it to take place (Wyman, 1957).

If the patient's illness has been diagnosed as being caused by a non-Navaho ghost, the ceremonial used to cure the illness will probably be Enemy Way (Waters, 1950; Wyman, 1970). An associated feature of Enemy Way is the squaw dance. Many whites have attended the squaw dance, but they are not permitted to view the ritual parts of the ceremonial (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1944). If illness is caused by Navaho ghosts or witches, the Ghostway form of Red Antway may be used (Wyman, 1965). Upwardreachingway, Big Starway, the Shootingways and Handtremblingway are all used to help one who has been witched by a Navaho. Because the main purpose of these rites is ridding the person of evil, the ritual is dominated by exorcistic techniques (Wyman, 1957).

In Blessing Way, there is a Mountain Smoke Ceremony that is used for a cure for frenzy witchcraft but is not used in curing any of the other

types of witchcraft. Prostitution Way is also said to be a cure for frenzy witchcraft. Sucking Way is used if a Navaho believes that he has been witched by a wizard. In this rite, the sucker cuts the place where the victim believes a foreign object to have been shot into him by a wizard, with an arrowhead. He then sucks blood and sometimes the object from the wound and spits it into a tray of pinion bark. He also sings certain rituals and may place some type of witchcraft medicine on the wound. In addition to the ceremonial chants listed previously, there are three prayer ceremonials used as cures for witchcraft. The prayer ceremonials are Self-Protection Prayer, Bringing Up Prayer, and Bringing Out Prayer. In all of these three ceremonials, the evil is prayed back to the witch (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Gall medicine is taken by the Navaho as a means of curing them if they should absorb corpse poison prepared by a Witch (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Robinson, 1966). The gall medicine, which is made of the gall of certain animals, is taken internally and makes the witched person vomit up the corpse poison (Robinson, 1966). So great is the Navaho fear of corpse poison that according to some authors "Every adult Navaho has 'gall medicine'" The Navaho are especially careful to carry a small sack of gall medicine with them if they are going where there will be a large group of strange people. They also keep small carvings of horses and sheep, small pieces of turquoise and shell, certain herbs and pollen all mixed together in buckskin pouches hanging in all of their homes as a protection against witchcraft (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960, p. 141). In addition to gall medicine, the Navaho try to keep an abundance of good stories, good songs, and good prayers, because they

believe that people who have these are harder to witch than others.

Pollen and sandpaintings of certain types also provide good protection.

If a witch is found out and made to confess, this will bring a cure to the person he has witched and turn his witchcraft back on him, causing him to die of the same thing afflicting the witched person within a year's time. This is true whether or not the witch is killed. In some cases, witches have not been killed and it has been said that a number have taken refuge at Canoncito. Canoncito is an area along with Chinle and Black Mesa where the Navaho believe witches are particularly numerous (Kluckhohn, 1944). It is interesting that in Son of Old Man Hat, a suspected witch is given an opportunity to confess but refuses. The feeling was that this man's own witchcraft had affected him and that a confession might cure him (Dyk, 1938).

The ceremonials and cures for witchcraft mentioned in this section are requested very often by the Navaho students with whom I work. In most cases, the students return to school after a ceremonial with their fears calmed, seeming to be fully confident that the ceremonial took care of whatever their particular problem may have been.

Social implications of witchcraft

in the Navaho culture

From earliest childhood, the Navaho child has contact with the fears of witchcraft through his parents and other family members. He hears his family discuss it and feels their fear of individuals, objects and places connected with witchcraft. He is told of members of his family and others going to ceremonials to receive cures for witchcraft. He learns early to fear the dead or anything connected with them. He sees his parents' fear

of the dark. He sees gall and other protections against witchcraft in his home. He feels his parents' fear and concern about carefully hiding or disposing of his urine and feces during his early toilet training. He sees family members hide hair, nail clippings and other personal offal and, when old enough, is taught to do the same. When these things are considered, it no longer seems strange, even in today's modern industrial society, that the belief in witchcraft continues to be passed down from generation to generation among the Navaho. It is little wonder that an author could say, in effect, that he felt the belief in witchcraft was nearly universal among the Navaho (Kluckhohn, 1944).

The Navaho have fears and anxieties about anyone with physical or mental disabilities. These fears are connected with their fear of witchcraft. They may feel that he is a victim of witchcraft (Leighton and Leighton, 1944; Newcomb, 1966). They may also feel that since these people are unable to provide for themselves in the same manner that others do, they may use witchcraft as a means of making up for their physical disability. No one wants to treat these people too badly because, if they are witches, they might have reason to harm you (Leighton and Leighton, 1944). The special respect and care given to the old in the Navaho culture is due, at least in part, to the Navaho belief in witchcraft. Just as with physical disabilities, an old person may use witchcraft when he becomes unable to otherwise provide for himself (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957; Reichard, 1950). An old person should be shown great patience. If an old person is suspected of witchcraft, he may get a lavish amount of attention. Visits to other family members may be suggested or other subtle means of getting rid of him employed, but the

activities against him and his family, but also the danger of being thought to be a witch himself (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957). Witch gossip is common about wealthy people, especially if their wealth was gained rapidly. One who gains wealth too rapidly is suspected of robbing graves. Navaho people expect those who are wealthy to be generous with their material goods. When a wealthy person is not generous, he often becomes suspected of being a witch. Popular singers who, because of their position, could become wealthy and powerful are usually careful to be generous with what they have and careful not to charge too much for their services. Sexual jealousy which is a common sore spot among the Navaho is also curbed to some extent by their fear of the dark. Night rendezvous become much less likely when those involved fear ghost and witch activities, which are carried out primarily at night (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

It is felt by some authors that acceptable social releases for aggression are achieved through using witches as scapegoats (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Leighton and Kluckhohn, 1948). They feel that the Navaho may, at times, use witches in the same manner that other cultures have used reds, capitalists, niggers, Japs, and Jews (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

The threat of witchcraft may be used by Navaho leaders to keep individuals in line who might otherwise cause social unrest. Kluckhohn sites the period following the return from Fort Sumner as an example. During the post Fort Sumner period, certain Navaho leaders were advocating another armed resistance against the whites. The great Navaho leader Manuelito, who opposed armed resistance, caused more than forty persons to be

old person will never outwardly be treated badly or let to know he is not approved of (Reichard, 1950).

