ABSTRACT: Two modern day psychologists explore the intersection between Western and Eastern psychological and philosophical theories and the philosophy of an American Indian folk healer. Drawing from extensive research in the field as well as personal experience and more than one year of interviews with “White Bear,” they arrive at conclusions that offer further material for building a bridge between spirituality and psychology. They explore ways a folk healer’s concepts about the self, seeing gifts in others, one’s own experiences, and anonymity apply to an emptying of the inner contents of self so that one can experience the undistorted reality that one actually encounters. In order to appreciate the bridging of the spiritual realm and the psychology, one must fully understand the tenets of each. The article includes a review of psychological and spiritual viewpoints about self to contextualize the qualitative study that follows as well as recommendations for further inquiry.

This qualitative research study is about giving voice to a Native American folk healer about spiritual healing. In the process of the discussions, White Bear, the participant, began to discuss the concept of self and relationship to self as foundational to spiritual health. During excavation of both religious and psychological literature, we found that many prominent thinkers had preceded White Bear in arriving at the same conviction. Such psychological and spiritual viewpoints about self contextualize the study.

INTIMATIONS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

Ongoing empirical psychological research supports a positive relation between religion/spirituality and physical and mental health (e.g., Ellison & Levin, 1998; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003). Explanations for the positive associations include healthier lifestyles that persons committed to a religion purportedly lead (Kark, Shemi, & Friedlander, 1996), regular interaction with persons who supposedly have healthier attitudes and behaviors (Oman & Thoresen, 2003), the physical and psychological support offered by religious institutions (Lazar & Biorck, 2008), and increased opportunities to engage in altruistic acts (Krause, Herzog, & Baker, 1992). A
reader of such studies may appreciate the union of spirituality and empiricism and the concrete and practical explanations that have emerged, but may wonder where the more inner intangible aspects of spirituality are in the explanations.

As far back as the turn of the twentieth century, William James suggested that the inner aspects of spirituality could not be encapsulated by behavioral, affective, or cognitive concepts. He wrote, “The ordinary waking consciousness is but one form of consciousness. All around us lie infinite worlds, separated only by the thinnest veils” (James, 1902/1961, p. 300). Referring to noetic or mystical states of consciousness, James said they may be similar to but different from feelings or emotions. He continued, “Mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge” (p. 371). Richards (2003) referred to mystical states of consciousness as ineffable and paradoxical. He wrote that the mystical experience cannot be captured with words or Aristotelian logic. Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso, and Greyson (2007) described the mystical experience as a unitary experience during which one feels an interconnection with an ultimate all-encompassing reality. Richards (2009) wrote, “Consciousness includes infinitely more than our individual egos. … Mystical consciousness includes a conviction that, within this unitive world, all of us are interconnected and inter-related” (p. 141).

Varying and fuzzy definitions of the self appear to be obstacles in making connections between psychological and spiritual perspectives. The concept of the self is a subtle and elusive notion within psychological thinking. In the study of personality, those who admit it as a construct define it obliquely. Ryff (1995) wrote that in the field of psychology, the construct of the self is typically described in terms of autonomy, observable behaviors, mastery of skills, self-regard, and development. Seligman, Stern, Park, and Peterson (2005) argued that individuals define themselves partly through their self-ascriptions, which are directly related to their actions, and partly through others’ ascriptions. Identity, which emerges from these ascriptions, is directly related to motivation and directs behavior. Harter (1999) reported that self-esteem is a by-product of achievement, though it can be a buffer to anxiety. Inflated self-esteem has been associated with aggression and violence (Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, Ackerman, & Youngstrom, 2001). Self-schemas, or cognitive generalizations, which form the content of our self-concepts, become increasingly resistant to change the older we become (Swann, 1997). Sometimes one thinks and acts to preserve one’s viewpoints and views of oneself even in the face of contradictory information, ignoring, avoiding, or refashioning its meaning rather than engaging in profound self-reflection.

Reacting to what they felt was a constrictive construct of the self, Richards and Bergin (2002) argued for the consideration of an “eternal self,” one that is connected to a transcendent purpose and meaning in life (pp. 101–110). Sperry and Schafranske (2005) created a “model of integrative spiritually oriented psychotherapy” (pp. 21–23), arguing that the psychological and spiritual experiences are fundamentally related. They wrote that psychotherapy often focuses on symptom relief and adaptive functioning but should include self-
More than any other movement in psychology, transpersonal psychology has been instrumental in connecting spirituality and psychology and in fact preceded the literature presented above (for example, Grof, 1975; Walsh & Vaughan, 1980; Wilber, 1980). Considering obstacles to this connection between psychology and spirituality, Jorge Ferrer (2002) assigned the primary problem to be psychology’s commitment to the sovereignty of the isolated Cartesian individual ego, which observes the world from a detached position. In reaction to the Cartesian paradigm, initially some transpersonal psychologists tried to go beyond personhood in order to experience the sacred, though many have begun to develop a more participatory vision of human spirituality that maintains personal experience. That is, they argue, individuality is not lost when one partakes in transpersonal experiences, though it may be purged of selfishness. Ferrer (2008) is of the position that the transpersonal experience can be achieved by progressing down various paths such as, through Buddhism’s compassion raising insight, Christian agapeic love, or shamanistic visionary experience, but ultimately the movement of the spirit is away from self-centeredness to a fuller participation in the mystery of existence.

**Theories of Major Psychologists and Spiritual Thinkers about the Self**

The discussion that immediately follows is an attempt to lay a foundation that may be helpful in determining what might be the most naturally intertwining strands regarding the selves described by psychology and religion/spirituality literature. Once these strands can be made visible, we may proceed to consider the question of how psychological health and healing may be informed by spiritual understandings, or more specifically, by a Native American folk healer around whom the study revolves. So we begin with an overview of the most recognized psychologists’ and spiritual thinkers’ perspectives about the self and its development, including transpersonal perspectives that follow later.

Aaron Beck and his colleagues (Beck, Freeman, & Associates, 1990) referred to the self as a reflection of schemas and interpersonal strategies. Sometimes he used the word ego to refer to the self and then only with negative connotations. For instance, he sometimes described self-centered and distorted perceptions and interpretations as being “egocentric,” while he claimed, on the other hand, that the functional self has undistorted recall, good concentration, and reasonableness. Interestingly, Rogers (1965) too typically used the word self as the center of the personality but occasionally used the word ego, always with negative connotations. For instance, he described “ego involvement” as selfishness that deters one from making good decisions. Rogers and Malcolm (1987) believed that the core of each individual was trustworthy, positive, resourceful, and possessing a basic drive toward health. Rogers (1965) held that distrust in one’s own organismic nature results in premature closure in development. Maslow (1970) criticized the field of psychology for focusing on the negative side of human nature and then focused on individuals’ capabilities for awareness, creativity, and peak experiences. He was of the position that the biggest enemies of growth are a person’s settling for “normality and...
convention.” Rollo May (1967, 1991) described a self as the means whereby persons make choices, but argued that one must transcend self-centered prejudices and the anxiety of freedom to make objective and creative choices.

