"PIBLOKTOQ" (ARCTIC HYSTERIA): A CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPEAN-INUIT RELATIONS?

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Abstract. Since it was first referenced in Polar exploration literature a century ago, "pi- bloktoq" (arctic hysteria) has fascinated numerous psychiatrists, anthropologists, and other scientists. In asserting its prevalence among the Inuhuit of northwestern Greenland, the scientists have advanced a myriad of explanatory hypotheses, arguing alternately for the primacy of psychological, environmental, or dietary factors. Yet, diverging semantic contexts of "pibloktoq" in Inuhuit language and folklore, and "hystera" in Western writing, have contributed to cultural differences in interpretation. This paper examines the primary record and offers a more extensive evidentiary base for analysis. It is argued that "pibloktoq" was a catch-all rubric under which explorers lumped various Inuhuit anxiety reactions, symptoms of physical (and perhaps feigned) illness, expressions of resistance to patriarchy or sexual coercion, and shamanistic practice. Many of these behaviors apparently were induced by the stresses of early contact between Euro-Americans and Inuhuit between 1890 and 1920.

"'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.' Shakespeare, Hamlet. Act II, Scene 2, Lines 208–209.

Introduction

When in 1894 Josephine Diebitsch-Peary published an innocuous reference to the term "pi- bloktoq" (arctic hysteria) she could hardly have imagined the textual production that this term would inspire. While the early references to "pibloktoq" appeared in exploration literature, it became entrenched in English-language writing largely through an outpouring of scientific papers and monographs in this century. Practitioners of a variety of professional and academic disciplines wrote on "pibloktoq" or compared it to other "culture-bound syndromes." As academic treatises multiplied, so did the theories proffered on the causes and significance of "pibloktoq." The proliferation of commentaries is itself one of the most interesting aspects of "arctic hysteria." As with the voluminous psychoanalytic literature deriving from Freud's famous case report on Dora, the small number of reported "pibloktoq" episodes enabled the construction of an entire discourse on arctic hysteria on the basis of a few fragmentary textual narratives. Yet, these original reports of "pibloktoq" were filtered through the specific cultural perspectives of their Euro-American writers and shaped by the history of their own experiences of early contact with arctic peoples. Beyond what it might say about hysteria, this intriguing aspect of

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High Arctic history offers the potential to enhance our understanding of European as well as Native behavior in the Arctic, and the historical construction of relationships between these two groups.

Despite the great quantity of writing on “pi-blokoq,” it remains an elusive entity. Various popular or clinical terms have been offered: “temporary insanity” (Whitney 1910:67), “transitional madness” (Gussow 1960:219), “frenzied dissociative neurosis” or “shock and fright neurosis” (Foulks 1972:11), and “atypical culture-bound psychogenic psychosis” (Yap 1962:163–169). In current psychiatry it is described as “a hysterical state of dissociation” (Lehmann 1985:1235), yet “hysteria” itself has been a catch-all rubric under which innumerable symptoms have been subsumed in the last century (Parker 1962:93, n.2).

Whatever its specific character, “pi-blokoq” would not have achieved such prominence in the literature if social scientists and physicians had not viewed it as both widespread and integral to the personality of the Inuit, particularly the Inuhuit of northwestern Greenland. This interpretation appears in both Danish and American writing on the topic. In 1905 the Danish physician A. Bertelsen wrote that the Inuit of Greenland were prone to “impulsiveness, suggestibility, and instability” (M. Ch. Ehrstrom 1951:255). M. Ehrstrom, who examined 1072 Greenlanders for medical and emotional disorders, similarly argued that hysteria was prevalent in this population (M. Ch. Ehrstrom 1951:260). A number of psychoanalytic anthropologists have continued in this vein. Extrapolating from a series of 13 second-hand case reports, the psychiatrist Zachary Gussow described “pi-blokoq” as a “manifestation of the basic Eskimo personality” (Gussow 1960:231). In the same year Anthony Wallace and Robert E. Ackerman wrote that the Inuhuit were “characterized by a distinctive mental disorder known as perderoropq (pi-blokloq)” (Wallace and Ackerman 1960:250), while Seymour Parker argued that they were “characterized by a tendency toward hysterical behavior” (Parker 1962:92). When it was not the centerpiece topic, “pi-blokoq” has also functioned as the historical backdrop to a discussion of contemporary mental illness among Canadian Inuit, which similarly asserts that psychopathology is prevalent in their society (Sampath 1974:366).

At the same time, this general verdict of pervasive Inuit hysteria has not gone entirely unchallenged. In commenting on some of the literature on “pi-blokoq,” Thomas J. Boag wrote: “. . . there is a tendency in cross-cultural psychiatry to interpret as hysterical any unusual or bizarre symptomology if duration and intensity do not justify a label of schizophrenia” (Boag 1970:113). Similarly, one has only to read some of the explorers’ accounts of “pi-blokoq” to perceive that their own amateur diagnosis of hysteria was applied with a broad brush to almost any behaviors by Inuit which seemed strange or bizarre to them, and for which they had no other ready explanation.

It seems timely to revisit the scene of writing on arctic hysteria. Both the literature on “pi-blokoq” and the behaviors to which it refers need to be contextualized. What follows is a review of the scientific literature, followed by a reexamination of the use of the term “pi-blokoq” in Inuhuit and European narrative, and an attempt to reexamine the various contexts of the original case reports on which this literature is based.

Review of the Literature

The medical/scientific discourse on “pi-blokoq” can be divided generally into several distinct categories of causal explanation. While the approaches are not mutually exclusive, writers have generally favored one of these categories over the others:

(i) psychoanalytic approaches, focusing on the influence of personality development on behavior;
(ii) environmental approaches, which emphasize the impact of climate, cold, light, and related factors;
(iii) nutritional approaches, which stress the effects of ingested minerals or vitamins, either in excess or deficiency of normal dosages;
(iv) interdisciplinary approaches, which attempt to synthesize possible psychologic, environmental, biological, and cultural factors.

To this list we might add a fifth category of explanation, underrepresented in the literature, that emphasizes cultural or social factors in the etiology of “pi-blokoq.” Some works have noted a general relationship between Native shamanism and hysteria (Eliade 1964; Merkur 1985), and the Danish ethnographer Holtved drew a specific connection between Inuhuit shamanism and hysteria (Holtved 1967:151–152). Aberle (1952), in a brief survey of the literature on arctic hysteria and latah in Mongolia, suggested that these syndromes were in part defensive responses occurring among subservient populations in Asia. Largely absent from the literature is a consideration of the possible impacts of contact between Euro North Americans and Inuhuit as they relate to the reported cases of hysteria.

Given the reliance of medical/scientific writers on second-hand reports it is important to place the term “pi-blokoq” in its original discursive contexts. The term derives from the writings of the Peary family and associates regarding behaviors...
among the Inuhuit that they witnessed or heard about during several High Arctic expeditions between 1891 and 1909. The word “piblokoq” first appeared in an English language publication with the appearance of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s My Arctic Journal in 1894. Her reference to the term occurs in a discussion of a sledge trip to Inglefield Gulf in April, 1893. On arriving at a temporary Inuhuit settlement of snow houses on Northumberland Island, she described the occupants of three dwellings, and added:

... The mistress of the remaining igloo was making an awful noise and trying to come out of her habitation, while a man was holding her back and talking to her, but she screamed and struggled so long as we remained where she could see us. I asked Maine what was the nature of the trouble and she told me that the woman was piblokoq (mad) (Diebitsch Peary 1894:125).

While the story is presented in a matter-of-fact manner and seems to be an accurate recounting of the event as it appeared to the author, certain problems nevertheless arise. The author cannot be separated from any of the described actions in the sequence. The reader is not certain whether the arrival of the American party precipitated the woman’s making a noise and attempting to depart the igloo, but this seems quite likely. Her screaming and struggling is said to have continued only so long as the Americans were within her sight. Moreover, the designation of her actions as “piblokoq” was not independently offered, but rather was made in response to the author’s question. Diebitsch-Peary’s brief account underlines some of the unexamined issues in the secondary accounts comprising the “piblokoq” case material, that is, the role of the European or American observers in generating and naming the behavior, and in translating Aboriginal signifiers into terms that would be comprehensible to their Euro-American readers.

If Josephine Diebitsch-Peary was the first Western writer to remark on “piblokoq,” her husband Robert E. Peary was the first to characterize it as “hysteria.” He wrote passages on it in two of his books—Nearest the Pole, published in 1907, and The North Pole (1910), from which the following is excerpted:

... the adults are subject to a peculiar nervous affection which they call piblokoq—a form of hysteria. ... The immediate cause of this affection is hard to trace, though sometimes it seems to be the result of a brooding over absent or dead relatives, or a fear of the future. The manifestations of this disorder are somewhat startling. The patient, usually a woman, begins to scream and tear off and destroy her clothing. If on the ship, she will walk up and down the deck, screaming and gesticulating, and generally in a state of nudity, though the thermometer may be in the minus forties. As the intensity of the attack increases, she will sometimes leap over the rail upon the ice, running perhaps half a mile. The attack may last a few minutes, an hour, or even more, and some sufferers become so wild that they would continue running about on the ice perfectly naked until they froze to death, if they were not forcibly brought back.

Peary’s amateur diagnosis of “hysteria” was accepted and developed in A. A. Brill’s 1913 article, “Piblokoq or Hysteria Among Peary’s Eskins.” The head of Columbia University’s Clinic in Psychiatry and the Bronx Hospital’s Neurological Department, Brill was at that time the acknowledged leader of the psychoanalytic movement in the United States (Roazen 1976:381). His article marked both the beginning of the professional medical/scientific discourse on “piblokoq” and the first application of psychoanalytic theory to the study of the phenomenon.

Accepting the evidence of Peary and his assistant Donald B. MacMillan that “piblokoq” attacks were limited to women, Brill advanced a modified version of Freud’s interpretation of “female hysteria.” He wrote that “those who are acquainted with the etiology of the neuroses as formulated by Freud will also understand the almost entire absence of any hysterical manifestations among the male Eskimos” (Brill 1913:518–519). Noting that none of the Inuhuit women “lacked the gross sexual” (sexual intercourse), he hypothesized that the principal determinant of “piblokoq” was not sexual repression but “love” or “sex in all its broad manifestations.” Picking up on Peary’s observation that attacks were connected to “brooding over absent relatives, or a fear of the future,” Brill condensed these factors into two primal needs—love and hunger (Brill 1913:518).

Brill repeated and endorsed MacMillan’s contention that the “piblokoq” attack reminded him of “a little child discouraged and unhappy because it imagines no one loves it or cares for it and therefore runs away” (Brill 1913:517–518), an assessment in conformity with Peary’s own repeated characterization of the Inuit as “children” (Peary 1910:333).

The interpretation of “piblokoq” as a childlike cry by women for attention reproduced a common nineteenth century medical stereotype (Clark 1981:293). Beyond the gender issue, the compari-
son between European children and adult “primitives” reflected a cultural evolutionist framework predominating among European and Anglo-American approaches to the study of non-Western cultures in the nineteenth century. The analogy was often extended to encompass emotional disturbance and lack of ego control said to characterize members of both groups. Writing on non-European cultures in this period employed a semantic field of interchangeable categories: “child,” “primitive,” and “neurotic” (Pace 1983:78–88, 136–134), now expanded to include “woman.”

Brill’s article had few successors in its own era, but a revival of interest in the psychoanalytic study of cultures after World War II, coincident with the rapid spread of psychoanalytic practice in the United States, generated a proliferation of such texts. In a 1951 survey article on “Mental Diseases Peculiar to Certain Cultures,” P. M. Yap, a psychiatric administrator in Hong Kong, attempted to situate “pibloktoq” within a more general framework of “culture-bound syndromes” (Lebra 1976b; Simons and Hughes 1985) or “trans-cultural psychiatry” (Kiev 1972; Cox 1986). In this general discussion, “pibloktoq” was lumped in with other examples of “the primitive hysterical outburst of undifferentiated excitement, weeping, laughter and running away” (Yap 1951:310). Elaborating in another article of the period, Yap added the factor of “biological primitive” to his analysis: “. . . the behavior covered by it is exhibited by relatively simple and undeveloped personalities under the stimulation of biologically primitive impulses . . .” (Yap 1952:526–527).

Yap assumed an objective transcultural standard of normality in terms of adaptation of individuals to their environments, against which any of the enumerated “disorders” could be evaluated. Contrasting with behaviors of “adjustment,” he defined the “quintessence of abnormality” as “the choice of a type of reaction which enables the individual to escape or fly away from a difficult situation instead of facing it squarely. The choice resulting from the conflict is, moreover, unconscious, and apparently beyond the will or purpose of the patient . . .” (Yap 1951:315).

Psychoanalytic approaches were also evident in a series of American writings on “pibloktoq” around 1960. In that year the psychiatrist Zachary Gussow argued that “pibloktoq” did not reflect the inability of abnormal persons to adapt to specific situations so much as it was a culturally patterned response to intense stress, triggered by traumatizing situations. Gussow’s argument was consistent with Brill’s interpretation of “pibloktoq” as a child-like response of individuals seeking love and support, but he also viewed it as an essentially manipulative performance. The phenomenon of flight was a “dramatic, though thoroughly unconscious, invitation to be pursued, i.e. to be taken care of” (Gussow 1960:234).

If Gussow argued that “pibloktoq” was a syndrome specific to Inuit culture, Seymour Parker’s 1962 article “ Eskimo Psychopathology in the Context of Eskimo Personality and Culture” represented a renewed attempt, along the lines of Yap, to situate “pibloktoq” within more general categories of ethnic mental disorder. Parker posited that certain societies were more prone than others to hysterical behavior, and that such behavior was culturally prefigured by four factors, including: the lack of severe early socialization practices, an emphasis on commnalistic values, disadvantages attending the role of women, and a religious system in which “hysterical-like” behavioral models are institutionalized (Parker 1962:81). Like Gussow, Parker argued that the Inuit were “undersocialized,” with weak superegos and thus unrestrained in terms of self-control (Parker 1962:79, 81–83).

