

Oracle 2002 Survey Report

By Peter Bloom, with Mary Myers, and Nancy Anderson

Introduction

This report is a profile of contemporary, non-indigenous shamanic practitioners who attended the Oracle 2002 gathering and completed a three-page survey. The goal of this report is to provide insights into the beliefs, experiences, and practices of participants. It includes data on age, sex, shamanic studies, helping spirits, and how the participants apply shamanism in their lives.

About the Gathering

The Oracle 2002 Gathering was a meeting of shamanic practitioners from around the world. It was held from April 4-7, 2002 at the Triangle Y Camp in Oracle, AZ. The camp is an hour north of Tucson. The non-profit organization “Shamanic Circles” sponsored and organized the event. “Shamanic Circles” sponsored a similar Oracle Gathering at the same location in April 2000.

The group intention of the gathering was to heal the Earth. Each night there was a ceremony that relating to the theme of “Mend the Hoop, Nourish the Tree, Strengthen the Web.” A sand-filled volleyball court was transformed into a colorful, three-dimensional map of the earth and served as a focal point for earth-healing prayers and meditation.

A variety of offerings from attendees were presented during the gathering. The offerings included shamanic arts such as making drums, rattles, fringe masks, soapstone carving, and trance dance painting as well as plant spirit medicine, horse spirit medicine, using shamanism to help with grief, and remote healing.

About The Survey

The survey and this report are also an offering to the Oracle Gathering participants from the people who worked on the project. It was an anonymous “single-select” survey that was available to participants during the event. 74 out of 115 participants returned questionnaires.

None of the people who participated in this project are affiliated with the organizers of the Oracle Gathering. However, as attendees, we completed questionnaires and our responses are included in the data. Most of the data presented in this report came from the questionnaires that were completed by attendees during the Gathering. The exception is location data which came from a contact list that was distributed to each person attending the Gathering by the organizers.

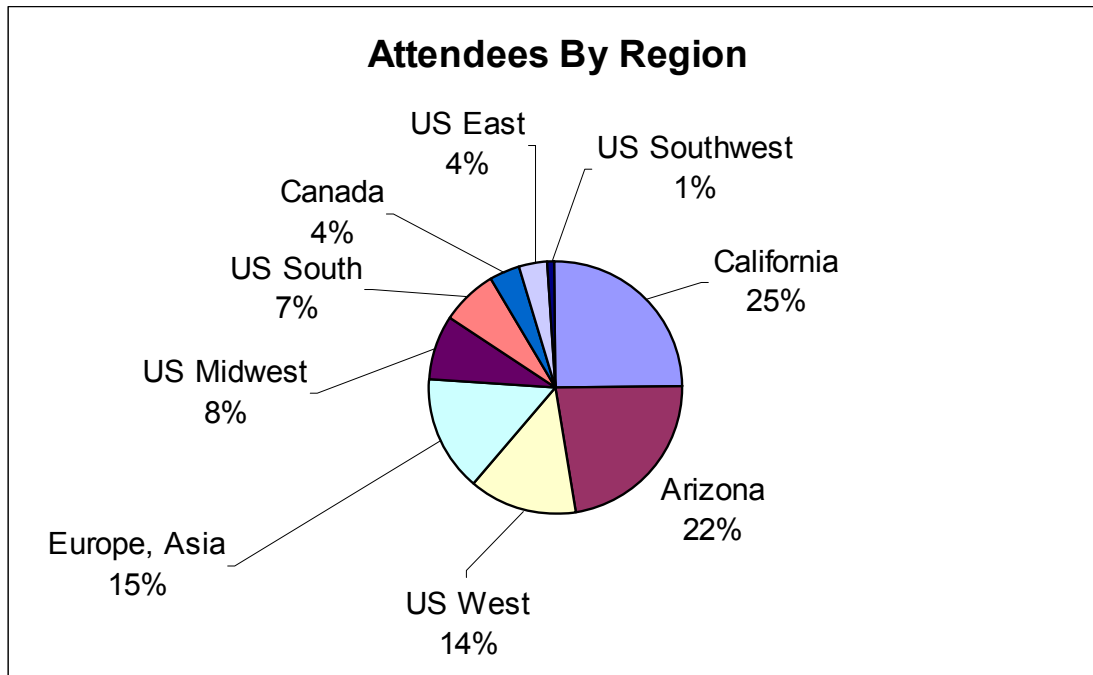
The data on location include all attendees; otherwise, when this document refers to the group, people or participants we mean only those attendees who responded to the survey. For more detailed information about the data collected, please contact Nancy Anderson by email at wiseheart@shaw.ca.

The questionnaire is at <http://www.shamaniccircles.org/2002oraclefolder/questionnaire.pdf>

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Location

The mailing list provided to attendees was the source of location data. 108 addresses were on the mailing list. 24% of the Oracle attendees on the list had addresses in California and 22% were from Arizona. Arizona and California were well represented at the Oracle 2000 Gathering, too. 16 people, or 15% of the people registered, came from Tucson. This is not surprising as Oracle is only an hour away from Tucson. There were also people coming from long distances. For example, 19% of attendees came from outside the United States. This included people from Canada, England, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Finland and the Netherlands.