Christian theologians too have written extensively about the functioning of the self as it is related to health and salvation. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Augustine, 2001) revealed Saint Augustine purging himself of pride on his way to finding peace with God. According to Kierkegaard (1974), the self that searches for subjective meaning by using reason ultimately experiences despair. The self must take a leap of faith and direct its energies into a single-mindedness toward something unknown (God) in order to find atonement. Bonhoeffer (1968) argued that in order to receive God’s costly grace, one must give up self and its subterfuge. Tillich (1963) wrote that identity is symbolized by the self, which can only find “centeredness” after it has spurned self-centeredness and repeatedly engaged in acts of “transcendence and integration.” Reinhold Niebuhr (1953) saw self’s pride as the great enemy and enumerated the self as threefold: natural, rational, and spiritual. The natural part of the self urges the self toward destructive competition and will to power. Reason inevitability fails to acknowledge its own prejudices and finitude, rationalizing selfish acts. Only through the spirit can one transcend one’s selfishness and through grace experience unity with God. Neibuhr also referenced the “resurrection of the body” passage in the New Testament to remind his readers that the individual self is maintained even in atonement. Catholic theologian Teilhard de Chardin (1960) acknowledged that the self must detach from “enjoying oneself egotistically” and then encouraged his readers toward the path of “glorious responsibility and splendid ambition of expanding the self,” which he refers to as divinization (p. 74). He warned, however, that there are hazards of self-regard even when related to self-renunciation. Like Neibuhr, even though he advocated “the radical sacrifice of egoism,” he held on to the idea that one can be united with God and still remain oneself even after death.

St. John of the Cross (John of the Cross, 1958) expressed a mysticism founded on a dualism in which human beings are a battleground between the spirit and the flesh. The flesh must be mortified. His mystic way required extreme will power to remain obedient to God’s authority. He wrote, “One cannot reach union without remarkable purity through vigorous self-mortification. Whoever refuses to go out into the night to search for the Beloved will not succeed in finding Him” (p. 27). Thomas Merton (1957) maintained that submitting one’s self to God was paramount for spiritual healing. He argued that a false self urges us toward self-glorification, but God facilitates our awareness of our true self. God helps us transcend the depravity of reason to experience ourselves as part of his mystery. Sufi thought contends that the false ego that separates itself from experience and reality is a delusion. Inayat Khan (1999) wrote, “The false ego is a false god; when the false god is destroyed, the true God arrives” (p. 54). Krishnamurti (1973) stated that the mind or self finds healing when a person realizes that he or she is not a separate entity, that the observing self is the content of the observation. According to Kornfield (1993), Buddhism teaches that there is not a self. Healing occurs when we cease to identify...
ourselves with repetitious mental patterns and when we achieve emptiness or basic openness beyond the self’s fixed notions and obsessiveness.

Native American mystics frequently allude to spiritual experiences in which they feel or intuitively know they are interconnected to all of creation. Neihardt (1959) quoted Black Elk, who described an experience he had beyond the multiplicity of time and space. “I was seeing in the spirit … all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle … and in the center grew a mighty flowering tree” (p. 58). Lame Deer and Erdoes (1972) repeatedly emphasized Lame Deer’s spiritual awareness of transcending a separate identity. He said, “I offer myself to the Great Spirit. … We are a part of nature, rain, stones, trees, animals, even insects. … We try to understand them not with our head but with the heart. … Time, like space, shrinks in unexplainable ways … pressed together in a few seconds of insight” (p. 84). Discussing Hanblecyta (vision quest) and the Four Directions, Bad Hand (2002) wrote, “Let go of yourself, so you can find yourself in the order of all beings … recognize a common divine reality that belongs to every living thing upon the earth” (p. 76). The mystic journey begins with the awareness of a natural divine order, which results in a sense of belongingness and feelings of peace. Donald Fixico (2002) of the Muskogee Creek tribe wrote, “mainstream Christian thinking conceives of a bracketed, reified individual self. Fundamental Creek thought eschews the existence of atomistic selves and entities. The Creek entities, all my relations, human and nonhuman, known and unknown, are all part of a continuum of energy that is at the heart of the universe” (p. 2). Seminole Anne Waters of the Seminole tribe (2004) wrote, “Cultures that locate identity in a politic of ideas tend to colonize other cultures and link individual identity with linear time. Indigenous [culture] nurture individual identity formation with a communal interdependence and geographic location” (p. 154).

Almost all of the above authors write about the self being the center of personality and that selfishness is the main deterrent to development. The psychologists also see conventionality, bias, and anxiety as barriers to growth, while the spiritual and religious writers speak of temptation and sin, bias, anxiety, overestimation of reason, lack of faith in God, and lack of awareness of our interconnections as being limitations. The developmental goal of the self, for most of the psychologists, is to become trusting, free, autonomous, reasonable, and creative. The religious and spiritual writers are more likely to write about a loving relationship with God, realization of no self beyond conditioning, or a movement toward a unitary experience with God or Being Itself, some emphasizing absorption more than others. We are struck by the psychologists’ focus on characteristics that might describe what may lead to or actually be a balanced, interdependent awareness, even though they do not name it in spiritual terms, while the religious and spiritual writers utilize metaphor to refer to an unnamable experience achieved through a higher awareness or submission to God and His/Her grace.

Again, it is transpersonal psychologists who have explored the connections between spirituality and psychology the furthest. Grof (1988) described two
types of consciousness; hylotropic and holotropic. Hylotropic refers to one’s individual, normal, everyday consciousness which is in consensus with most other people. Holotropic refers to a state of consciousness that is equated with an awareness of the totality of existence. When in the holotropic state, an individual transcends his/her individual self. Ken Wilber (1995) has continued writing in this tradition. He argued that the crucial task in this regard is to integrate the subjective (associated with “I” and the arts), the inter-subjective (associated with “we” and morals) and the objective (associated with “it” and science). Through vision logic or “thinking globally,” he argued that human beings have the capacity to integrate all three dimensions and come to the brink of the transpersonal (p. 264). Ferrer (2002) argued that during transpersonal experiences there is a fluidity between the objective and subjective. The self expands and can become identified with objects and subjects in the world (p. 32). Grof (2012) argued that transpersonal events encompass experiences at both micro- and macro-cosmic levels. He wrote that this identification can entail contraction to the cellular level.