More recently, psychoanalytic approaches to arctic hysteria have been proposed by a team of researchers, Edward Foulks, and Daniel and Patricia Freeman, in two papers published in the late 1970s. Their arguments are an elaboration of earlier attempts to situate “pibloktoq” in Inuit child-rearing practices and their supposed negative effects on personality development. To summarize, they first posit an “idyllic” early relationship between Inuit mothers and their children. When by the age of two or three the child becomes the object of “affectionate teasing” by older siblings and other adults, the mother takes the rule of “rescuer and comforter.” Over time, these described socialization practices are said to rob the child of independence and to produce great anxiety when separated from others; resultant attacks of hysteria are thus held to be a regression into an infantile state (Freeman, Foulks, and Freeman 1974:210n; Foulks, Freeman, and Freeman 1979:61–69).

These studies drew on insights in Jean L. Briggs’ Never in Anger (1970), although Briggs’ recent work suggests a more positive interpretation of the impact of Inuit child socialization process (Briggs 1990).

Environmental or ecological explanations of “arctic hysteria” were first suggested by the Danish ethnographer H. P. Steensby (1910), who reported a relationship between the autumn season and the onset of symptoms. The environmental hypothesis was more fully developed in M. A. Czaplicka’s 1914 book Aboriginal Siberia. In reviewing the response of various ethnic groups to the harsh cold and prolonged winter darkness of Siberia, she observed that hysteria was more prevalent among groups that had immigrated more recently to this arctic region. Long-established groups, on the other hand, were more subject to
such disorders as melancholia and suicide (Czaplicka 1914:319).

In a 1924 article, Stanislaus Novakovsky, who incorporated several reported “pibloktoq” episodes among his examples, opted for the model of environmental determinism. He argued that key contributing factors to hysteria included the length and darkness of winters, brevity of the summers, and sharp contrasts between summer and winter. Novakovsky also introduced an element of genetic determinism into his argument. Observing that hysteria was more common among women than men, he asserted that gender difference and sexuality played important roles in its incidence. He argued that “the transitory stages in the life of a woman are periods of the greatest susceptibility” (Novakovsky 1924:119–121). Genetic determinism was also implied in an article of the period on “pibloktoq” by C. Boden Kloss, although he attributed it to race rather than gender. Noting that the symptoms identified by Peary were “akin to amok,” Kloss commented that what the Inuit of the Arctic and the Malays of the Equatorial regions shared in common was that “they are both Mongoloid peoples” (Kloss 1923:254).

Several writers on the North American Inuit have also pursued environmental explanations of arctic hysteria. The Canadian ethnologist Diamond Jenness, who visited the Central Arctic with the Canadian Arctic Expedition of the First World War era, wrote that hysteria “is peculiarly common around the Polar Basin.” He argued that the “long winter darkness and the loneliness and silence of a hunter’s life make the arctic peoples more susceptible to this disorder than the rest of the human race.” Jenness also made the interesting observation that “religion and hysteria went closely hand in hand,” but did not provide additional data or historical references (Jenness 1959:52). E. M. Weyer accepted Jenness’s environmental explanation in his 1942 textbook The Eskimos: Their Environment and Folkways (Weyer 1932:386).

More recently, Richard Condon has investigated the relationship of marked seasonal changes in light intensity and duration with Inuit disease susceptibility in the central Canadian Arctic. While “pibloktoq” was not the focus of his study, he hypothesized that it might be caused by a combination of arctic environmental factors, and drew specifically on the arguments of Anthony Wallace and Joseph Bohlen that rapid seasonal shifts in light levels in arctic regions contribute to desynchronization of both annual and circadian (24 hour) calcium levels in the body, leaving individuals susceptible to the onset of hysteria (Condon 1983:132). This argument was based in part on the assumption that arctic hysteria is a seasonal phenomenon most likely to occur in the late winter or early spring. However, a larger compilation of primary references to “pibloktoq” does not support such a seasonal pattern (see Fig. 1 and Appendix B).

Possible dietary factors in “pibloktoq” were discussed by various writers, beginning with the Norwegian veterinarian J. Baashus-Jessen in 1935. This writer discerned apparent similarities of symptoms displayed by persons with “arctic hysteria” and the seizures of arctic dogs afflicted with the so-called “animal pibloktoq.” He argued that various symptoms of “pibloktoq” were caused by deficiencies of fat, vitamins, and minerals (Baashus-Jessen 1935:345–348). Noting that “a hypernervous condition in man” was then found in districts of southwestern Norway, Baashus-Jessen offered the view that it resulted from religious sectarianism and associated taboos against the eating of blood, fat, or meat. However, the inferred connection between these reports and “pibloktoq” remained an untested hypothesis.

The argument for dietary factors was pursued by Anthony Wallace and colleagues in a series of articles in the early 1960s. While arguing generally for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of “pibloktoq,” Wallace emphasized two Scandinavian studies linking hysteria in the Angmagsagalik Inuit and epileptotetanoid behavior in dogs to dietary vitamin and mineral deficiencies, most notably, of calcium. Wallace argued that low calcium intake, coupled with low vitamin D3 synthesis during the sunless winters, contributed to calcium shortages among the Inuit. He further hypothesized that anxiety from chronic stress or sudden fright could cause hyperventilation in individuals, further reducing ionized serum calcium levels by raising the pH of the serum. This combination of circumstances might reduce serum calcium levels to the point of impairing the functioning of the nervous system, leaving the person vulnerable to a “pibloktoq” attack (Wallace 1961:265–270). Wallace acknowledged that this was an “arunchair” hypothesis and prescribed an ambitious program of interdisciplinary research that he hoped would verify or disprove it.

The calcium hypothesis was subsequently taken up by Katz and Foulks, who developed an eclectic explanatory model incorporating such widely diverging factors as physiological disturbance of serum calcium. “Eskimo basic hysterical personality factors,” anxiety and hyperventilation, and shamanistic practices (Katz and Foulks 1970:302–303). A subsequent study of polar biological rhythms by the physiologist Joseph Bohlen argued that calcium deficiency per se is not a cause of “pibloktoq” so much as the timing and irregularity of calcium levels within the body. He wrote that “internal desynchronization, when one or several physiological rhythms ‘uncouple’ from normal phase relations and proceed at a period slightly different from other variables, may trigger the on-
set of episodes" (Bohlen 1979:73). The arguments focusing on calcium were, like earlier studies, untested hypotheses prescribed for future empirical verification. While hypocalcemia has been said to lead in extreme cases to tetany (Katz and Foulks 1970:300), or other symptoms mistaken for conversion symptoms, the link between ionized calcium levels and hysteria has never been conclusively demonstrated.

The most recent nutritional hypothesis on the etiology of “pibloktoq” is David Landy’s contention that vitamin intoxication, namely hypervitaminosis A, is the principal factor in “pibloktoq.” At toxic levels, he argued, this vitamin can contribute to various behavioral and neurological changes in humans, including delirium, dementia, and convulsions. Landy based his hypothesis on a reading of the literature on Inuit diet, which was traditionally heavily dependent on marine mammals, the flesh of which is rich in vitamin A, and in particular polar bear livers, which contain highly toxic levels of vitamin A. That this hypothesis has already gained some academic acceptance is indicated by Marvin Harris’s endorsement of a combination of Landy’s argument and Wallace’s calcium hypothesis in a recent edition of his survey textbook in cultural anthropology (Harris 1988:513–514).

There are some difficulties with this argument, however, beginning with the fact that Landy’s own evidence casts doubt that the Inuit ate polar bear liver. Moreover, the Danish ethnographer Holtved rejected the notion that polar bear liver was consumed (Holtved 1967:142–144), and the scientist Christian Vibe wrote that neither bear nor bearded seal livers were eaten (Vibe 1950:63–64). Landy based his argument on the assumption that most “pibloktoq” cases occurred during the late winter or early spring, “just the point at which arctic mammals are at their lowest weight but also when their livers may not have decreased in size,” and be “maximally poisonous” (Landy 1985:178).

The assumption that “pibloktoq” occurred mainly in the late winter or spring is not supported by a breakdown of 40 reported “pibloktoq” episodes by month, which indicates a preponderance of cases in the summer and autumn (Fig. 1). Also unexplained is the apparent absence of such symptoms among various American or Danish explorers who lived with the Inuit for extended periods and shared their diet.

While referencing noneological factors in some cases, the arguments of the environmental or nutritional theorists have sometimes tended to the reductionist—the cause of “pibloktoq” is not culture but nature, i.e., climate, biology, chemical reactions, and so on. Many of the arguments seem plausible, but the lack of reliable empirical data makes it virtually impossible to test which of the ecological factors might have contributed to “pibloktoq,” or in what degree.

Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of “pibloktoq” were first proposed by Anthony Wallace (Wallace and Ackerman 1966:249–260), and later pursued by one of his assistants, Edward F. Foulks. Foulks’s monograph, The Arctic Hysterias of the North Alaskan Eskimo (1972) is apparently the most comprehensive attempt to explain “pibloktoq” in scientific terms. His approach was to investigate epidemiological patterns through empirical tests of this “culture-specific pathology.” As a physician in a small Alaskan Inuit community, he was in a position to do first-hand research on patients he considered to suffer from these disorders.

Foulks’s empirical research comprised detailed medical histories of ten Alaskan Inuit patients who displayed “arctic hysteria like” behavior (Foulks 1972:87–99). While the described behaviors conformed to some of the symptoms described in the literature on “pibloktoq,” it remains an open question whether these were actual cases of hysteria. Foulks’s own data strongly suggest that epileptic seizure might have been implicated in several of the “spells” suffered by his patients. For example, three of the patients displayed cerebral electrophysiological abnormalities, suggesting epileptic susceptibility (Foulks 1972:98,116). All ten of the subjects suffered from chronic middle ear disease, which infection, Foulks wrote, could spread to cause scarring of the temporal lobes of the brain, contributing to susceptibility to psychomotor epilepsy (Foulks 1972:99). In his words, such a condition “may produce behavior indistinguishable from that ascribed to the Arctic Hysterias” (Foulks 1972:116), a conclusion reinforced in current mainstream psychiatry (Nemiah 1985:951).

Foulks based his study on the assumption that “pibloktoq” is a current pan-Arctic phenomenon. Apart from the ten case reports from his own medical practice in Alaska, all episodes of “pibloktoq” cited in the scientific literature occurred in the eastern High Arctic, specifically in northwestern Greenland and on Ellesmere Island, and in the period 1890–1940 (see Gussow 1960:219–222). No evidence has been presented that could demonstrate that these examples are linked to reported cases of hysteria in other arctic regions, or that “pibloktoq” is actually an ongoing phenomenon.

However plausible or interesting, the assorted hypotheses on “pibloktoq” perhaps pose more questions than they are able to answer. Part of the difficulty relates to the lack of consensus as to exactly what “pibloktoq” constituted. Was it a psychological disorder, or group of disorders? Could it have been epilepsy, as Foulks’s data sug-
Figure 1. Distribution of reported piblokoq episodes by month. This graph illustrates the seasonal distribution of “piblokoq” episodes, as reported in the primary accounts reproduced in Appendix B. It comprises 39 of the 40 reported cases; one episode could not be identified by month and was left out of the tabulation. There are no obvious sampling biases. as all episodes have been included for which there was eyewitness testimony, and which could be situated in time (year) and place. These episodes were reported by Euro-Americans or Europeans who were then spending at least one year in close contact with the Inuhuit. Their extended contact would seem to rule out the possible skewing of results by the seasonality of summer voyages to the Arctic and associated fieldwork, for example.

gest, or other forms of physical illness, such as tetany resulting from hypocalcemia? Did it derive from shamanism? Was it, as Brill and Gussow suggested, a kind of performance or staged drama? Or was it a combination of these possibilities?

Regarding its etiology, was “piblokoq” the product of individual or group psychology? Was it caused or influenced by the Polar climate, physical environment, or diet? Did it result from a combination of psychological, environmental, and cultural factors? Were there other causes?

A problem running through the literature is the slender case material on which it is based. Conclusions of prevalent Inuhuit hysteria ultimately rest on a small number of discrete reports, as well as some composite references which cannot be situated in time or place. Zachary Gussow’s 1960 article on “piblokoq” represented the first attempt to compile all known primary reports (Gussow 1960:219–224). He assembled 13 discrete cases, including three episodes described by Whitney (1910); four second-hand accounts from MacMillan, as reported by Brill (1913); four second-hand reports by Neil Rasmussen in unpublished interviews with G. P. Steed; an episode reported by Steensby (1910); and Peary’s retrospective account of a “piblokoq” attack he witnessed in 1898 (Peary 1907:384–385). Foulks’s 1972 monograph on arctic hysteria drew on Gussow’s examples, and contributed two additional references from Whitney, two reports of “piblokoq” from Malaurie’s The Last Kings of Thule, and general references from books by Peary and MacMillan (Foulks 1972:12–17).

Of the cases assembled by Gussow and Foulks, the reports by Brill, Steed, and Malaurie are of questionable scientific value in that they were not directly witnessed by these authors. This leaves a corpus of nine discrete cases, five of which come from Whitney, and one each from Robert E. Peary, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, Donald MacMillan, and H. P. Steensby. These reports, combined with various data and interpretive rubrics extrapolated from other contexts, have provided the basis of the scientific discourse on “piblokoq,” as is indicated in a tabulation of published works and their sources (Table 1).

The lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to establish which of the enumerated factors might have contributed to “piblokoq,” or in what
Table 1. Summary of the Scientific Literature on “Pibloktoq”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientist</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Interpretive Rubric</th>
<th>Data Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Steensby</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Environmental—change of seasons</td>
<td>Author witnessed one episode in 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Brill</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—“female hysteria”</td>
<td>4 episodes reported to Brill by Donald B. MacMillan; general references by Robert E. Peary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Czaplicka</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Environmental—extreme climate and winter darkness</td>
<td>5 episodes reported by Whitney (1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Kloss</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Genetic determinism—“Mongoloid” hysteria</td>
<td>Peary (1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Novakovsky</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>(i) Environmental determinism—light and temperature oscillations, etc.; (ii) biological determinism—the menstrual cycle</td>
<td>Whitney (1910); Czaplicka (1914)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jenness</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Environmental determinism</td>
<td>No specific episodes cited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Weyer</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Environmental determinism</td>
<td>Jenness (1928)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Baashuus-Jessen</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Dietary—Deficiencies of fat, vitamins, and minerals</td>
<td>Peary (1907; 1910); Whitney (1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Yap</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—shock or fright neurosis</td>
<td>Brill (1913); Czaplicka (1914)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Yap</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Psychobiological—“primitive hysteria”; “instinctive” responses to acute stress</td>
<td>Brill (1913); Czaplicka (1914); Yap (1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Aberle</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>(i) Psychoanalytic—social defence mechanism</td>
<td>Czaplicka (1914); Novakovsky (1924)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gussow</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—culturally-patterned response to stress</td>
<td>Whitney (1910); Steensby (1910); Steed (1947); Peary (1907); Brill (1913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Wallace &amp; Ackerman</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary—untested hypotheses including hypocalcemia, epilepsy, hypoglycemia, food poisoning, encephalitis</td>
<td>Peary (1910); Brill (1913); Novakovsky (1924); Baashuus-Jessen (1935); Gussow (1960)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Wallace</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Dietary—deficiencies of vitamins &amp; minerals, especially calcium</td>
<td>Peary (1910); Whitney (1910); Brill (1913); Rasmussen (1915); Baashuus-Jessen (1935); Gussow (1960)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Parker</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—socialization practices, communalistic values, low status for women, institutionalization of shamanistic practices</td>
<td>Peary (1910); Novakovsky (1924); Yap (1951, 1952)</td>
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degree. Before endorsing any of these explanations, it would seem advisable to seek a greater base of contextual information about the specific episodes.

**“Pibloktoq” Revisited**

Recent scholarship in the field of cross-cultural psychiatry has shifted the emphasis from a focus on the nature and etiology of “culture-bound syndromes” to an interrogation of the cultural or professional presuppositions of the scientists studying such phenomena. Proponents of the “new psychiatry” have noted fundamental differences in the definitions, form, and content of mental illness in different societies. They have asked whether categories of mental illness in one context appropriately apply to the experience of persons in other contexts (Littlewood 1990:310, 1991:696–698).

Even when the forms or symptoms of disorders in a particular society bear a superficial resemblance to disorders in another culture, these forms can carry different meanings for their respective societies. For example, in non-Western societies, within culturally authorized ritual settings, trance or possession states comprise normal forms of experience. When they occur outside these settings, trance states can still be effective, culturally patterned techniques of communicating experience, or accessing “indwelling icons” of gods, ghosts, or ancestors (Kleinman 1988:51). Such states have nevertheless been pathologized by Western scientists as dissociative forms of experience necessarily constituting illness according to Western conventions and definitions (Littlewood 1991:697–698).

A second development in this field has been a shift from the categorization of mental disease in terms of fixed universals, to the study of the social and cultural contexts of psychological or somatic pathology (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1987:317–319; Kleinman 1988:53–76). Various studies have interpreted “culture-bound syndromes” as being in part the product of specific stresses expe-

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**Table 1. continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientist</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Interpretive Rubric</th>
<th>Data Referenced</th>
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<tr>
<td>17. Foulks</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary synthesis—arctic environment; calcium deficiency; Inuit shamanism; Inuit psychobiology</td>
<td>10 case studies of Alaskan Inuit displaying symptoms; Diebitsch-Peary (1894); Peary (1910, 1911); Steensby (1910); Whitney (1910); Rasmussen (1915); MacMillau (1934); Steed (1947), Malaurie (1950)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Freeman, Foulks &amp; Freeman</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—early socialization robs child of independence</td>
<td>Brill (1913); Gussow (1960); Parker (1962); Peary (1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Foulks, Freeman, &amp; Freeman</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic—pre-Oedipal dynamics</td>
<td>Diebitsch-Peary (1894); Peary (1910); Brill (1910); Steed (1947); Gussow (1960); Parker (1962); Foulks (1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Bohlen</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Environmental—Desynchronization of calcium rhythm in body</td>
<td>Whitney (1910); Brill (1913); Jenness (1928); Baashauss-Jessen (1933); Aberle (1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Condon</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Environmental—seasonal shifts in light levels cause desynchronization of calcium levels</td>
<td>Peary (1907); Steensby (1910); Whitney (1910), Rasmussen (1927); Malaurie (1956); Murphy (1960)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Landy</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Dietary—Hypervitaminosis A, caused by ingestion of polar bear livers</td>
<td>Peary (1907, 1910); Whitney (1910); Steensby (1910); Brill (1913); Czaplicka (1914); Nuvakovskiy (1924); Jenness (1928); Aberle (1952); Rasmussen (1915); Wallace (1961); Wallace and Ackerman (1960)</td>
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Dick: Pibloktoq and European-Inuit Relations
rienced by social groups. To take just one example, Jilek and Jilek-Aall (1985), in reviewing changing aspects of two “culture bound” disorders, koro and Salish “spirit sickness,” suggested that these phenomena were generated by feelings of powerlessness caused by perceived threats to ethnic survival. A number of other studies have identified associations between higher incidence of psychiatric illness and subordinate social status (Littlewood 1991:697). Yet, as the French social scientists Deleuze and Guattari have argued, Western medicine has pathologized the very contexts within which resistance might be expressed (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Holland 1991).

New approaches to ethnography have likewise begun to critically evaluate the role of Western observers who have generated the ethnographic data on which much of cross-cultural psychiatry rests (see Clifford 1988; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Among other factors, these studies have addressed the impacts of colonialism in the ethnographic encounter (Clifford 1988:55–91). With regard to the ethnography of “pibloktuq,” writers such as Peary and MacMillan established a network of relationships with the Inuhuit, whom they employed to provide a range of services to their expeditions. The study of these relationships holds the promise of illuminating the contexts within which reported episodes of hysteria occurred, and the extent to which these observers might have contributed to the behaviors they were describing.

In light of these trends, a reexamination of a number of issues surrounding the nature and incidence of “pibloktuq” appears to be warranted. To establish possible indigenous meanings of the term, I propose to investigate the semantics of “pibloktuq” through its use in Inuhuit narrative. The term “hystéria” also needs to be contextualized in terms of its semantic associations in nineteenth-century European writing. With regard to the possible causes of “pibloktuq,” both ecological and psychological factors need to be more fully investigated and placed in appropriate narrative contexts. In keeping with current directions in cross-cultural psychiatry, data on the social and situational contexts of particular “pibloktuq” episodes will be introduced. To facilitate the analysis, all primary reports of “pibloktuq” which could be situated in time and place have been compiled (Appendix B). The attitudes and behavior of the European observers of “pibloktuq” are potentially relevant to issues of definition and etiology, and they, too, will be investigated.

**Semantics of “Pibloktuq”: Inuhuit Language and Folklore**

A reassessment of “pibloktuq” might logically begin with an examination of the term and what it meant to the Inuhuit who used it. An immediate difficulty arises with the realization that no such term as “pibloktuq” or “pibloktuk” exists in the orthography of either West Greenlandic or the Inuhuit dialect. The ethnographer Erik Holtved has indicated that even an experienced observer with a good knowledge of Inuhuit language and culture can encounter considerable difficulty in distinguishing their terms, due to idiomatic use of suffixes and linguistic rhythm, and marked individual differences in speech patterns (Holtved 1951:9). European or American writers who used these terms were giving crude phonetic representations of Inuktitut utterances as they sounded to these authors’ Western ears. The problem of identification of terms is complicated by the fact that these Western writers who have provided orthographic equivalents have represented “pibloktuq” as a variety of similar-sounding Inuhuit terms which nevertheless carry different meanings. In other cases they have provided diverging translations of the same term.

For example, Henrik Rink, a nineteenth-century Danish administrator in Greenland and a scholar of Greenland Inuit language and folklore, defined the term pivdlororteq as “a mad or delirious person” (Rink 1887:57). More recently Holtved, in referring to “arctic hysteria,” employed the same stem word as Rink (pivdlorornerq) but translated it as “drum dance fits” (Holtved 1967:151). W. Elmer Ekblaw, the ethnographer with MacMillan’s Crocker Land Expedition of 1913–1917, wrote in his 1926 Ph.D. thesis that the Inuhuit designated “arctic hysteria” by the term “pibloktuk,” which he translated as “something bad” (Ekblaw 1926:101). Evidently Ekblaw thought that the term derived from the Greenlandic stem word piluk or pilug, meaning “bad, vile, or rascally” (Rink 1887:70). When the suffix signifying the subject is added to the term, it generates pilugpoq, meaning “he/she is in a bad way” (Schultz-Lorenzen 1927:81). Jean Malaurie, the French anthropologist who spent a year with the Inuhuit in 1950/51, rendered the Inuhuit terms for hysteria as perlerornerq (Malaurie 1956:80), while Wallace and Ackerman (1960:250) employing the same stem word, proposed perdlororpoq. This word is very close in pronunciation to perdlorpoq, meaning “he (or she) is dying of starvation” (Rink 1887:140; Schultz-Lorenzen 1927:185).

The diverging Native terms and translations of “pibloktuq” leave unresolved the issue of what Inuhuit informants actually meant when they named such behavior. Nevertheless, Holtved’s translation of “pibloktuq” as pivdlorortuq (“drum dance fit”), and the similarity in pronunciation of perdlororpoq (he/she is mad) to such terms as pilugpoq (“he/she is in a bad way”) or perdlorpoq

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("he/she is starving") suggest the possibility that "pibloktoq" may be more complicated than simple "hysteria" or "madness."

A more rounded understanding of pivlerortoq or perleremqeq will require the placement of these terms in appropriate semantic contexts. One way to establish the semantic associations is to investigate the use of these terms in indigenous narrative. For this purpose a collection of 170 transcription and translations of Inuhuit myths and legends (Holtved 1951a,b) provides access to a wide range of indigenous stories recorded before the establishment of the American air force base at Thule between 1945 and 1945. The Danish ethnographer Erik Holtved collected these stories via dictation or disc recorder in the periods 1935–1937 and 1946–1947. They may be considered a fairly reliable representation, not only of Inuhuit use of particular terms, but also conceptual associations and symbolic relationships of aspects of their culture and environment prior to extensive modernization.

With regard to dissociative states, five of the stories from Holtved’s informants employ the term pivlerortoq or variants, and focus on derangement as a theme. One story incorporates several of the symptoms of “pibloktoq” as defined by Peary and the psychoanalytic writers, including a woman’s hallucination, departure from the igloo, and singing (Holtved 1951b:151, story no. 174). Of particular interest are the repeated references to starvation in this and two other stories dealing with “madness.” Another myth, “Ama's Drum-songs” links a woman’s hunger to drum singing (Holtved 1951a:357–358), while four tales deal with starvation (nos. 104, 163, 165, and 166) and six others with cannibalism, its ultimate consequence (nos. 44, 49, 50, 51, 90, 172).

The content of other myths is also instructive in identifying a number of cultural and environmental stresses on Inuhuit life. For example, 11 stories deal with hunting accidents, in which hunters suffer a variety of calamities, including drowning, being carried off to sea, falling from cliffs, or being buried by avalanche (nos. 76, 84, 110, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116, 162, 164, and 167). Two tales deal with stormy weather; one of the variants of these stories associates reductions in the population with increased frequency of storms (Holtved 1951b:75). This association reflects the objective danger involved in hunting from the floe edge in rough weather.

Some of the most common themes in Holtved’s collection involve disaster or hardship, particularly from hunting accidents, themes which were representational of actual stresses and risks in Inuhuit history. Hunger or starvation, reported by various observers, was a recurrent threat to the inhabitants of this harsh environment (Peary 1910: 51; Ackerknecht 1948:894). Hunting accidents, too, were an ever-present danger to the Inuhuit historically as they continue to be today. The stories underscore the risks of falling through the ice when hunting seals or polar bears, capsizing one’s kayak on a narwhal or walrus hunt, or being swept away by avalanche or falling from cliffs while netting auks. Mortality statistics from the 1940s and 1960s show that hunting mishaps continued to be a major cause of Inuhuit male deaths well into this century (Rolf Gilberg 1976:27–28; Aage Gilberg 1948:92–93).

A semantic analysis of Inuhuit narrative, then, suggests a number of ecological and social stresses bearing on the lived experience of this group. The legends provide an insight into Inuhuit perceptions of their often precarious existence in a difficult environment, which climactic deterioration after 1800 had worsened (Gilberg 1974–75: 159). The fact that pivlerortoq (“madness”) and hunger co-inhabit several of the stories suggests that at least some Inuhuit informants conceptually linked ecological stress with mental illness.

**Semantics of “Pibloktoq”: Euro-American Notions of Hysteria**

The other semantic field bearing on this issue was the complex of meanings associated with the term “hysteria” in nineteenth century Euro-American discourse. When American explorers first witnessed episodes of “pibloktoq,” their perceptions were conditioned by then-current Western conceptual frameworks. The emerging field of psychiatry had already developed a particular set of expectations regarding the vulnerability of whole classes of humanity to various forms of mental illness. By the late nineteenth century, Euro-American physicians had come to the conclusion that women were particularly susceptible to a range of illnesses, including hysteria (Mitchinson 1991:48; Wood 1973:25–52). It was thought to be endemic among American middle-class women by the mid-nineteenth century (Smith-Rosenberg 1985:198). A common diagnosis by nineteenth century physicians was that hysteria was a feigned illness. In some cases, women with hysteria were compared to unruly animals, to be “entrapped” by outwitting the patient. Assorted draconian “cures” were prescribed, including the application of electricity or plaster of Paris jackets for “moral effect.” Prescribed nineteenth century treatments included the administration of opium, bleeding, and blistering, involving the application of turpentine, mustard, cayenne pepper, strong vinegar, liquid ammonia, and other caustic substances (Mitchinson 1991:285–287).