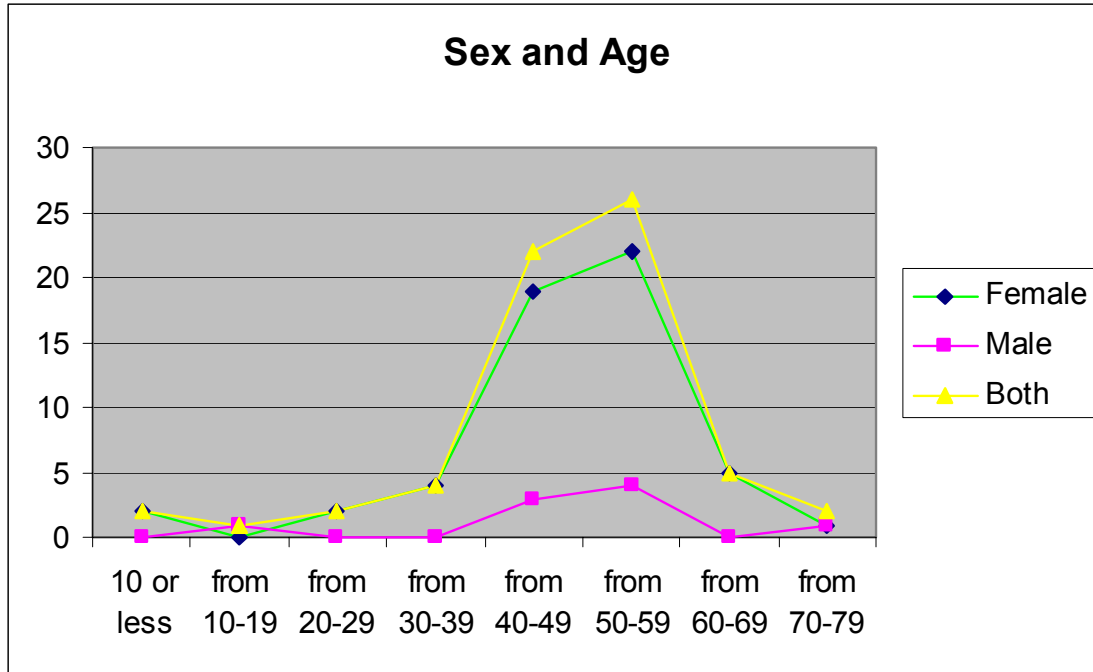
Age and Sex

The people responding to the survey were predominantly middle-aged women in their 40's and 50's. This appears to be typical of shamanic gatherings. Women represented 84% and men 16% of attendees.

The average age overall was 48.06 years. The average age of the men at Oracle was 47.44 years and the average age of the women was 48.16 years. There is a .72 year, or approximately 9 month, difference in the average age of men and women.

One family had three generations attending, but this information came informally from meeting the family.

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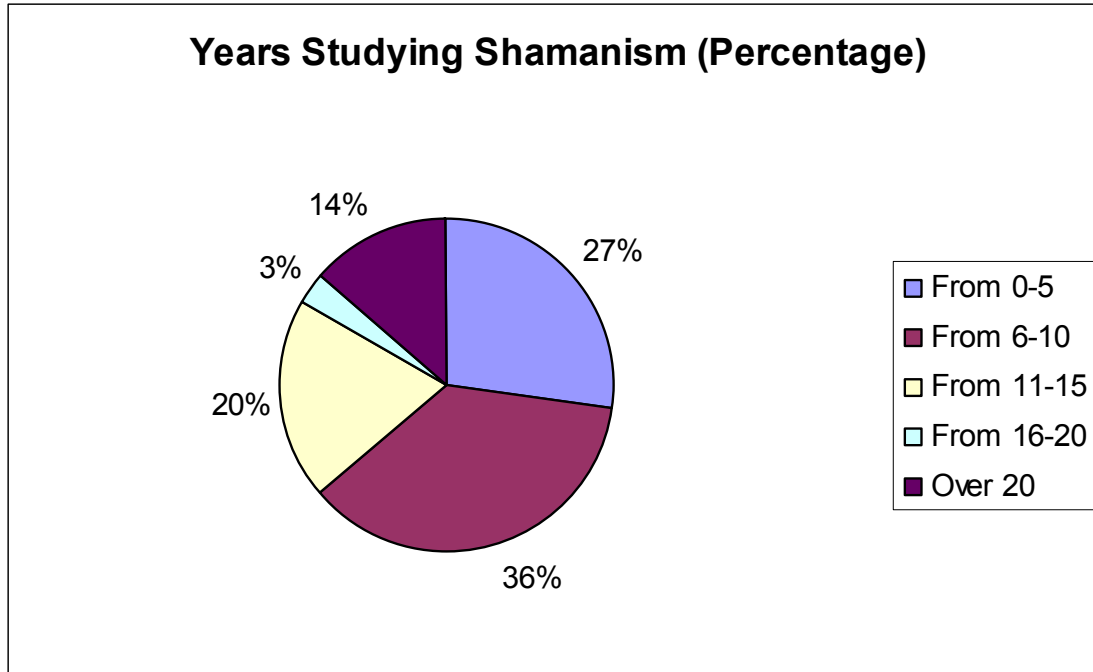
Note that there is a peak appearing among both men and women in their 40's and 50's. The single largest age group was 50-59 year olds who represented 41% of the population. This was followed by 40-49 year olds who represented 34% of the population. 11% were over 60 years old. 5% were 19 years old or younger, which is what brings the average down to 48.06.

Shamanic Study

The amount of time attendees spent studying shamanism varied from one day to 50 years. The mean or average time spent studying shamanism was 12.02 years. The mode or most commonly reported number of years was 8. The sum of all of the experience in the group of was 793 years.

Nearly two-thirds of the people responding to the survey had spent ten years or less studying shamanism. 36% or about one out of three people had from 6-10 years experience. 27% or a little over a quarter of the people had 5 years or less experience and 5% reported less than a year. 14%, approximately one out of seven, reported more than 20 years studying shamanism.

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Many people reported a life-long interest in shamanism, regardless of when they actually began to study it formally. We haven't figured out how to report past life experience yet!

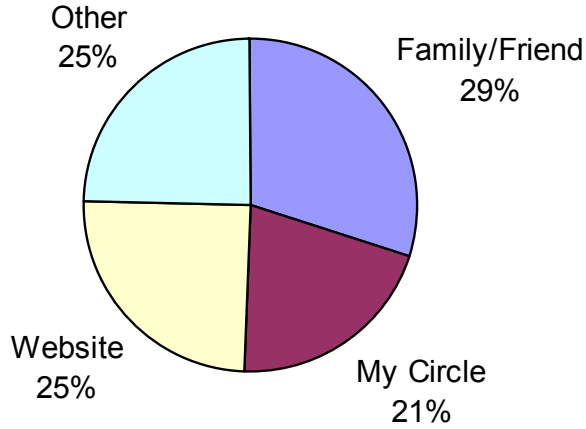
Oracle Participation

People new to the Oracle Gathering outnumbered those who attended the first Oracle Gathering. 62% were there for the first time. However, 69% of attendees said they had been to other shamanic gatherings.

Half of the people attending found out the Oracle Gatherings through direct personal contacts such as family, friends or circles. For example, 29% found out about the gathering from family or friends and 21% heard about it from their local circles. 25% found out about it from the Shamanic Circles website. The remaining 25% found out about the gathering from other sources such as the Shamanic Circles council, email, the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, a brochure from Sandra Ingerman, the Blue Sky Waters Newsletter, and the Bear Sisters (a Tucson circle).