Chögyam Trungpa (1973) used the phrase “spiritual materialism” to describe how attachment to spiritual achievement, even to apparent spiritual progress is simply another egoistic way of thwarting the ultimate awareness of the Self. Both Wilber and Ferrer caution that there is a realm of spiritual narcissism in which a person seeks a quantity of spiritual experiences for themselves. Ferrer wrote, “The goal is not to have spiritual experiences but to stabilize spiritual consciousness” (p. 37).

Using Wilber’s ideas about self as a springboard, Washburn (1995) argued that the self is ultimately illusory, which concurs with Buddhism and the Vedanta philosophy. The self is not an entity or a pre-given structure but rather a phenomenon of identification. The sense of the self is derivative of consciousness experiencing itself through the basic structure of the highest active psychic level. He wrote, “The self exists only as self-identity, the content and boundaries of which are determined at each psychic level by the basic structures of that level” (p. 35). Bernard (2008) too is troubled by the notion of a separate core self whose essence is fixed. He contends that instead of thinking of ourselves as “an unchanging nugget like essence that undergoes change on the surface, while underneath remaining the same...our individuality is the never ending changing end result of all the countless life experiences we have had, held together and unified into a single stream of experience in our memory... our identity is constantly in flux and is intrinsically interactive” (pp. 340-341). Ferrer cited anthropologist Charles Laughlin’s (1994) definition of transpersonal as “those experiences that bring the cognized-self into question” (p. 7), but added that transpersonal experiences vary across cultures. Then he expanded his definition further by arguing that, for some, the transpersonal experience has been incorporated into one’s ordinary mode of being in the world, while for others it is experienced but not lived (p. 196). Further, Ferrer contended that the transpersonal experience is always participatory in the sense that “mystical knowing” is developed intersubjectively against the background of adequate metaphorical models (p. 197). Wilber (1995) and Ferrer (2002), while appreciating Grof’s (1975) contributions in the area,
expressed concerns about descriptions of the self’s monological experiences with God which can easily evolve into narcissism in the subject. Instead, they are more appreciative of Frohlich’s (1993) description of the transpersonal experience as a “mystical intersubjective experience of a non-objectifiable presence of the divine at the level of one’s own presence” (p. 140).

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Both authors of this article brought to their study an awareness of the above research as well as deep awarenesses of their own spiritual traditions, which were Native American spirituality, Christian theology, and Buddhism, as they analyzed interview data with a folk healer (White Bear—see below), who discussed his ideas regarding self and healing. White Bear was selected based on one of the researcher’s five years of experiences with him, the trust and respect both researchers have for him, and because he is well respected in both his local community for his spiritual wisdom and his Sun Dance community, which honors him with ongoing leadership positions. In line with transpersonal research methods (Anderson & Braud, 1998; Braud & Anderson, 2011), the researchers actively reflected on their own spiritual and psychological journey, while being open to changes of their understanding of this topic and seeking personal growth and development during and beyond this research processes. For over five years, one of the researchers had participated in purification ceremonies and dances with White Bear, the Native American folk healer participant of this study. While this researcher had engaged in many conversations with White Bear about healing, he had never considered writing a paper divulging any of the wisdom he had garnished until White Bear himself suggested it. This researcher conducted all of the interviews with White Bear. Because White Bear spent so much of the conversations clarifying and reiterating points about the self, both the interviewer who did the interviews and the other researcher decided that self would be a good starting point as a topic to consider. The two researchers articulated four areas for discussion which White Bear agreed to talk about. Consequently, the researcher decided to ask White Bear questions regarding his views of self and self-transcendence. Specifically, he was asked about the following four topics: (a) developing beyond the self-centered identity; (b) achieving awareness beyond judgment; (c) selflessness; and (d) healing through meditation. Also emerging from the interviews, White Bear offered many comments related to the importance of befriending one’s self rather than engaging in an ongoing combative relationship with it. We hoped White Bear and his comments could act as catalysts to facilitate the further integration of deep spiritual wisdoms into psychological discourse. By inviting and listening to White Bear’s stories, as researchers, we ultimately hoped to expand our own understanding of this topic as well as that of White Bear and the reader.

INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

This article is built on the framework of Indigenous Methodology (IM), which is defined as “research by and for indigenous peoples, using techniques and
methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples” (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009, p. 894). The main intention of Indigenous Methodology is to ensure that research is conducted in a respectful and culturally sensitive fashion from an Indigenous perspective. Thus, our contention is neither to reject nor compete with Western psychology, but to generate meaningful discussions by challenging Western psychology with the questions folk and indigenous knowledges raise about the nature of our being, spirituality, and healing. It is our assumption that the certainty and “scientific rigorousness” of Western psychology and its process of judging knowledge and truth (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008) are in need of reassessment. Locally constructed and transmitted knowledges and values can provide new and different perspectives of psychological theories and spiritual traditions. Thus, we attempted to explore “the unique and yet potentially universal nature of the experiences” (Anderson & Braud, 1998, p. 31) by incorporating White Bear’s perspective with researchers’ insight and compassion, and the literature reviewed as well.

White Bear

A Native American male folk healer living in Oklahoma was interviewed multiple times during the course of a year. As mentioned previously White Bear asked one of the writers of this paper to interview him and write about what “the spirits” had to say about spiritual healing. This interviewer had witnessed countless others bother him for interviews and never wanted to be such a nuisance to him. Still, having been asked by White Bear, the interviewer could not imagine a person whom he would rather interview on spirituality. For years, the interviewer had participated in ceremonies with White Bear and had come to respect not only his opinions but also his spiritual commitment. Never had the interviewer ever met anyone who lived more in “spirit.” From the researchers’ perspective, spending more time in the spiritual dimension does not always equate with more profound or more complex perspectives. We had a hunch that he might be able to offer profound insights about the self, based on previous interactions and observations. One of the most discussed topics between the researchers was our experiences with other folk healers who overestimated their powers and who exhibited narcissistic tendencies. We revisited this concern many times during our work with White Bear. We found White Bear’s recurrent remarks about his limitations and his dismissive, self-effacing comment that often ended the interviews refreshing: “Take this information or leave it. I just say what I am told. If it is helpful good, but it is really none of my business.” We also found ourselves examining our own academic narcissism which lead us to value being “very critical,” an attitude that closes off much life experience.