The overriding medical interpretation of hysterical “fits” was that they were the product of a hysterical female nature. As Carroll Smith-Rosen-
berg has suggested, the correspondence between stereotypical notions of femininity and the behaviors of hysterics is too close to have been mere coincidence (Smith-Rosenberg 1985:196, 201–202). Other writers, including Phyllis Chesler (1972: 37–55), have also noted a correspondence between symptoms of hysteria and nineteenth-century notions of normative female behavior (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1985:123–124). Euro-American semantic associations surrounding the term “hystera” formed an important part of the perceptual repertoires which American observers carried with them when they first witnessed episodes of “piblokoq.”

Ecological and Cultural Contexts of “Piblokoq”: Autumn Stresses and Inuhuit Shamanism

The Inuhuit myths’ apparent association of pivlerortog with environmental risks raises the issue of possible ecological factors in “piblokoq.” A number of early visitors to the Inuhuit territory of Northwest Greenland commented on the seasonal and other environmental contexts of epi-sodes of hysteria in the contact era. The accounts include Harry Whitney’s Hunting with the Eskimos (1910), Frederick Cook’s My Attainment of the Pole (1913), Knud Rasmussen’s Foran Dagens Oje: Liv I Gronland (1915), Peter Freuchen’s Book of the Eskimos (1973), and Jean Malaurie’s The Last Kings of Thule (1956). Each of these writers wintered with the Inuhuit for one or more years during the contact era of 1890 to 1950, and had an opportunity to observe their activities over an extended period.

One of the most interesting points of correspondence in these books is the observation of a general gloom and depression among Inuhuit in the autumn, peaking in the month of October. This period, which marks the last few weeks of dwindling sunlight before the unrelieved darkness of polar winter, is characterized by extremely rough weather before the freezing of the sea. During this time, Whitney wrote that “heavy winds and terrific snow storms swept over us with only brief intermissions” (Whitney 1910:79). While both men and women were said to be affected mentally by the environmental stresses of the season, there was one key difference between the genders. As soon as feasible, the men, whose primary responsibility was to secure game for the family and community, left on hunting trips. The women, charged with domestic tasks, were confined to the settlements and their tiny shelters. According to Whitney, a general melancholy among the Inuhuit in October was worsened by the considerable risk of hunting disaster in this season (Whitney 1910:82–83).

It was in this context that Whitney observed the first of two attacks of "piblokoq" to strike Tongwe, the wife of Kulutinguah, an absent hunter (Appendix II, Episode 20). Whitney was in Kulutinguah’s igloo when another Inuk woman arrived. He reported that the two women cried for the return of their spouses and were also “very short of food,” having been obliged to kill three of their dogs that day to eat, an “additional cause for worry.” Later that night, he was awakened by the sound of a woman “shouting at the top of her voice—shriill and startling, like one gone mad.”

In the same era as Whitney, the explorer Dr. Frederick Cook made similar observations of prevalent depression and hysteria among the Inuhuit in the autumn. After the “forced hilarity” of their annual sporting event in late October he observed the onset of depression as the sun waned and disappeared. With the freezing of the ocean, and the out-migration of many sea mammals, “the Eskimos unconsciously feel the grim hand of want, of starvation, which means death, upon them.” He noted also the reappearance of shamanism at this time, and related the sounds of sorrow that characterized this period: “... Out of the sombre, heavy air began to issue a sound as of many women sobbing. From the indistinct distance came moaning, crooning voices. Sometimes hysterical wails of anguish rent the air and now and then frantic chorus shrieked some heartaching despair” (Cook 1913:92–93).

Cook also noted a general tendency of Inuhuit men to initiate drum dance ceremonies at this time. The lull in hunting activity occasioned the remembrance through singing of the year’s major events. He described one such scene:

... As they dance their voices rise to a high pitch of excitement. Their eyes flash like smouldering coals. Their arms move frantically. Some begin to sob uncontrollably. A hysteria of laughter seizes others. Finally the dance ends; exhausted, they pass into a brief lethargy, from which they revive, their melancholia departed (1913:97).

Cook viewed the drum dance activities as psychologically therapeutic for the men; he also surmised that the women’s emotional wakes at the ice edge occasioned a kind of cathartic release (1913:97).

Peter Freuchen, the first manager of the Thule trading station after 1910, also linked “piblokoq” to a renewal of shamanistic activity in the autumn. Ecstatic seances represented efforts to renew group confidence in the face of unsettling weather and impending darkness. He observed that shamanism was also occasioned by various misfortunes such as sickness or starvation considered to warrant the invocation of helping spirits by the angakut. In these circumstances trance-like states were commonly experienced by both shamans and other members of the group. Freuchen wrote:
... Every year, in the fall, we had a veritable epidemic of evil spirits materializing among the houses when the storms and darkness set in, and panic ensued. Sometimes nerves would reach the limits of endurance, consciousness would be cancelled out, and the individual in question would become senseless and hysterical, doing and saying incomprehensible things (Freuchen 1973:157).

Freuchen also reported having witnessed a seance during which one of the men, Kisiauk, had a “seizure”; Freuchen also used the term “piblokoq” to refer to this episode. While the other participants presented the appearance of ecstatic trance, Kisiauk was the only one to lose control (Freuchen 1973:168).

Various scholars have commented on the similarities of somnambulistic possession states and shamanistic trance (Eliade 1964:24–25; Merkur 1965:44–46). I. M. Lewis has pointed out that no one could be accepted as a shaman unless he or she could demonstrate their capacity to experience ecstasy—“a half-delirious condition” (Lewis 1981:30). Similarly, the “hysteria” of the autumn reported by Cook and Freuchen seems to have been closely linked to shamanistic activity. If so, these episodes might more appropriately be characterized as the “drum dance fits” (pivdlle-rorpoq) mentioned by Holtved, rather than pordle-rorpoq, or “madness.”

A tabulation of the seasonal distribution of primary reports of “piblokoq,” compiled from a range of unpublished and published sources (Appendix B), including the five episodes reported by Whitney, appears to bear out the inference that arctic hysteria was particularly concentrated in the summer and fall. Of the 39 cases which could be identified by month, more than two-thirds occurred in a four month period beginning in July. They peaked in October, when more than one-fourth of the episodes were reported (Fig. 1). While the sample remains small, this tabulation provides some quantitative support for the reports that “piblokoq” occurred most frequently in the period leading up to the disappearance of the sun in October, a time of year associated with the revival of shamanistic activity.

**Historical Contexts of “Piblokoq”: The Peary Expeditions, 1891–1909**

We have summarized some of the semantic, ecological, and cultural associations bearing on the term “piblokoq” in Inuitut and Euro-American narratives. It remains to situate “piblokoq” in its specific historical dimensions of time and place.

Was “piblokoq” always present in Inuit society and history? Neutra, Levy, and Parker have noted a particular clustering of reported “piblokoq” episodes in the Peary era. They offered the interesting suggestion that Peary’s “appearance among the Eskimos might have influenced the frequency and patterning of this condition,” but provided no evidence (Neutra, Levy, and Parker 1977:271). The historian Richard Vaughan, citing references to hysteria in the books of Peary, Whitney, and MacMillan, has drawn similar inferences. Noting the absence of reports of “piblokoq” before the time of Peary, Vaughan has remarked “for whatever reason, there seems to have been a sudden increase in the number of persons going piblokoq in the first decades of the twentieth century” (Vaughan 1991:119). Conversely, by the 1930s, reports of “piblokoq” apparently had tailed off. The physician Aage Gilberg made no mention of “piblokoq” in a book on his medical practice at Thule in this period (Gilberg 1948).

It would be worthwhile to try to establish whether there is an empirical basis for the inferred relationship between the appearance of “piblokoq” and the events of the early contact era. To this end, I have compiled the narratives of 40 references to arctic hysteria from the various sources of this period in Appendix B. Appendix A comprises a distillation of possible contextual factors present during these reported episodes. Specific factors which might have contributed to “piblokoq” include: (i) hunger, (ii) separation of family members, (iii) migration away from the person’s home territory for extended periods, (iv) physical illness, (v) dangerous hunting or traveling conditions, or (vi) involvement in shamanistic seance or trance (Appendix A). When such information was absent, it was left out of the compilation.

Situational data from the period record present opportunities to illuminate the specific reports of arctic hysteria. A major source for the study of these “cases” is the collection of Robert E. Peary’s unpublished papers at the U.S. National Archives. Of particular interest are the collections of documents relating to Peary’s expeditions of 1896–1902, 1905–1906, and 1908–1909, documenting nearly six years of close contact between Euro-Americans and Inuitut. In addition to various unpublished writings of Peary and other expedition members, the papers include the very detailed diaries and notebooks of Dr. T. S. Dedrick, the expedition’s surgeon between 1898 and 1901. Many of the explorers’ references to “piblokoq” were written from various locations on Ellesmere Island, when their parties established wintering quarters in the remote northern parts of the island at Fort Conger in 1900/01, or Cape Sheridan in 1905/06 and 1908/09 (Fig. 2).

In 1900 Peary made his fourth trip to Fort Conger, the station of the ill-fated Greely expedition of 1881–1884. Other personnel of his party included about ten Inuitut men and women, Dedrick, and Peary’s long-term assistant, Matthew
Henson. It was the first leg of what Peary hoped would be a serious attempt on the North Pole.

That spring, while on a sledging excursion to northern Greenland, Peary reported having witnessed a series of “piblokoq” attacks. Assembling a party consisting of Henson, five Inuhuit, and seven dog teams, Peary departed from Fort Conger on April 11. Reaching Greenland by April 18, the party camped at Polaris Boat Camp where they encountered “furious,” “infernal,” and “blinding” snow drifts for several days in succession. On April 21 he reported a “very bad” ice foot (the belt of sea ice that freezes fast to the shore), channel pack ice broken up by numerous leads and pools, and a lane of open water three miles wide and extending right across to Ellesmere Island. This meant that the group was stymied, both from northward advance or retreat. Peary wrote “My 2 Etah men are very down hearted. Have told them will keep them only 5 days longer.”

After putting Henson, Sipsu, Ahngmalotok, and Odaq to work hewing a path out of the mangled ice foot, Peary again set out on April 23 in a “furious wind and drift.” He reported the ice foot to Repulse Harbour as “very trying to sledges and men, wrenching the latter, ripping off ivory shoes and capsizing all sledges repeatedly.” When they arrived beside the Black Horn Cliffs, Peary reported that the cliffs were fronted by open water and vulnerable to moving pack ice “crushing against the ice foot where we build our igloo.” From this precarious perch he wrote on April 24 that “this camp can well be named Camp Wolf.”

The next morning, on waking after a heavy snow-
fall and with every hole in the igloo sealed by the snow, Peary's Inuhuit employees went "piblokt-
toq." He recorded in his diary that while they were
Drinking tea, "Pooblah had a fit and remaining Es-
kimos began to follow suit. Felt a trifle peculiar
myself. Recognized the effects of alcohol..." Peary
immediately kicked out the igloo door, sent
two of the Inuhuit men outside, and gave the oth-
ers a drink of brandy, which "finally quieted them
down" (Appendix B, Episode 6). Nevertheless, the
ominous grinding of the ice and other difficult
conditions continued to affect their morale as
Peary wrote that "the open water, the groaning
pack, had weather, and their attack of this morn-
ing, has put them in a very timid frame of mind."
Peary, accordingly, sent Sipsu and Absayoo back
to Fort Conger two days later, and on May 4 he
sent two others back, retaining only Ahngmalok-
tok and Matthew Henson for the arduous balance
of the trip.

What did these episodes of "pibloktokoq" sig-
nify? Clearly they occurred in the context of diffi-
cult sledding conditions and objective physical
danger. From Peary's description, the camp on the
ice foot at Black Horn Cliffs was liable to be
brushed by ice floes driving against the shore, and
the "groaning" ice pack was a constant reminder
of his party's vulnerability.

By July 1900 Peary and his party were back at
Fort Conger, anxiously awaiting the arrival of his
expedition ship, the Windward. Peary was relying
on the ship to provide their wintering shelter and
also to bring pemmican and other supplies in sup-
port of his continued explorations. Since few alter-
native provisions had been secured, he sent Ded-
rick and several of the younger Inuhuit on a series
of hunting trips in the area of Black Rock Vale and
the Bellows (Fig. 2), about 20–25 miles west of
Fort Conger.

While on these trips away from Conger Ded-
rick reported a series of "pibloktokoq" attacks suf-
f ered by Odaq, who was about 25 at the time. The
details of the attacks are extremely interesting, and
are reproduced in Appendix B, Episodes 7–9. Of
particular note are the shamanic associations
represented in Odaq's chanting and garnering of
animal parts as amulets. As Jean Blodgett has
pointed out, such amulets could be used by the
Inuit not only to express their relationships with
animals, but also to establish connections with ab-
sent humans (Blodgett 1978: 203). In this case,
Odaq's collection of a calf head was accompanied
by the cry "the Eskimos, the Eskimos," and while
picking up a muskox hoof he sang and chanted
about "friends at Whale Sound." Whatever else
this behavior signified, there was an obvious im-

dication that Odaq was feeling lonely for his kin-
folk back in Greenland. The same dynamic seems
to be present in Pooblah's recurring dream about
other Inuhuit being nearby. Dedrick wrote:
"Pooblah tells vividly how he dreamed he heard
the Eskimos saying 'Huk Huk.' (Get up) to their
dogs & he could not convince himself that Eski-
omes were not near. A dozen times he has told me
this dream" (Dedrick Diary, 8 July 1900). Also of
interest is the disappearance of Odaq's depression
and "pibloktokoq" when Pooblah joined their party
on July 8, only to return on the following day after
his friend departed for Fort Conger.

Heightened fears of physical illness, coupled
with a breakdown in the effectiveness of shaman-
istic cures, might account for some of the anxiety
expressed in "pibloktokoq" attacks during this expe-
dition. Jane M. Murphy, in her Ph.D thesis on the
psychopathology of an Inuit village on St. Law-
rence Island, Alaska, has argued that for non-West-
ern peoples, periods of waning shamanistic prac-
tice and beliefs are times of particular susceptibility
to emotional or mental instability, especially be-
fore Western psychiatric therapy has replaced its
shamanistic antecedents (Murphy 1960:90). At
Fort Conger, on 23 September 1900, Dedrick re-
ported that a female angakok was engaged in
shamanistic practice in an apparent attempt to cure
the woman Elatu, who was then dying of "liver
trouble." He wrote: "She started in pibloktoko while
in the sick woman house, but ceased when I or-
dered to stop" (Appendix B, Episode 12).