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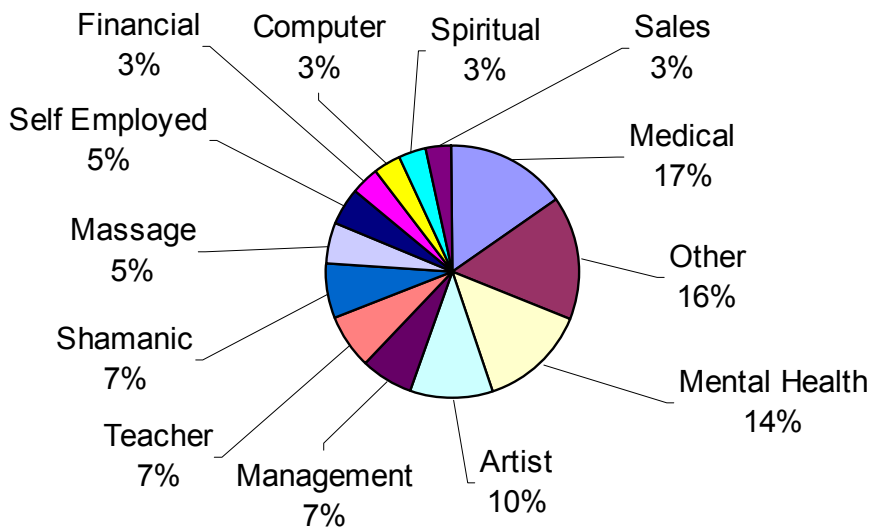
How Attendees Found Out About Oracle



Occupation

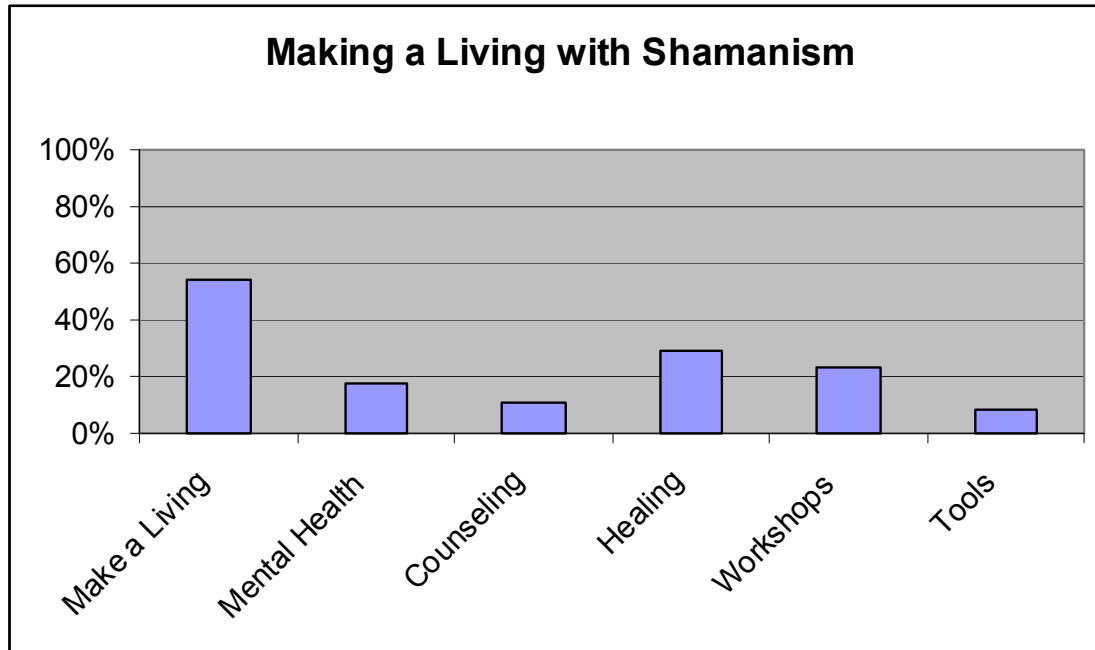
A large number of participants who came to the Oracle Gathering worked in helping professions. The combination of medical, mental health, shamanic, spiritual, massage, and teachers added up to 53% of attendees. 31% reported that they work in the medical and mental health fields.

Occupations



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Half the people reported that shamanism is part of how they make a living, even though only 7% used the word “shamanic” when they listed their occupation. One out of four people said that provide shamanic healing and charge for their services. One out of five people lead workshops and charge for their services. 11% offer and charge for shamanic counseling. 8% said that they create shamanic tools and charge for them. It is interesting to note that 18% said they were a psychologist, psychiatrist, or mental health professional and use shamanism in their work.



Helping Spirits

One important reason for submitting completed questionnaires anonymously to a collection box was that participants were asked to name their power animals, which is considered private information by many shamanic practitioners. So, it is important to note that the authors were able to preserve the anonymity of the people responding.

The question that asked people to identify their power animal drew the most impassioned response. Some received clear guidance not to include this information, but many were willing to share in this anonymous fashion. Those who did answer the question reported a wide range of power animals and helping spirits. Some participants said that they connected with more than one power animal and worked with specific ones for particular purposes.

More than 90% of the power animals reported by participants were birds and mammals. Bear was the most commonly reported power animal with 23%. Wolf was the second most common at 8%, followed by Eagle and Horse at 5%. Deer, Fox, Hummingbird, Jaguar, and Tiger were each power animals for 4% of the people responding. Buffalo, Mountain Lion, Owl, and Panther were each reported by 3% of the attendees. The remaining power animals were reported by only one person, but collectively added up to 19%. It is interesting to note that 3% of the people responding to the survey listed mythological creatures such as Dragon and Thunderbird.

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In the questionnaire we asked “What is your primary power animal,” implying we were asking for one animal. To our surprise, 20% listed more than one “primary” animal. In those cases, we counted the first animal on the list. 81% reported having other animal helping spirits.