Whenever going to visit White Bear, he was almost always to be seen on a boulder in the distance with his pipe. He had led over 500 sweat lodge ceremonies, hundreds of healing dances, including being pierced at sun dance over two dozen times. There were also little things he did without the slightest fanfare. I was told that in the middle of one night he had gotten up, put as
many bottles of water in the back of his pick-up as he could and then headed 15 hours south to Louisiana. He had heard that people there were without water after the hurricane. He also talked differently than most medicine people. He did not seem to ever say what tribal people thought he should say. He seemed to always talk spontaneously, without calculation, with great wisdom and genuineness. From the researchers’ views White Bear is a good representative of folk healers because of his genuineness, his uniqueness and the respect he has from his local community and Sun Dance community.

The pseudonym “White Bear” is used to protect his identity. He made it clear that maintaining his anonymity is vital primarily to protect his and his family’s privacy, so he limited the demographic information we originally proposed to disclose in this paper. As the concept of anonymity will be discussed at length in a much wider usage later in this article, it is relevant here to state that White Bear irregularly goes to a local prison to support Alcoholic Anonymous members. When asked if he received his teachings about anonymity from this organization, he said, “No. the spirits taught me about it. I use an old Indian word for it but what I have heard of anonymity I think it may be close to what the spirits taught me. So that is the word I use with you.”

Like the shamans in biographies (Conley, 2005; McFadden, 1991) we have read, White Bear described horrific times in his life’s path. He said he endured great poverty when he was young, but more painful was learning to love and accept his mother who was called “schizophrenic.” He said he spent the first part of his life fearing he was “crazy,” but the spirits told him that he could heal. He repeatedly spoke of his station as a healer as being involuntary.

White Bear is in his fifties and said that his vocation is a “ditch digger.” He has a high school education but has never read an entire book and has no interest in doing so. Although he has limited formal education, he discussed his spiritual experiences in a highly sophisticated fashion. For the most part, he spoke out of his personal experiences, though, often relating them to the hundreds of Native American events in which he has participated over the years. He said he simply reported what the “spirits” taught, whether they were “Native American or other religions.” The interviewer told him that some of his teachings sounded similar to Eastern religious ideas. He responded that he “did not know about that.” But that he did not have time to read about it if that was what I was suggesting, because he already had too much to think about just dealing with what the spirits taught him. Still, he explained that just because he practiced Native American rituals (He has sundanced with the Lakota for half his life), he had no interest in “preaching Indian stuff.” In fact, he was happy that one of the researchers practiced Buddhist rituals and hoped the ideas could be translated into that person’s life in a positive way.

He and his wife do healing work together on an almost daily basis. In the past, his wife and her family have been very politically active members of their tribe. He and his wife live on a small tract of land several miles from a small town, where people come for healing from across the United States, Europe, and Mexico. White Bear said the number of people who come to them seeking
healing can become overwhelming. He and his wife run two large sweat lodges every other Saturday evening and lead healing dances every other Sunday. The participants range in number from 12 to 75 persons on those Sundays. He and his wife also receive individuals seeking healing throughout the week. They conduct at least one fire dance per year, during which they carefully contextualize its appropriateness and relevance. About half of the people who come for healing report drug and alcohol problems.

Researchers

We consider White Bear as a partner in theorizing rather than a research participant. Thus, it is vital to explain the nature of the interaction between us as researchers and White Bear, although we acknowledge that the relationship is a complex and changing entity. We are a Native American counseling psychologist and a Korean educational psychologist. The Native American researcher has known White Bear over seven years. He has participated in hundreds of Native American Indian ceremonies and dances throughout his life and has periodically participated in spiritual and cultural events in which he practiced the “pause” (the pause will be described later) with White Bear. He has also regularly conversed with White Bear on the topics of spirituality and healing in formal and informal settings. This pre-established rapport and trusting dynamic allowed us to retain an insider (emic) perspective, which facilities the representation of the lived experience of indigenous people through dialogue. The insider’s view requires rigorous, critical self-reflection to avoid potential prejudicial views (Smith, 2005). Thus, the Native American researcher kept copious notes regarding his own observations and interpretations to reflect upon throughout the study in order to keep in mind that White Bear’s knowledges and perspectives were the center of the study. The other researcher has less knowledge of and fewer experiences with Native American culture, but has extensive knowledge of research methodology, and has regularly participated in Christian workshops and retreats that have encouraged spiritual experiences that might be described as mystical. She positioned herself as a fellow traveler of sorts who listened and shared with a participatory mode of consciousness.

Data Sources and Data Representation

Interviews were the main data sources in understanding the intricate details of White Bear’s perspectives and conversing freely without being constrained by predetermined prototypes or assumptions. The Native American researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with White Bear on ten separate occasions. Open-ended questions were used during each interview to serve as reference guides for the researcher, but the researcher attempted to follow the natural flow of White Bear’s remarks and attempted to engage in dialogue. Each interview conversation was centered around certain topics, such as ego diminishment, spiritual and psychological healing, energy, dimensions of reality, and interconnectedness and the unitary experience. Each interview
lasted one to one and a half hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, which resulted in a 146-page transcript.

Besides the interviews, observations of and participation with White Bear in rituals also served as data sources, which were documented in the extensive field notes format. The field notes included descriptions of the setting where the rituals and ceremonies were conducted, descriptions of behaviors and interpersonal dynamics, direct quotes from the conversations, and our comments, insights, and reflections. In addition, our ongoing memo writing and follow-up communication with White Bear were used as data sources. The multiple data sources in this study helped us to better understand the multifaceted nature of White Bear’s perspectives. We read and reread the interview transcripts, field notes, and memos and then highlighted significant remarks throughout the documents. The highlighted remarks were compared, contrasted, and aggregated in order to find similar patterns and categories. Throughout this process, the researchers triangulated and summarized the extensive text into core themes that reflected overall contexts and meaning. During the process of interviewing White Bear and analyzing the text, we brought in defined concepts from Western psychology and Western religions and showed them to White Bear. However, White Bear constantly deconstructed those concepts and loosened the researchers’ rigidity so that the meaning could be expanded and enriched. Thus, this study is based on the premise that there is no single spiritual Truth in time and space; rather, tentative truths and meanings can emerge through discourse with the subject of the study. This study attempts to encourage this dialogue with readers as well so that the process of deconstruction creates more space for growth and new language.

**RESULTS**

The following comments recorded from interviews with White Bear came in response to the questions (related to the four inquiry areas mentioned in the focus of the study section: (a) developing beyond the self-centered identity, (b) achieving awareness beyond judgment, (c) selflessness, and (d) healing through meditation. The areas of inquiry primarily emerged from previous experience with White Bear but were informed by the research and theory outlined in the literature review. As mentioned in the method section, triangulation, involving both researchers was utilized to arrive at the themes that are discussed below. The subheadings listed below emerged from analysis of the data rather than from any theoretical framework. Nonetheless, analysis of the data, a joint effort of the researchers, was certainly influenced by knowledges of Native American spirituality, Christian theology, Buddhism, and psychological theories.