Dedrick not only interfered with shamanistic
healing practices, but encouraged the young In-
uhuit in his charge to break food taboos. While in
the field on 26 August 1900 he reported that he,
Pooblah, and Odaq had each killed a hare. Since
they were immature animals the two Inuhuit were
prohibited from eating them. However, Dedrick
stated: "Now I am authority on these things, and I
say it is all right for you to eat the hare." On this
advice they ate the meat. Evidently Pooblah felt
uneasy doing this, as Dedrick heard him cry out to
his dead father "a sort of prayer apology."

Dedrick's and Peary's diaries indicate addi-
tional stresses on the Inuhuit which might be con-
ected to the "pibloktokoq" attacks at Fort Conger.
One of their fundamental worries appears to have
been hunger, or the fear of starvation. On 25 Octo-
ber 1900 Dedrick reported that while the Ameri-
cans still had some meat for their own use, "dog
meat & meat for Esk are all gone. One of the women
had a crying spell this morning on account of being
brought here & being so often on short rations..."

Another source of strain was the frequent
separation of Inuhuit women from their spouses,
as Peary assigned the men to extended hunting or
reconnaissance trips away from the base camps. In
February 1901 Dedrick observed that these separa-
tions had negative psychological consequences, as
he remarked: "Soundah does poorly when Pooblah
is gone, is listless, eats little, and sleeps all the..."
time” (USNA, Peary Papers, T. S. Dedrick Diaries, Notebooks and Other Papers, Dedrick to Peary, 27 February 1901; Dick 1901:22). That April, Peary, dividing a sledge party at Distant Cape on Robeson Channel, sent one woman’s partner up the coast without her. He recorded her reaction: “Jonah, wife of Ahngmaloktok cried freely, poor girl, at parting from her husband, but I comforted her as best I could” (Peary Diary Entry for 5 April 1901). Also in this connection, two apparent episodes of “pibloktok” reported by a R.C.M.P. officer at the Bache Peninsula Detachment on Ellesmere Island in 1928 occurred a week or more after the Aboriginal spouses of both women departed on extended patrols away from the detachment (see Episodes 39 and 40 in Appendix B).

Peary’s writings suggest an additional contextual factor: the impacts of the European-Inuhuit contact experience on sexual and interpersonal relationships, with associated dynamics of power. Peary himself was the arbiter of at least some of these transactions. On 31 July 1900 Peary reported in his diary that Dedrick “approached me on the woman question today. He wants to take Saune and leave her in with him permanently. I told him certainly, and that I knew he would be more contented and better physically and mentally for it.” Three days later he wrote: “Saune begins housekeeping with the Dr. tonight.” On 23 August Peary noted: “Mrs girl partially pibloktko yesterday & today,” and by 5 September Saune had moved back with the other Inuhuit as “she was dissatisfied at living with him.” There were no further reports of Saune’s suffering from “pibloktok” (Appendix B, Episode 10).

This episode illustrates Peary’s approach to the women of his expeditions, whom he placed at the bottom of a strict hierarchy organized along racial and gender lines. In 1885 he articulated his vision of the ideal exploration party, which he likened to “the physical structure of a tough, hardy man”:

Following this analogy, one intelligent white man would represent the head, two other white men selected solely for their courage, determination, physical strength, and devotion to the leader would represent the arms, and the (“Danish or half-breed”) driver and the natives the body and legs. The presence of women an absolute necessity to render the men contented. . . .

He went on to remark: “Feminine companionship not only causes greater contentment but as a matter of both physical and mental health and the retention of the top notch of manhood it is a necessity” (USNA, Peary Papers, Notebook, 1886, Notes dated 13 October 1885).

The instrumentalist view of the sexual role of Inuhuit females expressed in this passage affords an insight into the pressures placed on the women who accompanied Peary to the north. There is evidence that Peary followed this model on his expeditions to northern Greenland. During the 1893–1895 expedition, while based at the Anniversary Lodge at Etah, Peary left Evelyn Briggs Baldwin, the expedition’s meteorologist, in charge of the base camp during his temporary absence. Baldwin wrote of repeated attempts by four Americans to coerce Inuhuit women into sexual relations. On 20 November 1893 he reported “Carr’s boast that he would take a couple of the women to bed with him” and “Vincent’s remarking that he would take his turn later.” He observed: “later developments almost confirmed me in the execution of their assertion.” On the following evening, Baldwin reported:

Two of them, Swain and Davidson . . . inveigled two of the young native women—mere girls—in with them and attempted to have them submit to their carnal desires. Neither would do so, however, one of them crying . . . “The Doctor cashany,” “the Doctor cashany,” meaning “the Doctor only,” “the Doctor only,” from which it would seem that the physician and surgeon of the Expedition has a monopoly on the poor woman’s body. . . . (Library of Congress, Baldwin Diary, Entry for 21 November 1893).

The indignant writer stated that he was on the verge of reporting the transgressions to Lieutenant Peary, when he recalled that Peary had already been informed and had not acted on this knowledge. He wrote that “the men, by various remarks, have intimated that the Lieutenant countenances the licentiousness practiced by them.” Further, a Mr. Stokes had informed him that Peary “considered it necessary [Baldwin’s emphasis] for the men to do so and that it would not be long before all in the party would be ‘at it’, etc. etc . . .” (Library of Congress, Baldwin Diary, Entries for 22 and 23 November 1893).

Several of the Americans apparently continued to pursue Inuhuit women, including those with Aboriginal spouses, with disruptive effects. On 28 November, Baldwin observed that Swain “attempted to persuade Ah-now-we, wife of Ah-sha-yin, to sleep with him, but her husband became very indignant and left the lodge in tears and started back to his igloo. . . . He took his faithless koonah with him.” After this incident the diarist said he “remarked openly that [he] objected to having the lodge converted to a whore-house” (Baldwin Diary, 28 November 1893). The coercive use of alcohol in these episodes was also suggested. On 2 December, Baldwin wrote that two colleagues “are still unjustly incensed at the continued pollution of their quarters.” Two weeks later, on 10 December, he reported that “some of
the careless [his emphasis] men gave cider to the natives in order to make them 'tipsy'."

Baldwin's observations provide a rare glimpse into a previously unexamined issue, the presence of sexual harassment or coercion on Peary's expeditions. The power imbalances in the sexual relationships between Americans and Inuhiut women are apparent. While a direct connection is difficult to establish, the example of Saune, coupled with Baldwin's reports, suggests that these liaisons had the potential to precipitate distress, and possibly hysteria, among Inuhiut women.

Beyond the dynamics of male-female relationships on the expeditions, Peary's removal of hunters from Thule had impacts on relationships of spouses who had been separated by the voyages to the north. Peter Freuchen wrote that the Inuk Sigdlu left his family to accompany Peary on his last expedition. He returned to find his spouse Alakrasina had been "abducted" during his absence by another hunter, Uvigsakavisk (Freuchen 1973:117). Another source of disruption was that, by his own admission, Peary took "only the best" Inuhiut hunters with him on his extended trips to the north (Peary 1910:74), increasing the vulnerability of the families left behind.

One of the most frequently cited episodes of "pibloktq" occurred at Cape Sheridan and during Peary's last polar voyage of 1908–1909. Beginning with Brill, various writers have uncritically reproduced Peary's and MacMillan's reports of endemic hysteria among the Inuhiut women on this voyage. On one day, five of the 20 women were said to have suffered "fits" (Brill 1913:517). Despite the fact that this report of epidemic hysteria departs significantly from the usual stories of individual attacks, little contextual information has been utilized to help explain this extraordinary event.

Perhaps the Cape Sheridan "pibloktq" epidemic can be best understood as the culmination of a cumulative series of stresses, rather than the product of specific precipitating occurrences. Northern Ellesmere Island was a region which carried anxious associations for the Inuhiut. In 1906, during Peary's return from Cape Sheridan, eight Inuhiut families left his ship at Fort Conger, ostensibly in a dispute over reductions in their rations. According to Malaurie, the actual reason was that "they found the monotony of life on board oppressive and its comforts upsetting" (Malaurie 1956:202). Their departure also occurred shortly after the Roosevelt was heavily knocked about by the pack ice in the Nares Strait (Bowdoin College Library, Bartlett Papers, "From the Crow's Nest," p. 36.) Whatever their reasons for abandoning Peary's company, their winter was described as a "harb one" (Green 1926:224). The Inuhiut wintered in the interior at Lake Hazen (Fig. 2): according to Malaurie, they nearly starved. The group arrived at Etah eight months later on foot, most of their dogs having perished on route (Malaurie 1956:202).

Only two years later the Inuhiut were back with Peary at Cape Sheridan. After reaching their destination on 8 September 1908, the members of the expedition set about their autumn work, the men preparing for various hunting and sledging parties, the women setting fox traps along the shore and making fishing excursions to lakes in the vicinity (Peary 1910:127). This was the period of rapid transition from autumn to winter; at Cape Sheridan's far northern latitude the sun completely disappears by October 12 (Borup 1911:87). By early October, 21 of the expedition's 22 Inuhiut men had left with autumn sledging parties. Within days of the departure of the last party, according to MacMillan, "pibloktq was now common among the women" (MacMillan 1934:101).

While there are few specific details, several possible factors may be noted. The "pibloktq" attacks occurred soon after the departure of the male hunters at a time of year that carried ominous associations for the Inuhiut. This was the season during which a general melancholy was said to obtain (Steensby 1910; Whitney 1910; Cook 1913; Rasmussen 1915; Malaurie 1956; see also Herbert 1981). In this case the women had been left behind on the edge of the Arctic Ocean on the cusp of the long polar night. Freuchen, who knew the Inuhiut well, wrote that "if a woman happens to lose her husband during travel in desolate places, she frequently starves to death along with all her children" (Freuchen 1973:56).

Coincidentally, shamanism seems to have been involved in the outbreak of hysteria reported at Cape Sheridan. MacMillan later reported that several of the Inuhiut had moved into snow houses on the shore, where he observed a shamanistic ceremony on October 7, virtually the date on which the "pibloktq" epidemic was reported. He wrote that an older woman was leading two teenaged girls in a "mystic chant," accompanied by rhythmic beating of their hands. "As the singing continued, the two girls became actually frenzied and were simply beyond control. Physical exhaustion alone quieted them to a knowledge of their surroundings" (MacMillan 1934:105). Dr. John Goodsell, Peary's surgeon on the expedition, also wrote of an Inuhiut "requiem" for deceased relatives that he witnessed at the base camp during the autumn. "At times the women, especially, become excited and sometimes hysterical, waving arms, rending their garments and shouting so loud that one is reminded of old fashioned camp meetings in America" (Goodsell 1983:35).

These shamanistic ceremonies, like the great majority of reported "pibloktq" cases, occurred...
during the early contact era, a period of "psychological crisis" for this group (Malaurie 1956:220). In addition to the psychological costs attending the undermining of shamanistic belief structures, there were other socially disruptive developments in this era. One of the more obvious examples was the Peary expedition's replacement of formerly egalitarian forms of social organization with a hierarchical command structure (Dick 1991:22). The Peary period was also characterized by recurrent infectious disease epidemics, with high rates of mortality. On two occasions influenza epidemics caused the deaths of 11% and 15%, respectively, of the entire population—in 1895/96 and 1901/02 (Gilberg 1976:29). This devastation corresponded closely in time to Peary's first major wintering expeditions to the Thule district.

While the impact of acculturation and disease on Inuhuit society in this period has yet to be adequately studied, various writers have noted a susceptibility of both Western and non-Western cultures to mental illness during periods of rapid cultural change (Ackerknecht 1943:56, 63–64). Edmund Carpenter (1961) and Louis Marano (1982) have produced similar arguments in explaining the incidence of witch-fear and psychoses among the Aivilik Inuit and subarctic Algonquians during their respective postcontact periods. Most reported episodes of "pibloktqoq" occurred in a period of terrifying uncertainty for the Inuhuit. They appear to bear out Lewis's interpretation of shamanism as "an attempt to enrich the spiritual armoury of a community beset by chronic environmental uncertainty, or rapid and inexplicable social change" (Lewis 1971:203–204). Despite apparently desperate efforts to reassert control over natural and social forces in the face of devastating illness and cultural upheaval, the customary shamanistic cures of the angakut were no longer working. The situation was ripe for an eruption of hysteria.

Conclusions: "Pibloktqoq"—An Index of Historical Change?

Recent scholarship has highlighted some of the problematical issues relating to hysteria, a phenomenon whose origins in psychiatric discourse are not easily separated from nineteenth century notions of patriarchy (see Bernheimer and Kehane 1985; Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenborg 1973). If this is so with hysteria in European cultures, the problems must be particularly pronounced in the study by Europeans of hysteria in non-Western cultures.1

Given these complicating issues, few studies of "pibloktqoq" have provided either extensive empirical evidence or a rigorous testing of hypotheses which could justify the definitiveness with which their various interpretive frameworks have been advanced. As an alternative strategy, I have undertaken an analysis of its semantic, ecological, and social contexts to facilitate a more rounded understanding of when, how, and why a number of reported episodes occurred. The described episodes comprise a wide range of behaviors which elude monolithic categorization.

The semantic analysis of equivalent or similar sounding terms points to alternative meanings, such as hunger or "drum dance fits" that may be indicated in Native utterances rendered by Europeans as "pibloktqoq." Inuhuit myths and legends provide an insight into some of the ecological stresses bearing on the lived experience of this group. A survey of writings by contact era visitors to the Thule district situates the autumn as a critical time for the Inuhuit, when stresses of separation from family members and prospective food shortages were heightened by severe weather and dwindling daylight. Six writers with extensive first-hand interaction with the Inuhuit have identified this time as a peak period for depression or hysteria-like behavior, an impression which is supported by a tabulation of "pibloktqoq" episodes by the month in which they occurred (Fig. 1).