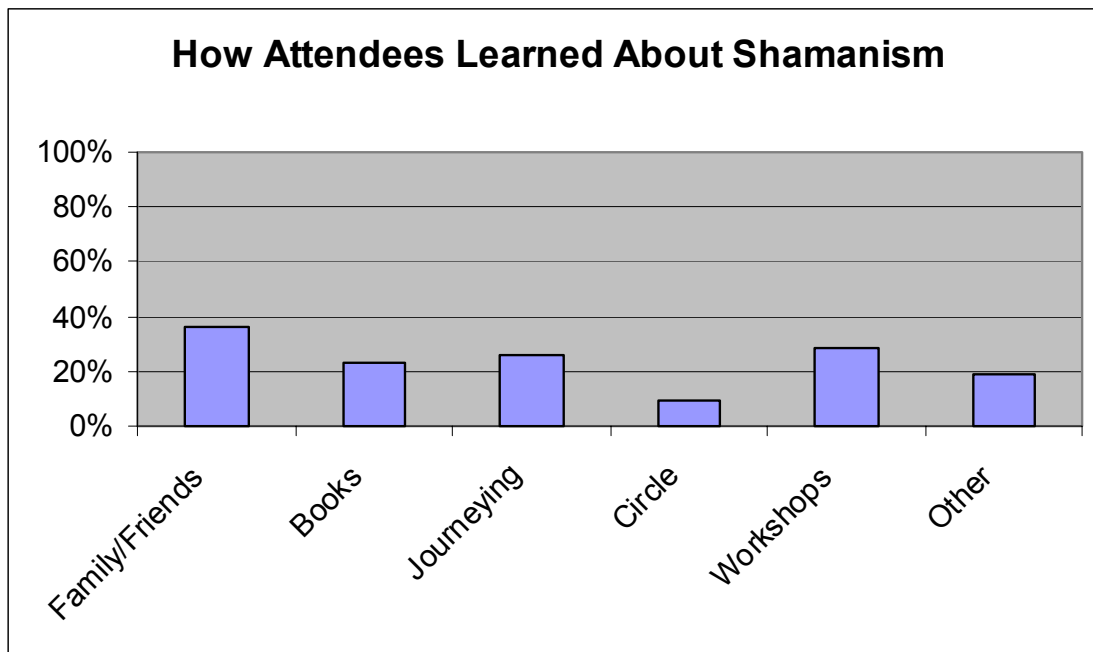
88% said that they had helping spirits in the upper world. We did not ask about middle world helping spirits, but some people reported having contact with spirits from that realm as well.

We did not ask for location in the questionnaire, so we could not relate a power animal to location. However, most power animals identified are found in North America. It would be interesting to investigate the relationships between where someone was born, where they live, and where their power animal is found.

Learning about Shamanism

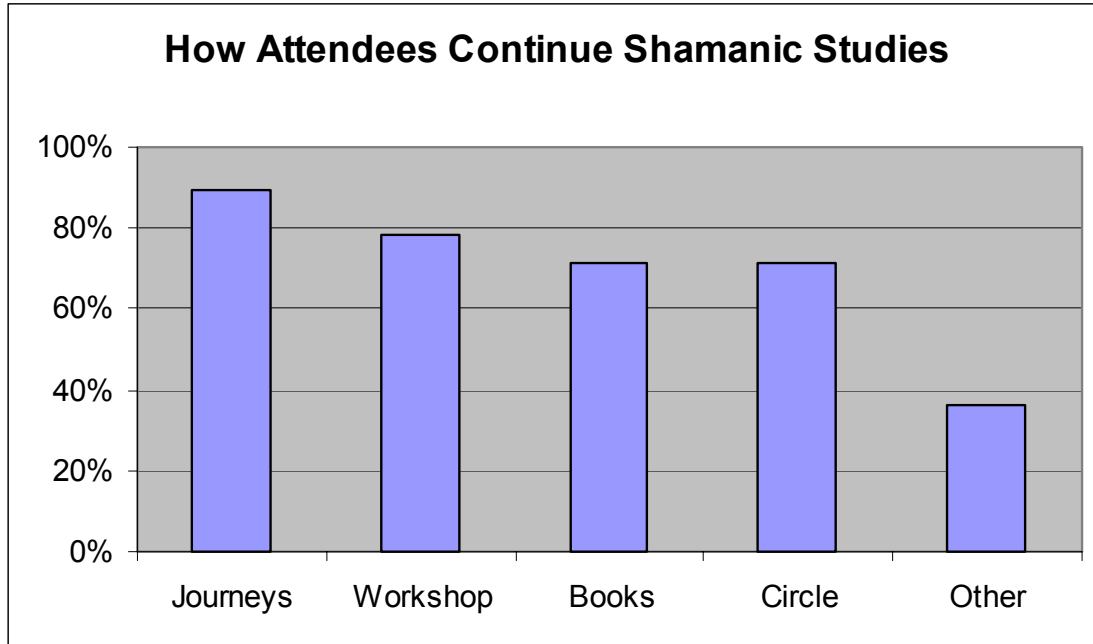
In this part of the questionnaire, people were asked to identify how they first learned about shamanism and many reported that they had more than one way of learning about it. 36% said they first learned about shamanism from their family or friends. 28% reported learning about it from workshops and 23% from books. 10% learned first learned about it from a shamanic circle.

It is intriguing to note that 26% reported learning about shamanism from spontaneous journeying. Although the term “spontaneous journeying” was not defined, several people reported having shamanic experiences long before they began to study it. This area is another interesting area for further investigation.



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89% of the people said that they continue to learn about shamanism from journeying. This implies that they are learning from the helping spirits that they contact during their journeys. 78% reported they continue learning shamanism from workshops, 72% from circles, and 72% from books. 35% reported other sources such as nature, dreams, mentors, and teachers.

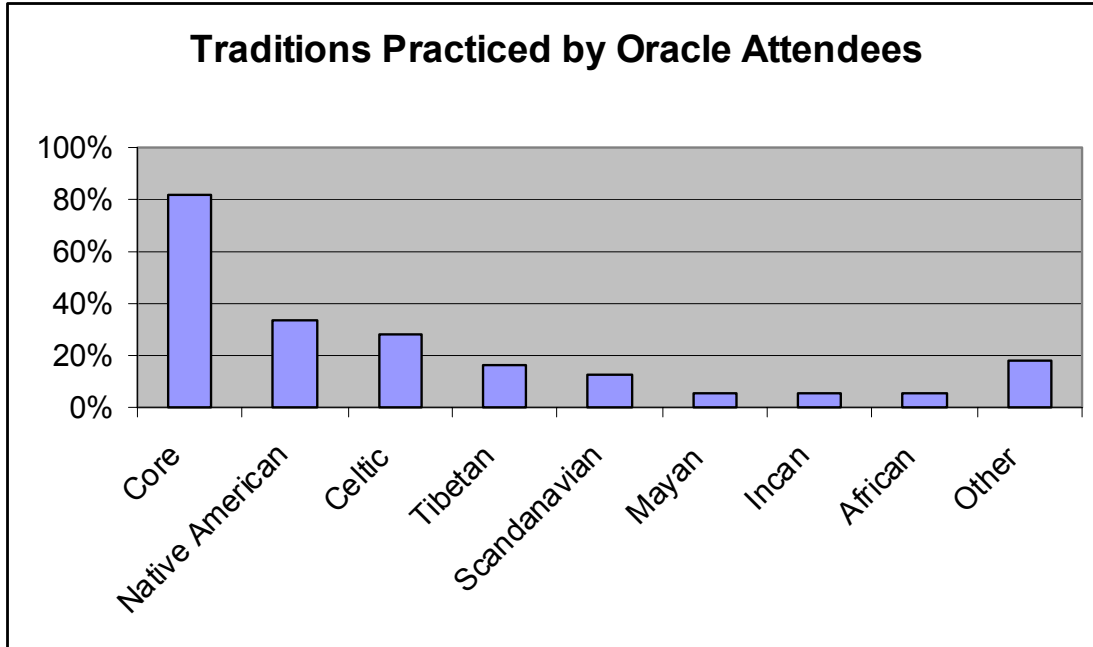


50% of people indicated they had completed or were currently committed to long-term training programs. This question did not specifically ask whether the training came from formal instruction or from daily journeying. It is interesting to note that only 13% of the people responding had shamanic practices passed down to them from their family, but 57% percent are teaching shamanism to their families. It appears many of the attendees are establishing a new “ancestral tradition” of shamanic practice for their families.