**Overcoming the Self-Centered Identity by Befriending the Self**

When listening to White Bear define the self, the Native American researcher recalled feeling at first that he was being equivocal. “The self is a concept just
like God is a concept. If you don’t know what they are, then my words won’t help you. You feel yourself if you are open to feeling alive, and you can feel God’s love if that is what you want to call it, but you can’t talk precisely about it because we don’t know anything that we can compare them to.” At first, the interviewer wondered if White Bear was incapable of defining the self. Did he instinctively know the self and feel by summing it up in words he would be doing it violence? It was clear that he was not going to begin a plodding doctrinaire elucidation. He would not give the researcher repetitious phrases that would congeal into a fully developed definition. But he does indicate in this comment that the self is something we “feel” or intuit. As mentioned earlier, Tillich (1964) also suggested that the self we talk about is removed from lived reality. Language itself is based on dividing up and comparing experiences. Further, White Bear connects the self to God, mysterious reality beyond isolated containment.

I continued, “I have heard Christians talk to you about the importance of dying to the self or sacrificing the self. I have listened, wondering how that may or may not fit into Native American views about realizing our interconnection to everything. Would you comment on this?” White Bear responded,

There is not an Indian perspective. I can tell you what the spirits are telling me. They say, “Don’t kill it. You can’t kill it.” The self tries to keep us safe from suffering right now. The self is important because it protects us and it keeps us on top of problems. It is helpful. I might have been hit and buried by the dirt when we were digging that ditch the other day if not for self. But it likes to look good all the time and the false one the Christians are talking about is a control freak (he seems to mean what the Christians refer to as the false self; possibly White Bear was reacting to phrases such as Bonhoeffer’s “death of the self” described in the literature review) It is supposed to be viewing all this … this creation that is always going on right now, but when it is in control, you just see only its protective vision that is not totally true and keeps you from seeing the beauty right in front of you.

White Bear begins with the assumption that there is part of a person that transcends and is capable of being mindful of the self. White Bear suggested that the self is simply a part of who people are and has a protective function. However, appearance is more important to it than truth. It may hide faults from a person on the pretext that the person may suffer, thus denying the person the possibility of insight and growth. White Bear suggested that the self may deny us the full present experience of appreciating our surroundings because it may keep us preoccupied with protective concerns and the way we may appear to others or try to control things so much that we cannot experience them for what they are. When individuals are overly self-conscious or preoccupied with how they think things should be, they cannot think clearly, feel naturally, or appreciate what is occurring in the present. White Bear continued,

People have tried to control the self through warfare. If it is the true self, it is viewing creation. It doesn’t need to be killed. It’s got its purpose. I try to not
fight self but have conversations with it instead. The self loves being listened to. Give it attention and honor it by wondering about its gifts. Make friends with it. We have to give self the permission to be who it is. We have to quit being at war with it. It is too tricky and powerful for us to defeat anyway. Self wants to look good. We have been hurt and embarrassed, and self wants us to look good. That would be a tricky thing for us to just kill off.

White Bear argued that it is important not to deprive the self of its needs. He said it is vital that a person let the self be who it is, a protector and an observer. People can “view creation” in harmony with their protective self. White Bear sees the insurmountable wiles of the self and suggests that people give it attention and make friends with it. It is crucial to note that White Bear was careful not to demean the self but rather said that the self demands recognition. The underlying assumption is that the self is only one important part of who we are but should not completely rule us. White Bear continued,

When a drop hits the rock, it goes everywhere, but then it becomes whole in the stream. Hitting the rock we come whole again. Self doesn’t want to splatter. It wants us to stay in the protective box. It doesn’t want to be the water drop that splatters into everything. When things happen that splatter us, we become nut cases. Self wants to quickly put us back together in the same or a similar box to not be embarrassed. Self wants to be in control all the time but it needs the chaos of splattering to change and grow.

The researcher asked, “Have you seen examples of people splattering and staying free?” White Bear said, “I have seen a few persons who were thought to be burned out on drugs or alcohol and miraculously re-emerged as humble appreciative people.” Was White Bear saying that when people accept the loss of control of their over-protective selves, when they lose their identification with their rigid self forms, that they have a chance for a larger identification? He seemed to be saying that full awareness comes when people are no longer in a hypervigilant state, when there is no more self-importance left. In order to remain free from self-tyranny, people must relax into the stream of ongoing change and openness or even into the chaos of unpredictable spontaneity. It is a state of being that may appear excessively vulnerable to many of us who want control. Still, White Bear had seen a few people who, having hit “rock bottom,” had become humble, meek, and thankful enough to “go with the flow” of life.

The researcher asked, “If we become truly humble, are we what people call enlightened or in harmony?” White Bear laughed and complicated matters more. He said, “If anyone got there, they would become unenlightened the next second because creation doesn’t stop. As long as you are in time and space, there is always more to experience and know.” White Bear believes that people can only experience profound awareness if they avoid developmental closure by responding flexibly to new conditions and challenges. Any state like enlightenment must constantly be renewed and refilled (Wilber, 2007).

White Bear discussed the self’s tendencies toward hubris. For many Christians, pride is believed to be the most fundamental enemy to spiritual development,
social harmony, and individual happiness. Consequently, as White Bear said, many believe they must make war against the hubris self until it is subdued. White Bear claimed that such an approach only initiates an unwinnable war that will cause misery. He suggested that people give the self attention, which it craves, and converse with it (possibly about its protective functions). When this is done, the self can relax and continue its protective functions and begin to view ongoing creation rather than seeking to control it. The point of his comments appears to be that we can move beyond the self’s fears to living a life of greater freedom and serenity.

Healing the Self by Wondering about Hidden Gifts

When the self is not given the attention it desires, it looks with the gaze of judgment. White Bear said, “Most of the time our minds are a cesspool. We are so in our heads sizing each other up and judging, we end up abusing each other instead of creating with each other. If we were healthy, we would be healing others in our every interaction with them.” White Bear’s metaphor compares our selfish pattern of compulsive fault finding, critical one-upmanship, and obsessive comparisons with stench and waste. The self-interested identity feeds on distinguishing its opinions and appearance from others with a desire to feel superior. Csikszentmihalyi’s studies (1990) support White Bear’s metaphor; he reported that most people’s attention is engaged in personal problems, grudges, and frustrations. He further estimated that most people spend, on average, 50% to 90% of their conversations talking negatively about others. White Bear continued, “By judging, you are trying to prove you’re okay. Your self is telling you that you are such a great person and others aren’t. Judging keeps us from being who we are. You are a being living in the present and you don’t even know it. Instead of living in creation, you are in the cesspool of the false ideas about who you think you should be.” White Bear said that there are continual opportunities to relax and live in the moment. We can live in life’s constant stream, in relationship with others, rather than a stagnant egotistic pool, at odds with others. In the stream, people would no longer feel the need to judge and compulsively react. By not succumbing to the self’s defensiveness, we could experience harmony and promote it in the world. Complaints and judging have no purpose except to feed the false self’s attempts to control rather than observe creation.