I have also endeavored to put into historical context what has previously been regarded as a transhistorical phenomenon. As the Canadian psychiatrist H.B.M. Murphy has noted, epidemiological studies of mental illness, and especially the so-called "culture-bound syndromes," have tended to neglect the factor of time in their analyses (H.B.M. Murphy 1973:33). Roland Littlewood and M. Lipsedge have similarly noted the problems of applying synchronic (comparative) approaches to psychiatric categories which are in diachronic (historical) flux (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1987: 289–335). My own research in primary documents has added 31 primary references from the contact era to the nine witnessed examples usually cited in publications on this topic (see Appendix B). These sources provide various insights into the circumstances bearing on the previously reported cases, as well as the episodes introduced in this paper.

There is a strong likelihood that stresses of early contact with Euro-Americans contributed to many of the episodes of hysteria among the Inuhuit. Service on Peary's expeditions represented dramatic, rapid change for this people, with disruptive effects for many individuals. Subsistence in the High Arctic had always carried risks, but Peary dramatically increased the risks for all members of his party. His single-minded pursuit of the North Pole, often in defiance of climate and the seasons, placed himself and his employees in frequently dangerous situations. As noted, Peary imposed military notions of hierarchy and decision-
making on a group accustomed to egalitarian modes of social organization (Dick 1991:22). Additional stresses associated with those expeditions included hunger and isolation of Inuhuit from friends and familiar environments. What seems common to many episodes is not merely the presence of stress, but the lack of power available to the people who were placed in these difficult situations.

In this regard, the spatial distribution of “pibloktoq” episodes generates some interesting associations, confirming that the great majority of reported cases occurred while the Inuhuit were on extended duty away from their homeland. Of the 40 assembled cases, 22 occurred in the far northern reaches of the High Arctic, several hundred miles from the Thule region of Greenland, the home territory of the Inuhuit. Twenty-one of these were in northern Ellesmer Island, and one case was reported in the extreme north of Greenland (Fig. 2). Five other episodes took place on the central Ellesmere coast in the Smith Sound region, including three at Bache Peninsula, one at Payer Harbour, and one at Cape D’Urville. Despite several winters spent by the observers with the Inuhuit in the Thule region, only 13 episodes were reported in this area, including seven at or near Etah, three at North Star Bay on Wolstenholme Sound, one at Karnah [Qanaaq], and another on Northumberland Island (Fig. 2). Interestingly, five of the episodes at Etah occurred within two months after one-third of the group’s population had departed to serve on Peary’s last North Polar expedition of 1908/09. Four-fifths of the reported episodes, then, occurred after the removal of Inuhuit from familiar surroundings or the artificial separation of many families for extended periods.

Tensions in gender relations also appear to have played a role in some “pibloktoq” attacks, underscoring the power imbalances in the relationship of Euro-American males and Inuhuit women. In the excerpt from the 1885 diary notes quoted above, Peary placed these women at the bottom of an expedition hierarchy, with himself at the summit, and American and Native males, in that order, occupying the middle rungs. He espoused an instrumentalist view of the need to employ Inuhuit women to provide sexual and other services for his American expedition employees. Arguably, Inuhuit men and women were both victimized by sexual harassment, insofar as relationships between American men and Inuhuit women apparently disrupted preexisting relationships between Native partners.

Documentary photographs of the period reveal some interesting differences in the responses of Inuhuit women and Euro-American men to the symptoms of persons with “pibloktoq.” In particular, two sequences of historical photographs by Donald B. MacMillan are instructive. In a sequence of 15 images photographed in 1914, he recorded an episode of “pibloktoq” of the woman Inalu (Fig. 3) at Etah, Greenland, in the home territory of the Inuhuit (Fig. 2). Among other actions, she is presented as throwing herself on the ground (Fig. 4), falling into convulsions, and collapsing in a state of apparent unconsciousness. Other Inuhuit women are shown gathering around her, apparently to monitor her condition and to provide assistance during the attack (Fig. 5).

This series contrasts with a sequence photographed by MacMillan in 1909 at Cape Sheridan, Ellesmer Island, during Peary’s last expedition. Here, Euro-American men are presented as in charge. Two photographs present Aluayali, an Inuk woman in distress, naked from the waist up, and held by two smiling males as they pose for the camera (Bowdoin College, Peary MacMillan Arctic Museum, Donald B. MacMillan, Photo Nos. NP-24 and NP-25). Two other photographs show the men’s “remedy” for this woman’s hysteria. Their solution was to lash the young woman to a wooden board in a kind of straitjacket, and suspend her from the boom of the ship’s forecastle. The American men are shown having gathered to pose around the tied-up woman, with the Inuhuit men ranged slightly farther away. From the top deck, the Inuhuit women look on, relegated to observer status by this assertion of Western male dominance (Fig. 6).

The draconian “cure” imposed by the Americans in this case echoed earlier treatments by Peary or his expedition physicians, which focused on the suppression of symptoms through the use of narcotics or caustic agents to induce nausea. These included the application of morphine by Peary in 1900 (Appendix B, Episode 5), oral and intravenous applications of “mustard water” to an Inuk woman by Peary’s physician Dr. Louis Wolf in 1905 (Appendix B, Episodes 19, 20, and 22), and the use of morphine by Dr. Goodsell in 1908 (Appendix B, Episode 24). These “cures” were rooted in nineteenth century European patriarchal notions of “female hysteria” and contemporaneous medical practice.

The explorers’ predisposition to view “pibloktoq” as a gender-specific disorder contributed to an assumption in the psychoanalytic literature that “pibloktoq” was largely limited to women. Based on statements by Peary and MacMillan, these writers essentially accepted the explorers’ amateur diagnoses of “female hysteria” and sought answers for its incidence in sexual trauma. If so, in at least some of these cases, the sexual trauma was apparently perpetrated by Peary’s own men.

A tabulation of reported instances (which counts each person in multiple episodes as a separate case), indicates that 18 men and 28 women were observed with “pibloktoq” (Appendix B),
Figure 3. "Inah-loo." The American Museum of Natural History, New York City, “Crocker Land” Expedition Collection, Photograph No. 231136. On several occasions between 1898 and 1914, Inalu reportedly displayed symptoms of “pi-blokoq.”

Figure 4. Inalu in the throes of a “pi-blokoq” attack in 1914. The American Museum of Natural History, “Crocker Land” Expedition Collection, Photograph No. 232198.
confirming that a significant proportion was drawn from each of the genders. At the same time, more women than men apparently were affected. Why this should be so is open to interpretation, and might relate in part to the explorer’s predisposition to perceive hysteria in female behavior. Another possibility is that the incidence of “piblokoq” was influenced by a proportionately higher level of involvement by women than men in shamanic possession. Some anthropologists have observed higher frequencies of shamanic possession among women than men in various non-Western societies (Wilson 1967; Lewis 1971; Kehoe and Giletti 1981). While the circumstances vary between cultural groups, Lambek (1993) has suggested that women’s interests in possession can be better understood by focusing on the nature of the spirits by whom they are possessed. In his study of Mayotte (near Madagascar), Lambek found that women’s possession centered on spirits formerly present in parents or kin over generations, and articulated their reproductive roles within a network of kinship relations (Lambek 1993:334–335). In the case of the Inuhuit, the wakes of women at the floe edge in the autumn, reported by Cook, also involved the invocation of spirits of deceased relatives. He gave the example of Al-leek-ah, a middle-aged woman mourning the death of a spouse 20 years earlier in a hunting accident: “She was hysterical in her grief, now laughing with a weird giggle, now crying and grieving as if in great pain, and again dancing with emotions of madness” (Cook 1913:95–96).

At the same time, Native involvement in such possession states, including those with hysterical overtones, seems to have been made more frequent by contact with Euro-Americans. This apparent
fact raises the issue of the semiotic dimensions of "pibloktoq." Since human behavior is shaped by the social situation and milieu, and involves relationships between addressee and addressee (Volosinov 1973:86, 93), the question then arises as to what was being communicated by "pibloktoq" episodes and to whom? Were Inuhuit with "pibloktoq" sending coded messages to the Americans?

Comparative information on hysteria in Western contexts suggests that it might have offered an outlet of resistance for nineteenth century women confined by Victorian expectations of "true womanhood." Such resistance could be expressed in the form of passive aggression, or hysterical outbursts (Smith-Rosenberg 1985:215). Regarding non-Western contexts, writers on cross-cultural psychiatry have remarked on the apparent coincidence of various "culture-bound syndromes," such as latah and amok, with the subservient social status of indigenous peoples in colonial contexts (see Abercromb 1952; Murphy 1973). With specific regard to shamanism, I. M. Lewis has noted a correspondence between "spirit possession cults" among oppressed social groups, including women, and their strategies of protest (Lewis 1971:100–128).

These studies are suggestive of a dynamic that appears to have been present during several reported episodes of "pibloktoq." The psychologist Barbara Winstead has noted that the characteristic feature of passive-aggressive personality is "indirect resistance to social and occupational demands for adequate performance" (Winstead 1984:81). Inuhuit women were expected to provide visiting Americans with various services, including the preparation and sewing of skins, trapping of foxes, fishing of char, and, apparently, sexual intercourse. Yet, the hierarchical structure of these expeditions also thwarted opportunities for them to exert a degree of control over these transactions. For some individuals, the resort to "pibloktoq" apparently expressed, at least in part, an effort to equalize the power relationship, as one might infer from the comment of Robert Bartlett, Peary's navigator, in 1905: "... I would diagnose it as pure cussedness. She wants her way and cannot get it" (Appendix B, Episode 17). A scripting of behavior is also suggested in Donald MacMillan's comment that on the day after displaying "pibloktoq" at Cape Sheridan in 1904, a Native woman "told him that she did not have pibloktok, that she was only shaming...." (Brill 1913:516). Indeed, MacMillan himself might have played a role in stage-managing at least one "pibloktoq" episode, as is suggested in a photograph of the explorer with his camera, recording the episode for posterity (Fig. 7).

The assumption of sick roles in coercive contexts was apparently not limited to women. Complaints of somatized symptoms reported in Inuhuit males occurred when Peary placed them at risk or in stressful situations. The acting out of hysteria could have released these men from immediate demands, either through a momentary cessation of hunting or sledging, or dismissal from the undesired tasks. This, at any rate, was Peary's view, as he recorded his skeptical reaction to Abhongdloo's "spells" during a sledging excursion along the ice foot of Robeson Channel in 1900. He wrote: "He walked off all right. I am disgusted with him" (Appendix B, Episode 15). His skepticism was echoed by Robert Bartlett when the same Inuk became "sick" and "lost his nerve" on a sledging excursion in 1905 along the north coast of Ellesmere (see Bowdoin College, Bartlett Papers, "From the Crow's Nest"—"The First Roosevelt Expedition." 22).

Interestingly, the charge of malingering was solely applied to the behavior of Inuhuit males, who were expected to conform to Euro-American notions of rugged masculinity. Conversely, the explorers' more general application of the term "pibloktoq" to women suggests a predisposition to view hysteria as part of expected female behavior. These differences find their counterpart in current psychiatric diagnostic practice which tends to view women as "passively succumbing to their hysterical symptoms," while men "are perceived as consciously deceiving (malingering) or intentionally resistant (passive aggressive)" (Winstead 1984:81).

The literature on "pibloktoq" has also tended to generalize about the entire group on the basis of observed behavior by a minority of its members. Wherever possible, I have identified the names of the specific personalities said to have been affected by "pibloktoq." A review of the names of persons with "pibloktoq" indicates that some persons were recurrently affected, while the majority of Inuhuit were not mentioned at all. For those persons who did suffer from "pibloktoq," their experience of hysteria did not necessarily impede their functioning in Inuit society or in exploration contexts. A case in point was Odaq. A respected hunter and angakoq who accompanied Peary to his most northerly point attained in 1909, Odaq earned the explorer's compliment as his "best Eskimo" (Peary 1917:53, caption to photograph of "Oo-tah").

Beyond the stresses experienced by individual Inuhuit, it is pertinent to recall the larger context of severe infectious disease epidemics throughout the period. While there are no ethnohistorical studies of disease among the Inuhuit, a study of the effects of tuberculosis on the Coppermine Inuit showed the destructive psychological impact of these epidemics, particularly as they undermined traditional belief structures in the contact situation (Vanast 1991:75–104). As late as the 1960s, Frank Vallee characterized infectious disease epidemics as the "most noteworthy recent communal crises" to strike Inuit communities (Vallee 1968:507).
With reference to this study, at least two of the persons with “pibloktoq” were concurrently reported to be suffering from respiratory tract infections (Appendices A and B, Episodes 16 and 40). Given the high rates of mortality, any recurrence of respiratory disease could be expected to increase levels of anxiety for the entire group. The anthropologist Daniel Merkur has noted that Inuit cultures, including the Inuhiut of Greenland, traditionally feared and despised spirits as hostile forces (Merkur 1991:23), and extreme anxiety would have attended the failure to harness these malevolent spirits. In the contact era, such anxiety was undoubtedly heightened by the incapacity of shamans to curb the infectious disease epidemics.

On the basis of the data provided in the primary accounts, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between shamanic possession states and dissociative states of hysteria. Indeed, as Lambek’s studies suggest, the lines between these categories are often blurred, and may differ mainly in the degree of “scripting” of the behavior (Lambek 1989, 1993). In some instances, such as Dedrick’s detailed accounts of Odaq’s attacks, both self-induced shamanistic trance and depression seem to be indicated (Appendices A and B, Episodes 7–9). In other cases, shamanistic healing practice was apparently mislabelled as “pibloktoq,” as in Dedrick’s comment at Fort Conger: “The woman anakok . . . started in piblokto while in the sick woman house but ceased when I ordered to stop” (Appendix B, Episode 12).