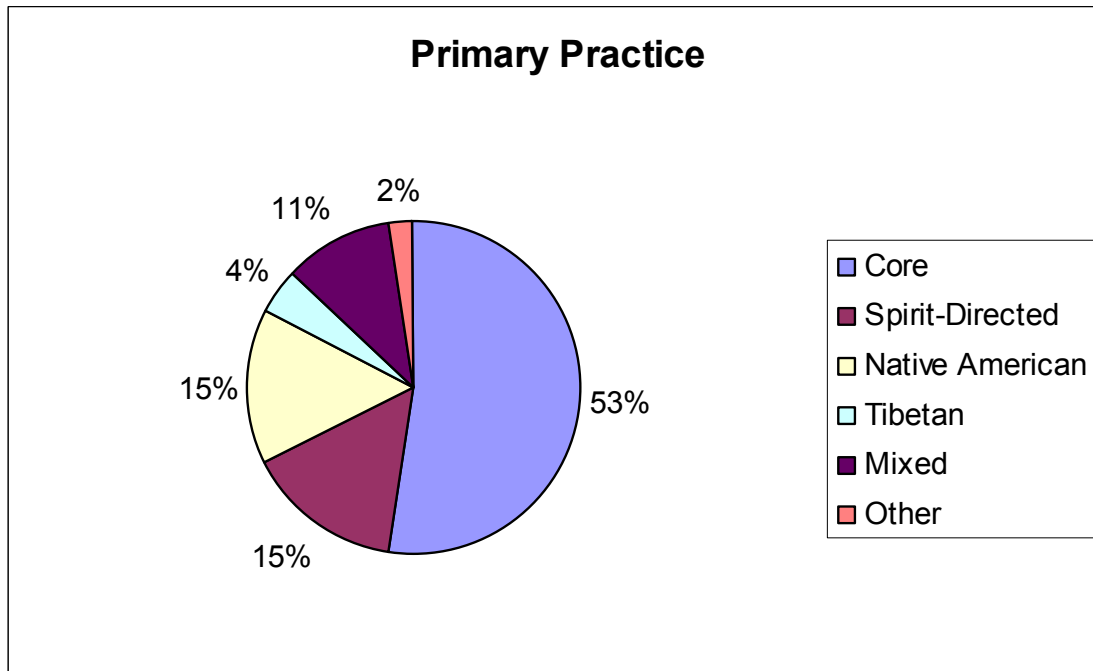
Attendees were asked what shamanic traditions they followed and could identify one or more tradition as part of their practice. 82% said that they use practices derived from core shamanism. Core shamanism is a set of common practices used by shamans around the world and taught by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. It is sometimes called “non-indigenous” shamanism.

The next largest category was Native American at 33%. This number includes a variety of tribes such as Lakota, Cherokee, Hopi, Navajo, and Huichol. 28% reported Celtic and 13% Scandinavian as part of their practice. Many attendees were white, so perhaps this indicates some whites are exploring their ethnic ancestral traditions.

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It is intriguing that 82% said that they practice core shamanism, but only 53% reported it as their primary practice. 15% reported Native American as their primary practice. Note that 15% said their primary practice is spirit-directed and 11% said their primary practice was mixed.



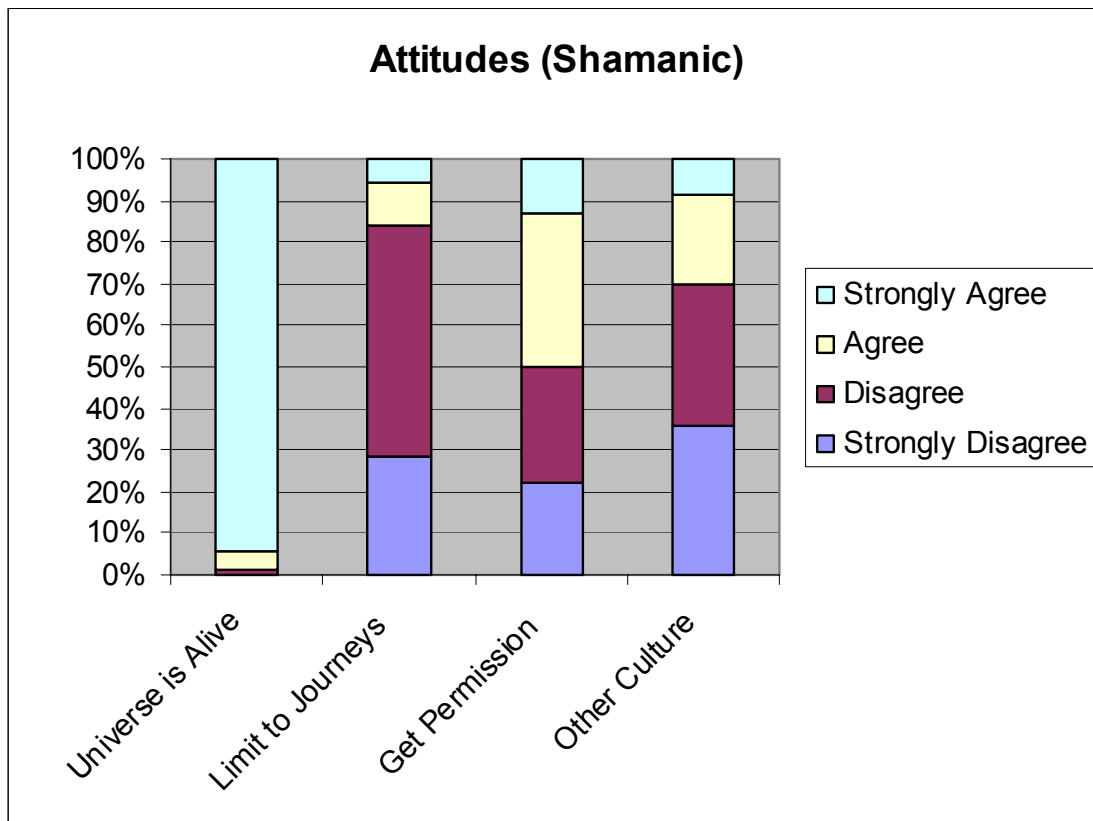
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Many attendees use core shamanism as their primary practice and supplement it with ideas and rituals from specific traditions. Perhaps core shamanism provides shamanic practitioners with a conceptual framework, and some people use it as a springboard to explore and understand other traditions. 58% said they created their practices and rituals from their own journeys. 39% stated they created their own blend of practices by weaving together rituals and ceremonies from other traditions. Although many traditions were specified, the majority of individuals listed practices from only one or two traditions. 4% indicated they followed one tradition exclusively.