White Bear carefully linked judging with not being present. He said, “If you are judging others or yourself, you are recreating an event that happened to you. You are recreating what already was created. You are not experiencing the new building blocks of the present. You are not in the present unfolding of creation.” White Bear argued that most of people’s physical, mental, and emotional functions are carried out in an involuntary, automatic, and repetitive fashion, out of habits based on past experiences. They are unaware of many of these habits, many stemming from patterns that were created in their ways of thinking and feeling from previous events in their lives. Those narrative patterns are so ingrained that they distract people from feeling the life within and around them in the present moment. White Bear said that these
mental patterns include judging both others and ourselves. People have the illusion that judging will somehow protect them, but the false, controlling, and judging self cannot live in the moment, where it is vulnerable to unpredictable occurrences.

White Bear said that one of the “Little People” (spirits he works with) gave him a specific concept to help him avoid engaging in incessant automatic judging.

_Eeneecho_ is an energy without judgment, without control, without dogma. _En ee okeenee eeneecho o kone a baka._ The spirit inside you and the spirit inside me is the only truth we have. I wonder what the gift is inside you. Baajaloo (little person spirit) taught me this. He asked me, “Do you want to be healed?” He observed me making a judgment toward my mother and her schizophrenia. He asked me when was the last time I wondered what her gift is. … Wonder is energy without control. You are not making a judgment of what the gift is.

White Bear believes that by practicing _eeneecho_, looking for the gifts in others, one refines perceptual sensitivity, which helps the mind to observe itself and the world in a new and fresh way. When one becomes capable of this kind of conscious self-regulation, one begins to wonder and see gifts in all things and experiences, and then healing can ensue. If we change the negative patterns of measuring ourselves against others, being competitive, feeling threatened and threatening others, and looking endlessly for what we can gain or preserve, into wondering about others’ gifts, we can begin to heal instead of being caught in the cycle of producing antagonism and receiving it, resenting others, and being resented. White Bear continued,

These people we judge are our teachers. They are doing things to us that should teach us something. Many people will pray for their enemies so they won’t be bothered by them anymore. They should consider what it is about themselves that attracts the conflict with the person. You have a chance to move closer to no time, no space if you can do that. Every difficult experience or conflict is what they call enlightenment. … Don’t try to control the conflict or even force harmony. Let go as you live each moment.

People view others as enemies when they personalize things others do or say. White Bear suggests that people pause and consider their own limitations or prejudices in the context of the conflict rather than reactively judging the “other” who judges them. Such a pause in judging preoccupations and reactions can provide a healing space that is without stress and anxiety. He suggests that even prayer for others can be tarnished by a condescending false compassion and can cause us to avoid the potential for growth that the conflict might contain. He advocates a qualitative state where the mind and emotion relax their braces.

Then, just when one might be considering that White Bear’s challenges may be too difficult to achieve, he makes them more arduous. “No one gets healed
until they see the gift in their abuse. Never! People realize how hurt their abuser is when they become healed. It is hard to get to this place.” The researcher responded, “But what about the abuser who feels no remorse?” He replied, “Be careful. You are getting into the area of judgment. There are people who did not experience as much pressure growing up, and some of these blessed ones become judgmental towards those who had a tougher time than they did growing up. Every person is an abuser and everyone has been abused, otherwise we wouldn’t be here.” If people meet hatred with hatred, they degrade themselves. When they judge, they bring fear and contention into their relationships. Unresolved conflicts, that is, ongoing, circular, vengeful thoughts, keep us unhealthy, obsessive, and unconnected to reality. If people can change negative patterns of thinking into compassion, they change who they are. White Bear contended that to gain clarity and healing, one must suspend judgment. People can commit their lives to living consciously in openness, forgiveness, and love rather than continuing in negative modes.

Various psychologists have written about ways that people block or armor themselves from living naturally, freely, and openly. Their perspectives are not so different from White Bear’s. Freud (1923/1960) defined neuroticism as viewing present experiences through the lenses of past traumas. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1980) claimed that the most difficult clients were those who avoided present awareness by intellectualizing. Cognitive-behaviorists wrote of imprisoning automatic thought feedback loops (Beck, Brown, Berchick, Stewart, & Steer, 1990). The Flow psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote that the optimal flow state requires mastery over one’s inner life, filtering both worries and intruding, irrelevant thoughts. Deikman (1966) demonstrated that participants in his study who engaged in Meditation Deautomatization increased the quality of their perceptions, developed capacities for unusual deployment of attention, and disrupted habitual perception patterns.

White Bear situates psychological liberation in the larger context of an oceanic spiritual energy flowing through all things. He argues that when the ego usurps control, an imbalance blocks energy, causing illness. He also puts special focus on how judgment of others or events keeps us in the realm of concepts and away from direct perception, experience, pure energy, and healing. White Bear adds psychological content to the typically noted idea of Native Americans favoring naturalness over more conventional and artificial modes of living and perceiving. He calls our typical mental and emotional functioning a “cesspool” filled with memories, cravings, miscellaneous irritations, and much nonsense distracting us from present awareness of the beauty in our immediate surroundings.

Anonymity

In the above sections, White Bear teaches that we suffer because of our failure to be in the present. We think our true being resides in our sense of self-importance and believe that we are isolated individual beings. He reminds us
that judging others is really about feeding our own self-interestedness. White Bear said,

It is like an ocean of energy is pouring through us and we get a bucket and fill it up and try to live on that bucket of water that we have decided we are. The bucket wears out. Narrow and fixed views of ourselves block energy flow. In anonymity, we can live in celebration of the energy flowing through us. Judging is the quickest way of ending the experience of anonymity. You are no longer in the moment.

White Bear stated that if we can allow ourselves to relax our insulated self-vigilance and experience the natural flow of life as it occurs, we might consciously experience an anonymity that allows the omnipresent energy to flow through us. He stressed that we must let go of our ordinary, narrow self-definition. It is our self-importance that keeps us fixed in our limited reality and separates us from feeling the exhilaration of ourselves as conduits through which life constantly flows.