The analysis presented in this paper suggests that “pibloktoq” did not constitute a specific disorder but rather encompassed a multiplicity of behaviors associated with Inuhiut psychological distress. These apparently included reactions of acute anxiety, symptoms of physical (and perhaps feigned) illness, expressions of resistance to patriarchy and possibly sexual coercion, and shamanistic practice. What these diverse phenomena shared in common was that they were largely confined to the early twentieth century, and often precipitated by the stresses of early contact with Euro-Americans. In light of the apparent complexity of “pibloktoq,” moncausal explanations or efforts to subordinate it to overarching interdisciplinary syntheses appear inadequate. This study has extended the inquiry to include a critical analysis of both the primary record and the scientific literature on “pibloktoq.” Beyond what it might reveal about the Inuhiut—the subjects of study—the phenomenon of arctic hysteria and its discourse offer considerable potential to illuminate the history of Euro-American culture, and especially its experience of early contact with Aboriginal cultures. What can be reasonably concluded is that the origins and nature of “pibloktoq” are more likely to be found through the study of European-Inuhiut relations in context than from within disciplinary boundaries.

End Note
1. Gayatri Spivak (1988) has argued that there is an inescapable issue of power relations inherent in the efforts of Western intellectuals to represent the experience of persons of non-Western cultures.

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Weyer, E. M.

Whitney, Harry

Wilson, Peter J.

Winstead, D. A.

Wood, Ann Douglas

Yap, P. M.


Appendix A: Tabulation of Possible Contextual Factors Present for Reported Episodes of “Pibloktoq”

This table indicates some of the possible contextual factors occurring in association with specific reported episodes of “pibloktoq.” The enumerated episodes correspond to the numbered sequence of “pibloktoq” examples compiled in Appendix B. Where evidence of contextual factors is suggested in the historical literature, their presence is indicated by an “x”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode No.</th>
<th>Hunger</th>
<th>Family separation</th>
<th>Migration away from home</th>
<th>Physical illness</th>
<th>Dangerous hunting or traveling conditions</th>
<th>Shamanism involved</th>
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TOTALS: 3 14 27 2 3 13
Appendix B: Primary Source Reports of “Pibloktq”

These narratives comprise all episodes of “pibloktq” or hysteria-like behavior among the Inuhuit which could be identified in primary published and unpublished sources, and situated in time and place, as observed by Euro-Americans or Europeans in the exploration era. I have not included several incidents reported to A. A. Brill by Donald MacMillan (Brill 1913:515–516, 518); to G. P. Steed by Neils Rasmussen (Foulks 1972:15–16); or to Jean Malaurie by Inuhuit informants (Malaurie 1956:77–79), as these are hearsay reports not witnessed by the writers. Entries are direct quotations from the indicated sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Person Affected</th>
<th>Original Textual Reference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Apr. 18, 1892</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>The mistress of the remaining igloo was making an awful noise and trying to come out of her habitation, while a man was holding her back and talking to her, but she screamed and struggled so long as we remained where she could see us. I asked Mane what was the nature of the trouble and she told me that the woman was pi-bloc-to (mad). <em>Place:</em> Northumberland Island, Whale Sound, Northwest Greenland. <em>Source:</em> Diebitsch-Peary 1894:125.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nov. 8, 1894</td>
<td>Atunginah</td>
<td>There is a woman named Atunginah, wife of Muctah [Muktah] who has had fits from time to time. Let me describe one of her fits that I saw her in. While at Karnah Nov. 8th 1894 I was in Kardah’s igloo, one of the largest igloos in the place. Atunginah happened to be there and some other women &amp; children. The old woman Atunginah was busy cutting up a piece of seal meat ready to cook, suddenly she stopped her work and stood just as she was with a vacant stare in her eyes. The natives were acquainted with her of old and knew that the first thing to do was to relieve her of the knife before she could do any damage. Then they led her to the platform where she sat down, I was in the middle of the standing room, and when she made a break for the door I was requested to hold her back and I did so. The floor being very greasy and slippery I could hardly hold her and so I thought it best to seat myself by her and hold her that way. All the time she was trying to get away and calling wildly a lot of talk which I could not understand. When she found she could not get away she changed her programme and began throwing onto the floor everything she could lay her hands on. When I held her hands she tried to catch the things hanging on the rack, when I held her away from this she tried to bite me which of course I prevented as best I could. Then she began a great game of conversation with herself and began to talk about a woman who had recently died, and this is something that a native in his or her right mind will never do. At length she began to talk to me and it was little that I could understand but the people about us would tell me what answers to make, mostly yes or no. At length she asked me if I would come to bed with her—answer no. One of the people present was Tookingnaw, a pretty young lady and the old woman asked me if I preferred [sic] Tookingnaw. Some answered yes, others no, and I said the first. That set the old woman wild again and I had to hustle to hold her quiet. After a while she asked me again if I preferred Tookingnaw...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Person Affected</td>
<td>Original Textual Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter, 1898</td>
<td>Inalu</td>
<td>In 1898 while the Windward was in winter quarters off Cape D'Urville, a married woman was taken off with one of these fits in the middle of the night. In a state of perfect nudity she walked the deck of the ship; then, seeking still greater freedom, jumped the rail, on to the frozen snow and ice. It was some time before we missed her, and when she was finally discovered, it was at a distance of half a mile, where she was still pawing and shouting to the best of her abilities. She was captured and brought back to the ship; and then there commenced a wonderful performance of mimicry in which every conceivable cry of local bird and mammal was reproduced in the throat of Inalu. This same woman at other times attempts to walk the ceiling of her igloo; needless to say she has never succeeded. <strong>Place:</strong> Cape D'Urville, Ellesmere Island. <strong>Source:</strong> Peary 1907:384–385.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 30, 1899</td>
<td>Inalu</td>
<td>Inalu was walking around in the rain today, bare legged &amp; koppetah torn, with mild attack [of] pihlokt. <strong>Place:</strong> Etah. <strong>Source:</strong> USNA, RG401(1)A, Robert E. Peary Papers, T. S. Dedrick Diaries, Notebooks, and Other Papers, VI, Folder 2, Dedrick Diaries for 1899, 1900 [1899, at Etah].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APR. 12, 1900</td>
<td>Ahngoodloo</td>
<td>Ahngoodloo kept me up all night. Chilly and frightened. Cave him quinine, brandy toddy and morphine and finally got him to sleep for a little while. When he woke, was as bad as ever &amp; pulse 100. <strong>Place:</strong> St. Patrick's Bay, Northern Ellesmere Island. <strong>Source:</strong> USNA, RG401(1)A, Robert E. Peary Papers, Peary Diary Entry for 12 April 1900.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Apr. 24, 1900  Pooblah, Sipou, Odaq, & Ahngmalotk

. . . While drinking our tea Pooblah had a fit and remaining Eskimos began to follow suit. Felt a trifle peculiar myself. Recognized the effects of alcohol . . . with every hole in igloo sealed by new snow. Kicked door out and sent two Eskimos outside. Others gave drink of brandy, and finally quieted them down . . .

Place: Black Horn Cliffs, Northwest Greenland.
Source: USNA, RG401(1)A, Robert E. Peary Papers, Peary Diary Entry for 24 April 1900.

7. July 5, 1900  Odaq

. . . After breakfast, Oh-tah had another attack. He came to me, wailing an Eskimo chant, which beat any dirge I ever heard. He was trembling & beating right hand against his breast . . .

Place: The Bellows Valley, near Fort Conger.

8. July 7, 1900  Odaq

. . . Oh-tah shook & hardly talked as we ate breakfast. I know what was coming & tried to engage him into pleasant conversation, but he said he wanted no breakfast & he had headache. I could see his hand shake as he lay in his blanket. Pretty soon, out he went & began his wild song, walking straight from tent in stocking feet. I overtook him & took his arm. He walked to the meat cache, took the calf head & came & buried it under his bed clothes, then went out & toward river at rapid gait. I overtook him & told him the stones would hurt his feet. He cried: “The Eskimos, the Eskimos.” I said “where?” “Over there,” pointing toward river in front of Black Rock Vale. I said “Let’s go up here (grassy knoll near tent) where I think we can see them.” He came back, grabbing on way a muskox boot, which he took into tent, then he remained there, on hands & knees, singing & chanting about friends at Whale Sound. Instead of whisky I gave him water. He crushed the milk tin (cup) before he could control his nerves to drink. I went into tent later & struck him lightly but decidedly, on back & said authoritatively “Tinaa, Tinaa, Now go to sleep.” He laid down, with the attack over. This was a hard attack. His cries & wailing are heart rending. The woman began to whimper & had a wild look in her eyes & kept very quiet for a long time. . . . I had to give him extra sleep the next morning, on his request, as I feared to refuse as he had been having his crazy spells mornings . . .

Place: The Bellows Valley, near Fort Conger.

9. July 9, 1900  Odaq

. . . Oh-tah had his usual morning crazy spell. Took the calf-head into tent & later a musk ox hoof—same as other day. The woman rushed out, and I let him alone till he began to stand up [in] our tent which not more than 3 feet high, when I called to him not to tear the tent, then went to entrance & said “lie down & sleep. Your attack is ended.” He ceased & laid down. It was a
<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Person Affected</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 23, 1900</td>
<td>Saune</td>
<td>Drs. girl [Saune] partially piblockto yesterday and today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 26, 1900</td>
<td>Odaq</td>
<td>. . . Oh-tah had a severe piblockto attack tonight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 23, 1900</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>. . . The woman angekok ordered Oh-tah’s tea made in separate pan last night. She started in piblockto while in the sick woman house, but she ceased when I ordered to stop.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 15, 1900</td>
<td>Odaq</td>
<td>Ootah [had] a crazy fit [during the night].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 25, 1900</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>We have some meat which was designated for house use, but dog meat &amp; meat for Eskimos are all gone. One of the women had a crying spell this morning on account of being brought here and being so frequently on short rations.</td>
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<td>Mar. 11, 1900</td>
<td>Ahngoodloo</td>
<td>. . . Ahngoodloo [had] another one of his spells last night, palpitation &amp; belly ache. Sent him back to Conger with Pooblah this morning. He walked off all right. I am disgusted with him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 27, 1902</td>
<td>Ah-ah-gi-ah su</td>
<td>Ah[ah-gi-ah-su] [had] a crazy fit this evening, laughing, crying, and shouting hysterically. She has sore throat and badly swollen under lip. Pulse rapid and head hot.</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Person Affected</td>
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| Sept. 16, 1905  | Ahtitah         | An Eskimo woman, Ahtitah, had an attack of hysteria.  
**Place**: Cape Sheridan.  
**Source**: USNA, RG401(1)(A) Papers of Robert E. Peary, Dr. Louis Wolf, Journal, 1905−06 (manuscript), 14 July 1905−23 December 1906. |
| Sept. 18, 1905  | Name not given  | Another one of the Eskimo females had an attack of what the Eskimos call “pibloktok,” or hysteria.  
**Place**: Cape Sheridan.  
**Source**: USNA, RG 401(1)(A) Papers of Robert E. Peary, Dr. Louis Wolf, Journal, 1905−06 (manuscript), 14 July 1905−23 December 1906. |
| Sept. 25, 1905  | Names not given | Several cases of “pibloktok” have occurred recently, and now am thoroughly satisfied that it is purely a hysterical condition and have found that, by administering heroic doses of mustard the attack is immediately brought to a termination.  
**Place**: Cape Sheridan.  
**Source**: USNA, RG401(1)(A) Papers of Robert E. Peary, Dr. Louis Wolf, Journal, 1905−06 (manuscript), 14 July 1905−23 December 1906. |
| Early Oct., 1905| Name not given  | . . . One evening I was reading in my room when I heard a number of voices, making a good deal of noise. I walked out to the alleyway, when I met the Doctor going out on deck. I asked him what the trouble was, he said that one of the coonas [women] had Pibloktok, the form of hysteria which is more prevalent among the fair sex than among their partners. I would diagnose it as pure cussedness. She wants her way and cannot get it. The crying and yelling they make would cause you to think that they were going to do violence to themselves. The Doctor sized up the situation and calmly said bring Madam to the surgery, the patient was brought to him and in the severest tones possible, but with great dignity, he lectured her, and injected a liberal portion of mustard water into her arm, and made her drink some of it. This had a desired effect, she immediately became sane again and was restored to her right mind. I must say that the Doctor lost a good deal of patronage for he did away with Pibloktok.  
**Place**: Cape Sheridan, northern Ellesmere Island, aboard the Roosevelt.  
| Oct. 6, 1905    | Name not given  | One of the coonas had an attack of pibloktok—with her baby on her back, she jumped over the ship’s rail and where they found her was up to the English cairn lying down on the snow and she was pretty cold. The Eskimos put her back on a sledge. I gave her a drink of whisky and she soon seemed to be herself again.  
**Place**: Cape Sheridan.  
**Source**: USNA, RG401(1)(A) Papers of Robert E. Peary, Dr. Louis Wolf, Journal, 1905−06 (manuscript), 14 July 1905−23 December 1906. |
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<tr>
<td>22. Dec. 1, 1905</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>One of the coonas attempted to have an attack of &quot;piblockto&quot; today, but the administration of mustard water nipped it in the bud. <em>Place</em>: Cape Sheridan. <em>Source</em>: USNA, RG401(1)(A) Papers of Robert E. Peary, Dr. Louis Wolf. Journal, 1905–06 (manuscript), 14 July 1905–23 December 1906.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Aug., 1908</td>
<td>Names not given</td>
<td>. . . One or two of the women have had fits. When they do they all pile on and hold them down. One of them went crazy a few days ago and wanted to kill someone. She stuck her hand through a hole in the partition and kept yelling sa-vik! (knife). The sailors did not know what she wanted, so put a hot potato in her hand! <em>Place</em>: Etah, aboard the <em>Roosevelt</em>. <em>Source</em>: Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine, Donald B. MacMillan Collection, Correspondence, MacMillan [Etah, aboard the <em>Roosevelt</em>] to Clifton Augustus Towle, Principal, Worcester Academy, Massachusetts, 10 August 1908.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Sept., 1908</td>
<td>Tukshu</td>
<td>It was upon our return to Etah on the evening of the sixteenth that I observed for the first time a case of problokto among the natives. Problokto is a form of temporary insanity to which the Highland Eskimos are subject, and which comes upon them very suddenly and unexpectedly. . . Tukshu began suddenly to rave upon leaving the boat. He tore off every stitch of clothing he had on and would have thrown himself into the water of the Sound, but for the restraint of the Eskimos. He seemed possessed of supernatural strength, and it was all that four men could do to hold him. With the knowledge that his madness was temporary and he would shortly be himself again, with no serious consequences to follow, I cheerfully watched his astonishing contortions. It would have been a very serious matter, however, had Tukshu been attacked while in the boat; and it is very serious indeed when piblokto attacks one, as it sometimes does, when on the trail, or at a time when there are insufficient men to care for the afflicted one. <em>Place</em>: Etah, Northwest Greenland. <em>Source</em>: Whitney 1910:67.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Oct. 6, 1908</td>
<td>Names not given</td>
<td>. . . We have a piblockto victim about every day. One woman ran out on the ice tonight with not a thing on. The women caught her, laid her on a musk ox robe and held her down for half an hour. <em>Place</em>: Cape Sheridan, Ellesmere Island. <em>Source</em>: Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine. Donald B. MacMillan Collection, MacMillan, North Pole Diary, North Polar Expedition, 1908–09.</td>
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</table>
27. Oct., 1908  Tongwe

Date  Person Affected  Original Textual Reference

. . . At half-past one that night I was awakened from a sound sleep by a woman shouting at the top of her voice—shrill and startling, like one gone mad. I knew at once what it meant—some one had gone problokto. I tumbled into my clothes and rushed out. Far away on the driving ice of the Sound a lone figure was running and raving. The boatswain and Billy joined me, and as fast as we could struggle through three feet of snow, with drifts often to the waist, we gave pursuit. At length I reached her, and to my astonishment discovered it was Tongwe, Kulutinguah’s kooner . . . She struggled desperately, and it required the combined strength of the three of us to get her back to the shack, where she was found to be in bad shape—one hand was frozen slightly and part of one breast. After half an hour of quiet she became rational again, but the attack left her very weak.