There are ethical considerations to using practices and rituals from other cultures. Using a culture's rituals can be considered cultural theft. For example, some people conduct rituals from a culture without training or blessings from representatives of that culture. Some tribes have taboos such as restrictions on the participation of women in rituals during menstruation and these are sometimes ignored by people outside the culture. Ethical considerations such as these inspired us to ask Oracle attendees about their attitudes and beliefs about the practices they use.

General Attitudes and Beliefs

The vast majority of people, 99%, said that they believe that everything in the universe is alive. It would be interesting to see how the general public would respond to this question.



84% said that they disagreed with the idea of limiting their shamanic practice to rituals that they get from their own journeys.

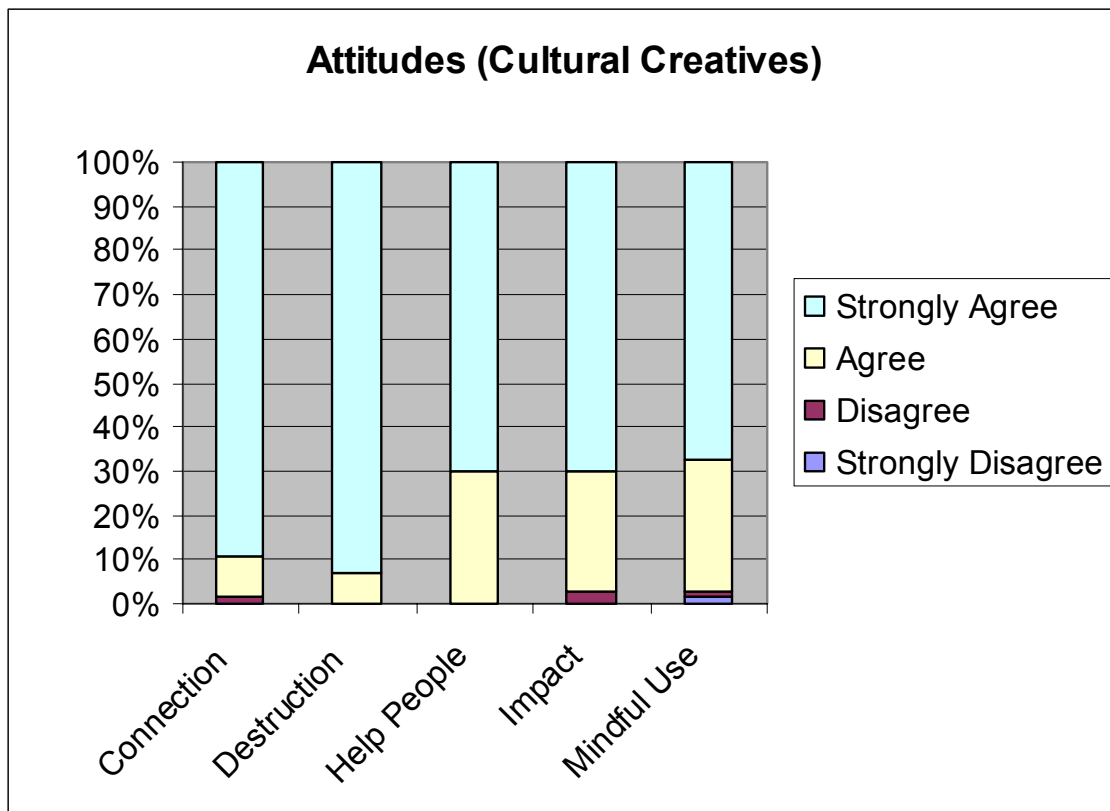
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Attendees were split 50/50 when asked if they felt they should participate in group shamanic activities only after getting permission from their own helping spirits. Only 30% agreed with the statement “I am uncomfortable using a ritual from a culture that is not my own.”

Several questions in the survey were based on definitions of people who are "Cultural Creatives" as described by sociologist Paul Ray and psychologist Sherry Anderson in the book *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*. They claim that about 50 million people in the United States care about the environment, spiritual and psychological growth and other values.

The Cultural Creatives subculture appears to represent a profound shift away from the values of the present U.S. mainstream. You can determine if you are a cultural creative on their website at <http://www.culturalcreatives.org/questionnaire.html>.

The responses in this survey showed that a vast majority agreed with statements associated with Cultural Creatives. Many strongly agreed with those statements. For example, 10% agreed they had a connection with nature and 89% strongly agreed. 7% agreed that they were concerned about the destruction of nature and 93% strongly agreed.