One of the integral aspects of White Bear’s teachings about spiritual healing is that we function as conduits rather than as buckets. White Bear says,

Who do you want to be anyway? When we are in spirit, we don’t need credit for anything. It is better if you heal without knowing you are doing it. This way you won’t try to control the work you are doing and limit it. The spirits can do the work without your pride or self-importance blocking the pure energy. … I don’t heal anyone. I am present observing the spirits working on people. We all do this and typically are not aware we are doing this. … Healing is best done in anonymity. You do it indifferently. I mean you feel it but you don’t control it. It is none of your business.

White Bear said that the healer allows the healing energy to freely pass through herself or himself to others. Self-glorification is a form of hoarding that halts the flow of energy. The false insulated self is possessive in regard to actions and achievements, taking credit for successes and bemoaning failures and making excuses for them, worrying about results. White Bear spoke of himself as a vessel. He said that the result of his healing work is “none of his business,” which frees him from anxiety about the outcome of his healing work.

When asked for an example of when he successfully practiced anonymous healing, he replied,

I saw a washboard appear in the sweat lodge and told a person in the lodge about the vision. It meant something to the person I was talking to but had no meaning to me. He said that he had one in his car trunk. I think the person is surprised out of their thoughts or something, but they also feel kind of special when the spirits pick them out. It becomes none of my business instantly. I may say that I don’t know what it means, but it must mean something to you. The spirits will show me something sometimes to get a person in a position for healing. The person usually says “yes.” Just by
saying “yes,” the energy moves. But if a person backs off, then the spirit will say or show something funny. Laughing is a no time/no space experience.

Consistent with the above teachings about the self, anonymity is not the same as selflessness. On the contrary, many people should develop a sense of feeling special. White Bear makes it very clear that until people realize their own self-worth, they can never attain a more expanded awareness. Self-worth is not the same as self-centeredness. Self-centeredness, greed, and self-interestedness must be faced and worked through in order to attain authentic self-worth (Fromm, 1956). The individual self may be inconsequential compared to the whole, but it is the passageway or conduit in time and space for the creative energy to flow.

To summarize this anonymity section, it is best for us not to be fully aware of the healing that we accomplish with others. Anonymity keeps self-interestedness, which blocks the healing energy that flows through us, out of the way. The anonymous healer is in a place of no self-importance and no expectation for the fruit of his or her labor. The anonymous person is a vehicle of energy, not an obstruction to it, and knowing it is none of his or her business, there is no desire to be seen as great, nor is there a need to have things turn out the way one wants them to.

For White Bear, humility and anonymity are prominent, but not in a stereotypical way. White Bear, like other warriors, never humiliates himself, laying prostrate, begging for pity. As a healing person, he realizes that self-centered effort limits the effectiveness of his work with persons with problems and illnesses. White Bear yields himself to the present moment and detaches from his expectations. A person can get caught up in the suffering of trying to attain recognition and then suffer when he or she attains it. The project of personal development can easily turn into mere self-gratification, but real personal development may be more about divesting ourselves of the image of ourselves that we seek to attain.

Healing in the Pause

During healing dances that White Bear leads every other Sunday, White Bear sometimes calls on all dancers to “pause,” or suddenly stop dancing. When asked about the significance of “pause,” he said,

We often move ahead of the energy. Getting in the pause allows us to get back into no time and no space … back before you learned anything, back to being at one. Watch the lizard and you will see what the pause is. When we stop and pause, all of our dimensions get in line again. There is active chaos in our everyday actions, and that is a part of creation. Everything comes apart as we dance. Then we pause in no time and no space. Then if there is not control, the true, pure creation of life comes through and spiritual healing occurs.

Here he described a pause that allows for a unitary healing spiritual experience. The lizard that White Bear referenced moves quickly from one place to the
next, stopping abruptly and looking around. When we are driven in our intention to reach a goal, we may accomplish much but may also lose touch with our unity and harmony unless we stop intermittently to connect with the world we live in and our whole selves. A pause involves sitting in no time no space, reconnecting to our whole self. It is a place where we may escape our goal-driven hypervigilance in order to experience calm and gain some inner order. It is also a place where there is potential and creative visionary experience. White Bear did not say that the pause is a place to recuperate, nor did he say it is a moment that lends significance to our lives. It is a place where we can be absorbed in no space and no time, in the unity of being and a time to allow creative healing energy to flow through us. White Bear continued,

When you are momentized, you are in a black hole. You wonder about the thoughts you have outside the hole. We wonder about those thoughts in an uncontrolled way. We should think of these thoughts in much the same way we would think about another person’s conversation. We feel disconnected from ourselves when we wallow in thoughts. We stay in those ongoing thoughts, never disconnecting ourselves from them, never connecting to the pure energy in the black hole. Somebody insulted you. Simply pause, stop your train of thought, and sift through your thoughts, wondering what would be of value in the insults. *Loin beon miscelic.* Wondering what the gift is in anything. Wondering what the gift is not knowing, but wondering. You are here connected with all things.

Potentially, the pause is a space where we are free from the delusions that come from identifying with our thoughts and feelings. It is a unique position from which we can view our thoughts and feelings without being carried away by them. We can detach from our worries and fears and wonder about the creative potential embedded in them, but we must hold them in the purifying energy of the moment. We can be the awareness behind our opinions and feelings.

The researcher asked if the pause could be cultivated in sweats, peyote meetings, or meditations. He responded,

I am not trying to offend you about your Native American Church meetings, and you know I lead sweats, but intentional meditation and rituals almost always become boxes. They are usually set up in regular ritualistic ways. I don’t like this. Anything that gets too purposeful can begin blocking the energy, the spirits. You can be in a pause while riding a bull. Children get in pauses all the time while they are playing. I am in the pause more often than I would choose. You know living in time and space is important, but you need no time and space for healing. The pause hasn’t always necessarily been a peaceful place for me either. A couple of times, early on, I became very afraid when there. I saw some of the thinking outside the black hole coming into this spirit space. I don’t know if it was coming in to be transformed through healing or if I didn’t completely get out of time and space with all its stuff. I felt fear. I now let go and experience it for what it is and no longer feel fear. But it is not a place most adults can be peaceful in for very long. It is just being. It is not self.
White Bear let the interviewer know in no uncertain terms that experiencing the pause is not something we can grasp and subdue through intention and focused discipline. Rather, it is something more elusive and free. It is experienced by the unarmored, the one with childlike spontaneity, else the pause becomes another box created by regimented discipline, which has little place in White Bear’s teachings about the primacy of the moment. It is a potentially scary place if we are not ready for the unpredictable and unexplainable that may occur there. He hinted that if we are not ready to simply be in the pause, we may be especially vulnerable to anxiety and fear when outside worries intrude. We have forgotten how to pause, and if we simply be rather than do, we lose our orientation and lack organization. Yet White Bear teaches that it is this state of unscheduled silence that heals.

