

Dissociation and Cultural Forms

NYU Postdoctoral Program
Fall 2018

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This course will show how the “ethnic syndromes” listed in the DSM-IV-R represent “idioms of distress” for people who are unable to express their anguish verbally, and how an interpersonal/relational orientation provides a key to their meaning. Most often some experience of powerlessness or oppression underlies this phenomenon. Making use of somatization and dissociation, these syndromes express and rework distress in a complex intertwining of body and mind. We will deconstruct some of these syndromes, such as spirit possession, to understand what psychic defenses they represent and consider alternative interpretations of ecstatic experience. Often, helplessness stemming from colonial or class-system domination leads to somatic expression. We will show a pathway from pathologizing dramatic dissociative experience, as Western diagnostics do, to a more contemporary understanding of the interpersonal/relational meaning of the alien-seeming dissociative phenomena from other cultures. Comparison of the dramatic states with contemporary analytic work with dissociation (Bromberg) will show historical and clinical changes in conceptualization and technique over time.

3 consecutive Saturdays (9:30-2 pm):

Session 1. Diagnosis and Culture: Cultural Construction of models of mental illness.

Difficulties of trying to diagnose in other cultures using DSM and American values; changes over time within cultures, diagnoses as “idioms of distress”. Alternative formulations: disorganized attachment or dissociative identity disorder? When does dissociated experience lead to violence, and when is it transformative?

When are our formulations valid, and when are they misleading because they are culture-bound? Mead and Bateson demonstrate “the return of the dissociated” childhood weaning trauma in the form of ritual trance dance: the Wicked Witch and the Weaning Mother in Bali

Dorothy Otnow Lewis MD, Catherine Yeager MA, Yael Swica BA, Jonathan H Pincus MD and Melvin Lewis, MBBS, FRC Psych, DCH, “Objective Documentation of Child Abuse and Dissociation in 12 Murderers With Dissociative identity Disorder”, *Am J Psychiatry* 154:12, December 1997

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Mead, Margaret, and Bateson, Gregory (1938) *Trance and Dance in Bali*. Educational video produced by Museum of Natural History, New York, N.Y.

Video of Beatrice Beebe mother and child showing disorganized attachment reaction in Stranger Interview – comparison with Balinese trance dance

Watters, Ethan “The Americanization of Mental Illness” NY Times Magazine, Jan. 10 2010 – young women from upstate New York share a mystifying tic similar to Salem Witch trials

Kleinman, Arthur *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition*
Ch. 1: The meanings of Symptoms and Disorders pp. 3-31

Ch. 6: Neurasthenia: Weakness and Exhaustion in the US and China pp. 100-120

Ch. 16: The Challenge of a Meaning-Centered Model for Medical Education and Practice pp. 252-267

Excerpts from Kardiner, Abram (1967) *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro*. New York: Meridian Books

Excerpts from Du Bois, Cora and Kardiner, Abram, (1960-61) *People of Alor*. Volumes 1 and 2, New York: Harper and Bros.

Session 2. Ethnic Syndromes: from nonsense to sense

In this session, we will show the relational meaning of three ethnic syndromes: zar, latah, and ataque or Puerto Rican Syndrome. These each have important distinctive culture history but share common themes of gendered oppression, and the symptoms convey protest over oppression and establish bonds of support.

Youtube videos of latah, zar, ataque

“Ethnic Syndromes as Disguise for Protest against Colonialism: Three Ethnographic Examples” <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15299732.2013.724340>

“Latah: an ethnic syndrome with dissociative features—a sadomasochistic pattern?” chapter from Dissociation and Psychoanalysis by Elizabeth Howell and Shelly Itzkowitz, in press

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Paraphrase and condensation of Gherovici, Patricia (2003) *The Puerto Rican Syndrome*. New York: Other Press

Paraphrase and condensation of Boddy, Janice (2007) *Civilizing Women: British Crusades in Colonial Sudan*. Princeton U. Press

Excerpts from Simons, Ronald C.(1996) *Boo! Culture, Experience, and the Startle Reflex*, Oxford U. Press

Discussion of Culture and Panic Disorder by Devon Hinton and Byron Good, Stanford U. Press 2009

Session 3 Spirit Possession, Dissociation, and Abuse: the interrelationships.

A closer examination of the self-definition and the self-states involved in culturally structured dissociative roles. Cultures accept or reject the fluid vs. the bounded self; trance, double-bind in relationship, and the status of the shaman-healer. Role of healer as a solution to gendered role conflicts. Brief examination of the False Memory controversy and the role of culturally structured beliefs.

Garrison, Vivian (1977) in *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*. (Ed.) Vincent Crapanzano. New York: Wiley-Interscience "The Case of Maria"

Clinical examples from Harvey, Youngsook Kim (1979) *Six Korean Women: the Socialization of Shamans*. American Ethnological Society monograph # 65. New York: West Group

Clinical examples from Kendall, Laurell, (1987) *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits*. Honolulu: U. of Hawaii Press

Petrucci, Jean ed. 2010 *Knowing and Not Knowing*, Psychoanalysis and the experience of uncertainty. Chapters by Itzkowitz, Hegeman, and Howell

Excerpts from Young, Allan, 1997 The Harmony of Illusions: The Invention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Howell, Elizabeth F. 2011 Understanding and Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder Routledge

Bromberg, Philip 2012 The Shadow of the Tsunami: and the Growth of the Relational Mind

Learning Objectives for **Dissociation and Cultural Forms**: Fall 2018

Participants will be able to

1. Connect historical and cultural factors with varieties of inner experience in Western and non-Western cultures
2. Discuss different theoretical constructs that psychoanalytic theory has offered in interpretation of extreme and intense emotional states
3. Choose the most appropriate models for interpreting somatic and non-verbal communication of distress according to cultural rules
4. Discern the pathways to healing mentalization and symbolization of traumatic experience in various cultural contexts
5. Consider the role of the community in inducing and/or reintegrating symptomatic expressions of distress in other cultures

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