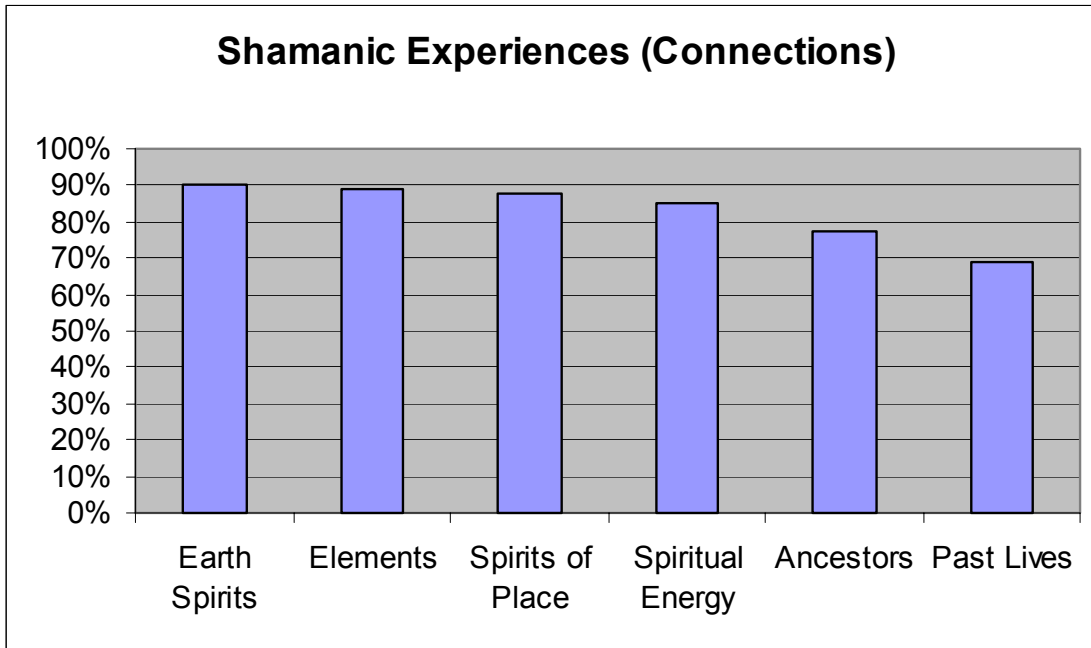


The percentage strongly agreeing went down to 70% on three questions: I place importance on helping other people by bringing out their gifts, I am concerned about the impact of large corporations on poor countries, and I support mindful use of natural resources in business.

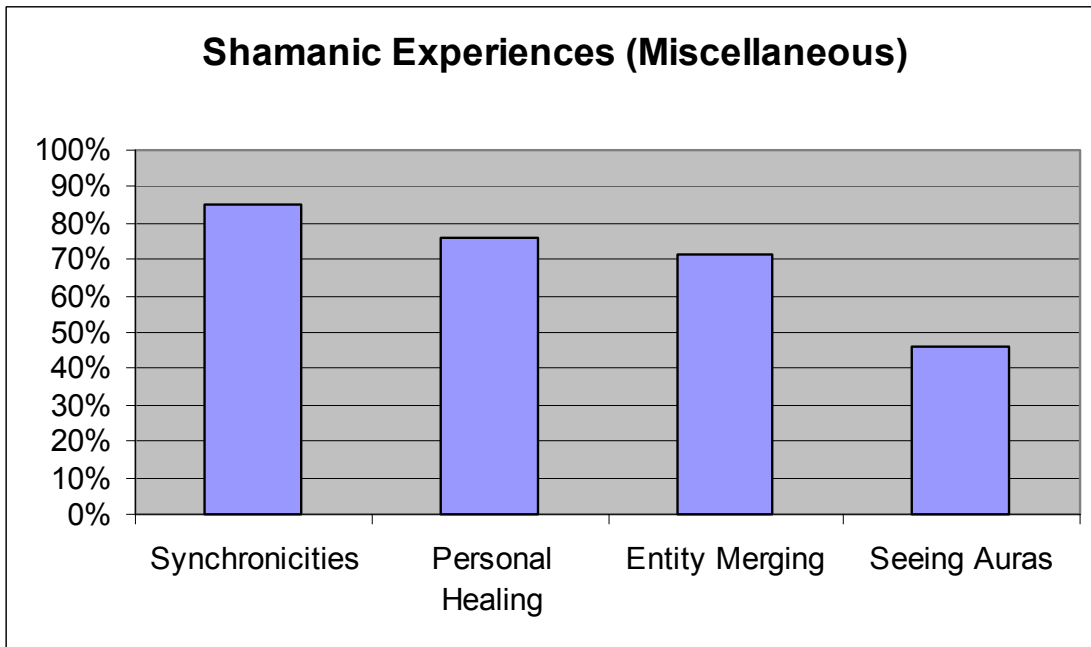
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Shamanic Experiences

85-91% experienced a connection with earth spirits, elements (air, fire, water, and earth), spirits of place, and spiritual energy. A smaller percentage of 69-77% experienced connections with ancestors and past lives. . It would be interesting to interview people about their experiences.



85% of the people reported experiencing synchronicities, 76% experienced personal healing, and 72% said that they merged with entities. Note that a minority of 46% have seen auras.

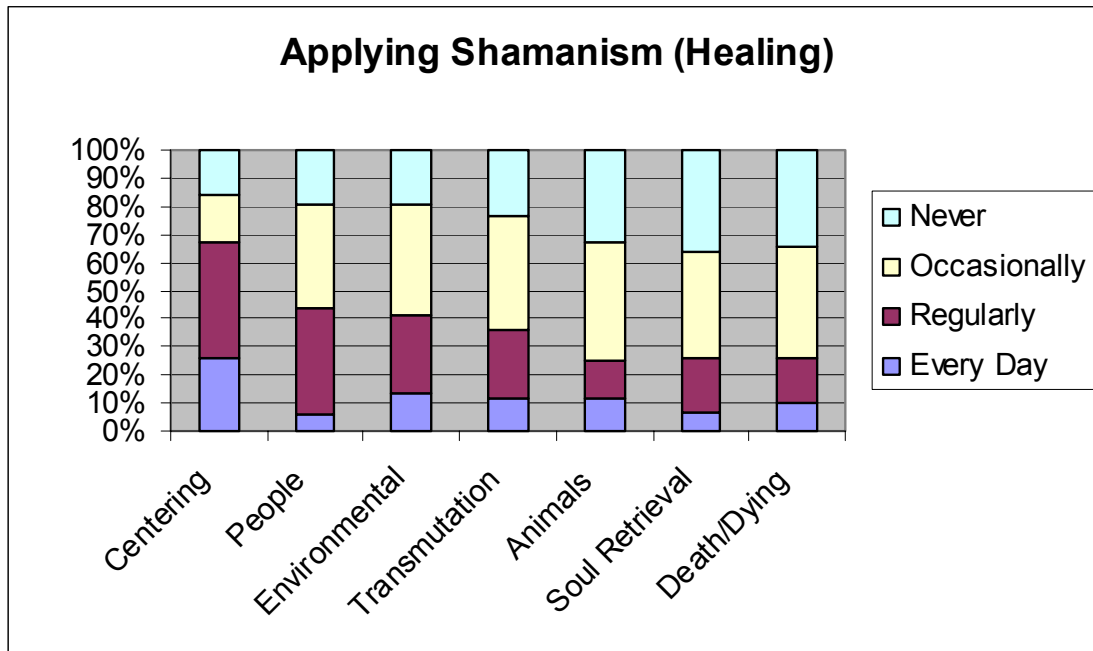


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18% reported other types of experiences including: miracles, connection with spirits not crossed over, visions, vision quest, plant medicine journey, near death experience, channeling, trance, birth and death, connection with plant spirits, and out of body experiences. Again, it would have been interesting to interview people so that they could describe their experiences further.