Unfortunately, leadership among the Navaho is discouraged by fears of witchcraft. If one becomes a leader, he will make enemies and some of his enemies may be witches and bring harm to him or members of his family (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Ladd, 1957). Kluckhohn gave an example of a brilliant young Navaho judge who, after only two years, resigned his position. The reason he gave for resigning was that some people had been offended by his decisions and he feared witch activities against him or members of his family as a result (Kluckhohn, 1944).

I have observed a very persistent reluctance on the part of Navaho students to hold positions of student leadership in the boarding schools where I have worked. When a student does become a leader, it is not unusual for him to suddenly, often without apparent cause, resign from his position after only a short time. Resignations are also very frequent after a student leader has taken a stand or made a decision which is outwardly opposed by either large or small numbers of other students. When this happens, the student will almost always totally disengage himself from any school or dormitory issues of any kind. On only one occasion have I been able to definitely tie this to a fear of witchcraft, but I have wondered on numerous other occasions.

Witchcraft provides a very effective social curb against a Navaho becoming too wealthy. One who becomes very wealthy will die of no sickness. Dying of no sickness is commonly thought by the Navaho to be caused by witchcraft. If a Navaho is wealthy, he must not only fear witch

executed for witchcraft in 1884 alone. Evidence is good that this may have been a way of silencing, in a socially acceptable way, leaders who opposed his stand for peace. Certainly if he had turned them over to white authorities, he would have been risking the loss of much favor with the Navaho people (Kluckhohn, 1944).

It is of interest that increased witch activities seem to have a correlation to the social pressures on the people themselves. This is evidenced in the post Fort Sumner period just discussed. Border areas which receive the most pressure from the white society show evidence of more witchcraft activity than other areas of the reservation. This is also evidenced in areas where there are the highest population densities and, thus, the greatest competition for grazing land. A noted increase in witch activities was observed during the stock reduction period of the 1940's when the Navaho people were forced to reduce their herds because of overgrazing. During stock reduction, there were even attempts made to witch employees of the government who were involved in the reduction (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960; Leighton and Kluckhohn, 1948). The present talk of further stock reductions due to the land dispute between the Navaho and the Hopi may provide valuable information with regard to the relationship of witchcraft activity to social unrest.

Witchcraft provides answers to many things the Navajo do not understand. This can be seen in instances such as dying of no sickness, ill health, accidents, loss of material possessions, an unfaithful wife, and numerous others. If a Navaho curing ceremonial does not work, the Navaho has no reason to lose faith in the ceremonial. This can easily be attributed to the evil and supernatural power of witchcraft. If a Navaho has problems

which become too great for him to cope with, either physically or mentally, he will likely gain little support from his friends or relatives no matter what the diagnosis from a white doctor or psychiatrist may be. If, on the other hand, his problems can be attributed to witchcraft, he will quickly receive a maximum of help from his relatives and friends. Not only is social support assured, but a victim of witchcraft is completely without guilt or responsibility for whatever the problem may be. Actions, which before would have placed him in low esteem in the eyes of others, when attributed to witchcraft, bring a maximum of help and social support. Family and friends gather around the victim, curing ceremonials are arranged for, family members all help in paying for costly singers if the victim is not able to do so, friends and family attend prayer ceremonials with the victim and usually stay for lengthy periods lending sympathy and support to the person who has been witched. In short, being a victim of witchcraft lends social acceptance to individuals who would otherwise be ignored or looked down upon (Kluckhohn, 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1960).

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY

The origin of witchcraft, which is attributed to First Man, is well documented in Navaho religious mythology. The Navaho have separated witchcraft into four major categories according to how and by whom it is practiced and certain undesirable attributes have been assigned to its practitioners. Human witches, as well as ghosts, sometimes referred to as witches of the dead, are greatly feared by the Navaho. To the Navaho, animals, people, places and things associated in any way with witchcraft should be avoided at all cost.

When a witch can be positively identified, it is appropriate under Navaho tribal law to kill him. One of the cures for a witched person is the killing of the witch. Numerous Navaho religious ceremonials are carried out by singers, both as cures for and protections against witchcraft. Other important cures and protections are also available to the Navaho for specific types of witchcraft.

Fear of witchcraft is learned by Navaho children at a very early age and some degree of belief in it is almost universal among the Navaho. Because of its wide acceptance, witchcraft plays an important role in the Navaho social structure.

Taking into consideration the cultural background of Navaho boarding school students, there can be little question that they are influenced by witchcraft. Circumstances or events which would go unnoticed by members of the dominant culture can take on very significant and frightening

connotations to the Navaho student. His fears are deep-rooted and cannot be shrugged off or made fun of. Even though these fears may seem ridiculous to one from a different culture, to the Navaho student they are real and should be treated as such. It is of paramount importance that guidance and academic staff members who are working with Navaho students have some knowledge of witchcraft. Without at least a basic knowledge of the students' beliefs about witchcraft, staff members cannot hope to deal with these beliefs in an understanding and appropriate manner. This paper will hopefully serve as a basis for helping the staff at Wingate High School understand Navaho witchcraft and its relationship to the education of the Navajo student.

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