**DISCUSSION**

From the first interview, White Bear insisted that neither concepts nor analogies will do when one tries to define God or the self. As selves, we bear the imprint of an ineffable reality. William James wrote that mystics have noetic experiences, or experience scattered bits of a unitary experience, that is, intuit the connection of their self with the Real Self but cannot articulate it. Thomas Merton followed a long line of Christian mystics such as Master Echart and John of the Cross in what he called the apophatic tradition, or the dark path, which seeks to unite the small self with the larger Self through a subjective path that eludes definitions and is communicated, though inadequately, only in paradoxical expressions. White Bear is in this tradition although he expresses his thoughts differently.

While White Bear never offered, and even resisted a definition of the self, he did suggest meanings about the self. For instance, after a purification ceremony, I asked him if he would be White Bear after he died. This following is the essence of what he said and in a harsh tone I might add. “No! Hey nobody knows what happens after we die. You really want to be a reference point? You want to be your memories? Really? Listen. The center, which you are always in, whether you know it or not, is everything and one. It is that simple.” This seemed to be the essence of what he had been saying all along and having read more of the transpersonal literature this statement had meaning for us. Both Wilber and Ferrer argued that the self is not real in the sense of a static point of view objectively scanning the environment but rather is the interconnections themselves of which our subjectivity is participatory and does not exist without.

So, in what ways might White Bear’s mystical perspectives influence behavioral health, and how can they be utilized by therapists? White Bear helps us to reconsider our relationship to ourselves. Many Western psychologies have emphasized that persons must have achieved in order to feel self-efficacious. On the other hand, some mystical traditions have argued that self-diminishment is necessary for an awakening to the vision of unitary consciousness. White Bear teaches that one can never slay the self and that it...
is vital that we “make friends with it” and “give it the attention it needs” to keep it from acting as a tyrant. White Bear suggests that we do not give in to the tyranny of the self, which easily becomes overprotective and self-interested. On the other hand, White Bear believes that the self can act as a conduit for a much larger energy. When appreciation is shown to the self, it can do its protective work and give us a strong sense of will and purpose without becoming tyrannical. Ken Wilber (2007) also argued that persons who have matured into responsible, stable persons may then move to the next stage of growth, which consists of transcendent openness and the awakening of a unitary awareness.

One of White Bear’s most powerful spiritual techniques for healing is achieving a state that he calls the pause. In most mainstream Western psychologies, there is little emphasis on the use of states of being for healing. This is in spite of the fact that four decades ago Charley Tart (1972) wrote a seminal article that challenged the idea that alternate states of being were not accessible to scientific investigation. Since then a plethora of articles have appeared in journals such as the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology and the International Journal of Transpersonal Studies where state specific methods of investigation have been developed and used to examine areas such as meditative states, lucid dreaming and LSD intoxication. “Mainstream” psychology would do well to listen to such contributions and make more use of it in therapy. As far as literature about Native Americans in psychology, in particular, is concerned, we most often find an emphasis on system theories, which focus on external patterns. White Bear, on the other hand, focuses on interior states of individual being, which may or may not contribute eventually to more healthy social interactions. By entering the “pause,” one can enter a state of being characterized by what he calls “no time and no space,” or “momentization,” during which one is freed from obsessions, all dimensions of being are integrated into one, and spiritual healing occurs. It is also characterized by a lack of self-domination and no differentiation. These states may facilitate the self’s growth into higher stages of development in which energy blockings due to self-centeredness are replaced by a wondering about others’ gifts, which, according to White Bear, allows the release of healing flexibility, openness, fluidity, and living in the present.

Without these pauses, the mind remains in a tortured state of constantly making judgments, filled with envy, jealousy, and ambition, unendingly comparing itself to others. White Bear refers to our inner worlds as tremendous wastages. If clients could be taught to pause periodically, turn off judgments, see the gifts in others and their own experiences, and identify with a broader consciousness, they might potentially address their stress issues as well as gain valuable insights that could act as anchors to hold them in higher spiritual developmental levels. Such a perspective is close to the Buddhist practice of bodhicitta, or wishing well on others (Kornfield, 1993). Instead of being annoyed with a person with whom we see ourselves in competition, we have positive aspirations for that person. When people are difficult to interact with, instead of hardening our hearts toward them, we see them as our teachers. Also, White Bear’s perspective is somewhat akin to Mindfulness Based
Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which “unlike Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, has little emphasis on changing the content of thoughts: rather, the emphasis is on changing awareness of and relationship to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations” (Segal, Teasdale, & Williams, 2004, p. 54). MBCT therapists teach mindfulness and meditation to their clients to relieve stress and facilitate relapse prevention.

On the other hand, White Bear’s perspectives do not directly address many areas that psychologists and therapists regularly work on with their clients. Folk spiritual practices, such as White Bear’s, could benefit from incorporating some mainstream psychological practices that have been subjected to empirical investigation since many spiritual folk approaches may not directly address contemporary Western family system problems and difficulties of love (Livingston & Cummings, 2009; Morrison, Clutter, Pritchett, & Demmitt, 2009). All sides, including White Bear’s, are limited and should be willing to learn from those with different perspectives.

In line with this, Vazquez and Garcia-Vazquez (2003) reported that folk healing perspectives are rarely covered in the graduate curriculum in psychology. Mio (2005) argued that for the most part training of mental health professionals is “culturally bound” due to the lack of coverage of models besides “traditional white models.” Duran (2006) discussed what he saw as “ethnocentric bias” in mental health services and argued that it is damaging to “natural help giving networks” that have benefitted community members for ages. He wrote that Native Americans, Asian Americans, African, Hispanic/Latino Americans and other groups are being delegitimized because they are not represented as consistent with “professional standards of practice.” We hope this paper helps readers consider the validity and therapeutic value of indigenous and folk healing ideas and methods such as White Bear’s.

This paper focused primarily on one folk healer’s opinions about his relationship to the self and ways to utilize the self in spiritual healing. In the future, researchers might include several folk healers and consider similarities and differences of their views and healing practices. More specifically, researchers might inquire into the methods whereby folk healers enter into transpersonal states. They might also consider inquiring about how the time they spent in transpersonal states impact their everyday lives. Possibly, the most meaningful part of the above study was the folk words and phrases (e.g., momentization, making friends with self, self as reference point...etc.). They provided new possibilities to articulate vital themes that are found in transpersonal literature.

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