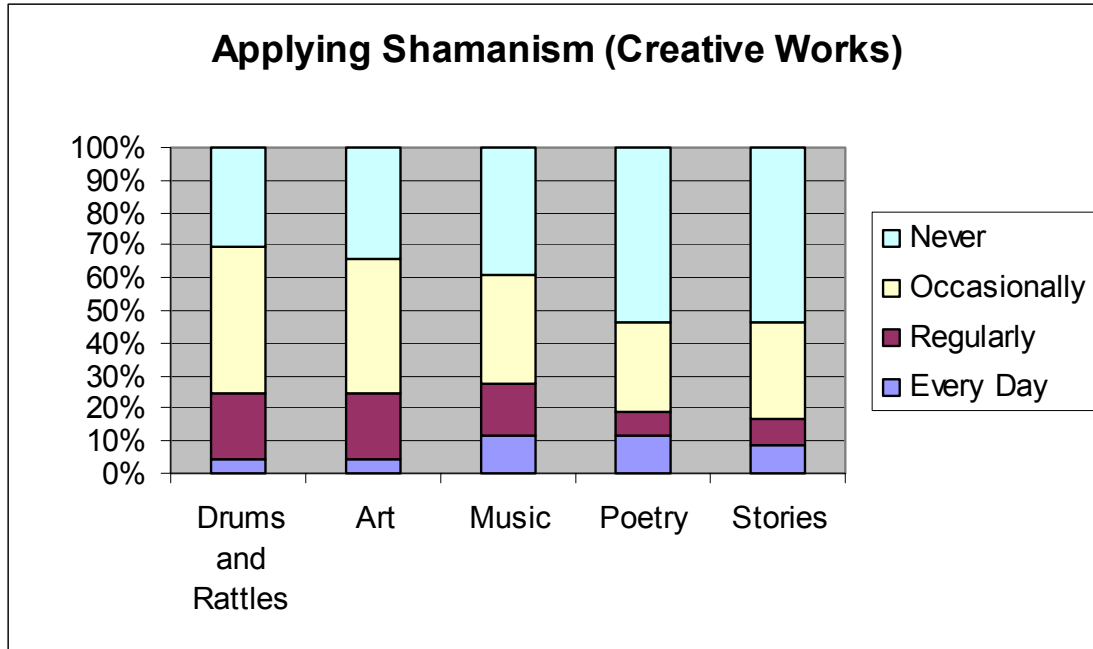
Applying Shamanism

These questions focused on how Oracle attendees apply shamanism in their lives. Most people responding used all of the listed healing techniques at least occasionally. Note that 63% use shamanism regularly to center themselves and one out of four use it daily. Approximately 40% apply shamanism regularly to heal people, the environment, and for transmutation. Around 25% regularly heal animals, perform soul retrievals, and work with death and dying.



Most of the people responding said that they apply shamanism creatively. Drum and rattle making was the most common creative outlet with 70% reporting they do it at least occasionally. The most consistently applied creative outlet was shamanic music. One in four people reported that they create shamanic music regularly and more than 10% said they do it every day. It is interesting to note that 53% said they never write poetry and 54% never write shamanic stories.

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Recommendations

The questionnaire asked Oracle attendees to recommend workshops, teachers, books, and other media. A list of recommendations from Oracle attendees can be found on the “Shamanic Circles” website at <http://www.shamaniccircles.org/2002oraclefolder/recommendations.pdf>.

Conclusion

It is possible to describe a typical Oracle attendee by reviewing the survey results. Feminine pronouns are used because women were such a strong majority there. However, there were men at Oracle and they brought a valuable energy and perspective to the gathering.

An Oracle attendee is most likely to be a white woman in her late 40’s from the western United States who works in a helping profession. She has been studying shamanism for about eight years. Although she has not been to Oracle before, she has attended other earth-healing gatherings.

It is nearly a one in four chance that her power animal is some kind of bear. It is very likely she works with other animal helping spirits. She also works with helping spirits in the upper world.

She probably first learned about shamanism from family or friends and most often continues learning about shamanism from her own journeys, but also learns from workshops, circles, and books. She has also committed to long-term shamanic training. Core shamanism is a significant part of her practice, but she is exploring other shamanic traditions. She is most likely to be interested in exploring Native American and Celtic traditions.

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She believes everything in the Universe is alive. She is not likely to limit practices and rituals to journey work and is not particularly hesitant about using rituals from other cultures. It is probable that Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson would consider her to be a Cultural Creative.

She has a rich variety of shamanic experiences because she has made connections with a variety of spirits beyond her power animal. She has also experienced synchronicities, personal healing, and merging with spiritual entities.

She probably applies shamanism in her life in variety of ways. Her focus on healing is most often for personal centering, but she is likely to be interested in healing other people and the environment. Shamanism is part of her creative life. Occasionally, she creates shamanic tools such as drums and rattles. She may also create art and music influenced by her practice.

Due to the nature of single-select surveys, it is not statistically valid to make conclusions beyond the people who responded to the questionnaire. Conclusions beyond this group could be made if the same questionnaire is distributed to participants at other shamanic gatherings. If there are people willing to administer the survey, the authors would be happy to make the questionnaire available to other gatherings.

References

Cowan, Tom. *Pocket Guide to Shamanism*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1997. p. 102-6

Ray, Paul H. and Anderson, Sherry. *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*. Three Rivers Press, 2001

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Oracle 2002 attendees who patiently filled out the questionnaires and shared their beliefs and practices with us.

Mary Myers originally came up with the idea for the survey and had an idea of the kind of questions she wanted to ask. She also helped tabulate and analyze the data. Peter Bloom composed the questions so that the results would be easier to tabulate and analyze. He worked on tabulating the data as well as analyzing and writing the report. Clardon Minton did not attend the Oracle Gathering, but reviewed early drafts of the questionnaire and made suggestions on how to improve it. Nancy Anderson brought experience with statistics to the team. She also helped fine tune the questions and was instrumental in analyzing the data. She also helped write the report.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Oracle attendees Gail Constable and Doug Shepherd. They were initially houseguests of Mary, but readily pitched in when we asked them for help with tabulating the data. Mary, Peter, Gail and Doug spent a grueling day entering the data into computers at Mary's beautiful home near Oracle, AZ.

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A Postscript from Mary Myers

The vision and the effort to make the information in this report accurate and accessible are the result of a wonderful synchronicity that brought together just the right people to move the project from my rather vague concept to completion. Peter Bloom, as the principal architect, probably put in enough effort to make this an academic research thesis. Nancy Dolan Anderson found time somehow in the midst of a demanding family setting and job, to do statistical analysis. Lucky for us, they make the results interesting, available, and easily understandable. Thank you both for bringing this project into reality.

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