Place: Etah.


28. Oct., 1908  Tongwe

On the evening after the hunters returned, and while I was dressing Kudlar’s hip, Tongwe—Kulutinguah’s kooner—was again attacked by problokto. She rushed out of the igloo, tore her clothing off and threw herself into a snow-drift. I ran to Kulutinguah’s assistance, but the woman was strong as a lion, and we had all we could do to hold her. A strong north wind was blowing, with a temperature eight degrees below zero, and I thought she would surely be severely frozen before we could get her into the igloo again, but in some miraculous manner, she escaped even the strongest frost-bite. After getting her in the igloo, she grew weak as a kitten, and it was several hours before she became quite herself. In connection with this woman’s case, it is curious and interesting to note that, previous to the attack which she had suffered the day before the return of the hunting party, she had never shown any symptoms of problokto.

Place: Etah.


29. Oct., 1908  Tukshu

. . . Tukshu, on a block of ice, was scarcely half-way across the open lead, when with a roar like the discharge of artillery, the floc he had just left broke into three parts. An upheaval of water followed, the pan upon which Tukshu was broke apart, plunging him into the sea . . .

Tukshu seemed lost, but in some manner he succeeded in reaching the main ice and was hauled upon it. The other Eskimos began at once to beat the water, quickly forming into ice, out of his bearskin trousers, while he pulled off his wet kuletar and donned a kopartar. Then I gave him a small drink of whisky from my flask, and he began running up and down to warm himself.

I do not know whether it was the whisky, or the excitement attendant upon his narrow escape, but suddenly Tukshu went problokto, and nearly two hours lapsed before he was sufficiently recovered for us to begin our retreat.

Place: Smith Sound.

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<tr>
<td>30. Jan., 1909</td>
<td>Tukshu</td>
<td>While we were thus engaged, the Eskimos laughing as they talked and ate and enjoying themselves to the utmost, Tukshu, without warning or hint, went piblokto. He fought the others like a demon, and I thought he would surely break through the side of the igloo but finally, though the Eskimos did their utmost to keep him in, he passed out through the entrance. In the tussle nearly all his clothing was torn off; and in the bitter and intense cold it seemed to me he must certainly freeze. For an hour he wandered around in the snow, while the others watched him through holes they had cut in the igloo’s side. Then he was captured and taken into one of the stone habitations. <strong>Place:</strong> Smith Sound. <strong>Source:</strong> Whitney 1910:187.</td>
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| 31. Early July, 1909 | “Buster Blanket” (Alnayah) | There was a huskie lady, a widow, dubbed “Buster Blanket” by our facetious cook, and she distinctly contrived to dispel dull care in a way widdies are capable of. One night after supper we heard a commotion for’ard and word was passed that “Buster’s got piblokto.” The “Scientific Staff” promptly proceeded to take such observations as the weather and place of the forthcoming performance permitted. As Mr. Adams puts it, when she “announced a meetin’ in the public hall the seatin’ o’ the same was found inadequate to ‘commodate the gang.”

There was the lady in a pool of ice-water, breast-high, right under the bow, looking like an inebriated fish treading water, singing like a siren, and hanging her hands together: Yah! Yah! A yah yah! Yah!” If she’d had more pleasant surroundings she’d have made the Lorelei look like the hat father wore on St. Patrick’s Day, and, for repetition of her words, a church choir stunned in an anthem.

The entire population of Cape Sheridan soon joined the gallery, and many were the opinions as to the best way of getting the lady to ice or dry land. None of us was stuck on pretending she was a bird’s egg and wading after her, so some fellows got up in the bow and tried to lasso the heifer, but, as we were not cowboys, she was perfectly safe. Others got a rope, but everytime she saw the rope start to grow taut she’d duck and it would merely scrape her back.

Finally, we got a long sledge, and while our 250-pound Chief Wardwell stood on one end to act as a counterpoise, another fellow climbed to the front. The widow dodged his embrace but we rang in another sledge, and finally the old girl was saved, though not until she’d given a good imitation of a cat arguing with fly paper.

On another occasion her high spirits broke out again and she mermaid it in a stream of ice-water a hundred yards wide, side wheeling it towards the mouth of the river 400 yards away, and we all trooped out to see what her farthest would be. After going most all the way she condescended to come ashore, and we...
Date | Person Affected | Original Textual Reference
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32. July 17, 1909 | Tu-ah-loo & “Buster” (Alnayah) | . . . The Eskimos are all aboard the hills where they have been hunting for quartz and eggs. Ina-loo and Buster Blanket being the last to come in. They promptly proceeded to get drunk on a tablespoon [MacMillan's emphasis] full of whiskey. For two hours they made things lively enough for all of us, Tu ah loo trying to walk with her feet in the air and Buster banging her head on the deck. Tu-ah-loo bit pieces out of the fur clothing of Tu-ah-loo swallowing these with evident pleasure, bit her lips, tore her seal-skin shirt, kicked everything and everybody within reach until finally it was necessary for six or seven of the men to sit on her and hold her down.

She then began to imitate all the animals in the arctic and some which have never been here.

Buster’s favourite stunts were kicking up behind with both heels, singing, spitting, and trying to fall down the hold. As she is a gross widow and not over-attractive, she did not have many sympathizers as Tu-ah-loo, so she was bound hand and foot, rolled in a blanket lashed to a board and suspended from the foreboom and there she swung back and forth in the breeze doing to perfection her only remaining stunt under the conditions—spitting right into the air.

A cup of strong coffee helped them to their senses and by midnight all was quiet again.

Place: Cape Sheridan, Ellesmere Island.
Source: Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine, Donald B. MacMillan Collection, MacMillan North Pole Diary, North Polar Expedition, 1908–09.

33. July, 1909 | Inadtiak | It lasted 25 minutes. She sat on the ground with the legs outstretched, swaying her body to and fro, sometimes rapidly sometimes more slowly, from side to side and tortuously, whilst she kept her hands comparatively still and only now and then moved her elbows in to her sides. She stared out in front of her quite regardless of the surroundings, and sang or screamed, occasionally changing the tone, iah, iah, aiha-ia . . . ; now and then she interjected a sentence, e.g. that now the Danish had come to them, and again the great happiness this gave her now in the glad summer time, and so on. Her two small children sat and played about her, whilst the members of the tribe scarcely looked at her during the attack; they seemed to be very well acquainted with such things. She recovered quite suddenly and only some hectic, red spots on her cheeks indicated anything unusual. Without so much as looking about her or betraying a sign of anything unusual she began, literally in the
Dick: Piblokoq and European-Inuit Relations

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<tr>
<td>June 15, 1914</td>
<td>Inalu</td>
<td>She tried to rip her clothes off, lay on her back on the ice, and kicked with both legs, pounded her head with sticks, imitated a polar bear, mimicked the cry of various animals and birds, ran out across the harbour, and did other stunts. It lasted about an hour, at the end of which she went to sleep, lying with her back on the ice. <strong>Place:</strong> Etah. <strong>Source:</strong> Bowdoin College, Special Collections, Brunswick, Maine. Donald B. MacMillan Collection, Diaries, No. 19/5, &quot;Crocker Land&quot; Expedition, MacMillan Diary, 12 February 1914–26 March 1915.</td>
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<td>Oct., Pre-World War I era</td>
<td>Qitlugtoq</td>
<td>What's up now? Shouting, screaming, wild spirit calls outside!—Arnajaq and I rush out of the tent. Oh! is it he again—the young fatherless Does he have one of his attacks again? Arnajaq screams. Upon my word, I never ... He is headed for the sea, and he cannot swim; it is best that I keep close to him! I grab a long dog leash to have something at hand for hauling him in and run over to the southern tents, which are at some distance from ours. Qitlugtoq is a big, uncommonly strong fellow of about twenty. Normally he is very much withdrawn, self-conscious and almost shy, but during an attack of this strange hysteria, he becomes absolutely wild, destroying and tearing to pieces everything around him, and he is dangerous for anyone near him. Lately he has had many attacks, and therefore, being a danger to his environment, easily risks being put out of the way. The other day, he attempted during such an attack to pierce us with a harpoon through the tent door. And what is going to happen this time? I see that he has a long sharp-tipped blubber knife in his hand. When he is so deep in the sea that he has difficulty with standing on the bottom upright, he suddenly turns around, falls, but gets up again and makes his way to the shore without a dry stitch on his back. A young girl, &quot;Little Egg,&quot; reputedly his lover, goes behind him to look after him; all others keep at a distance, as he linges forward every now and then brandishing his long knife, and &quot;Little Egg&quot; must then run and jump aside to save herself. The Eskimo, who are so used to this kind of incidents that they are no longer alarmed by them, can, as usual, appreciate the comic side of the situation and roar with laughter; as Qitlugtoq proceeds, drenched with water. He passes me close by; in spite of the cold he does not seem to feel chilly; he is staring wildly</td>
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about him, with a strange fear in his expression, and he appears not to see any of us. He is singing a spirit song, uninterruptedly, with feverish passion. "It is the song of the dead," they whisper to me, "and he is singing with the spirits of the dead. He seems to be happy, and that is why his voice is so warm."

Suddenly he starts to run and climbs up the side of a cliff steeply descending into the sea. "Little Egg" does not dare to follow him there, because no one fully sane can go there. However, he moves on practically without foothold, with a sureness that astonishes all of us. A moment later, he is up on the level ground again and headed for the tents, immediately entering "Little Auk's" tent, where there are 3 or 4 babies. But "Little Auk" follows him and with a calm and self-control that the task requires, takes the knife from the madman's hand. It is suggested that he be tied now that he is unarmed, but it is no longer necessary, since he suddenly stops chanting, collapses limply, and comes around. Simultaneously, his whole body shivers with cold, he is himself again, he is human, without contact with the dead—the silent, bashful Qitdlugtoq.

In the evening, an old woman calls her spirit helpers to obtain information about the unending storm. It creates a stir, when the spirits tell her that our settlement is still haunted by the soul of young Qitdlugtoq's mother. She longs for her son and feels compassion for him, because he has become a lonely man, but her presence causes continuous storms and bad weather and recurring attacks of hysteria in her son.

Place: North Star Bay, North Greenland.
Source: Knud Rasmussen 1915:102–115. Translated from the original Danish, courtesy of: Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Multilingual Translation Directorate, Hull, Quebec.

... I continue leafing through my diary. It contains moving prelimudes to the Polar night.

Under an attack of hysteria, Arnajaq, poor good-natured Arnajaq, rushed off to the mountains. There she met the spirit of the newly deceased "Little Auk's Son," who wanted to take her by force. She pushed him off and highly exasperated, came to my tent. I was alone. All blood had left her cheeks, she was singing spirit songs so that she was about to run out of breath, and she amused herself by stacking in my tent all kinds of junk from an old tent site next to me. When all the rubbish was finished, she took a stone so big that she could hardly lift it, and rolled it into my tent. All this took place with a comic seriousness and a studied solicitude, which made it look as if she were bringing me something that I had long wanted and now finally received. And she nodded her head at me, seriously and conscientiously, as if to say: "Yes, we two are sure to overcome life's problems together."

After standing still for a moment and inspecting with the greatest satisfaction all the junk she had deposited all around my tent, she suddenly rushed out, and with
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<td>Oct., Pre-World</td>
<td>Inalu</td>
<td>delicate steps, took a small coquettish preliminary run before starting to turn somersaults with an amazing speed all the way to the end of the valley before me, with an—unseparable comic, astonished expression in her face, and all my dogs dashing after her—in genuine bewilderment. Then she straightened up, beat her head with small stones, and before I could prevent her, tore to pieces her new fox skin which she had just got and was so proud of—and then wanted to throw herself into the sea. With great difficulty, I managed to carry her into the tent, where she finally came to her senses again. Slowly, colour returned to her cheeks, and she observed with the greatest astonishment all the peculiar things she had presented me. Even though such attacks seldom last longer than half an hour, they are followed by a great physical exhaustion. . .</td>
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| War I Era          |                 | Place: North Star Bay, North Greenland.  
Source: Rasmussen 1915:102–115. . . Inaluk, the considerate, pleasant, always clean “Gut,” does remarkable things one day during such an attack. Her man wrestles with her long but gives up, when he is unable to control her. She has an obsessive idea that she absolutely must have a piece of seaweed, and she wades out into the sea to about her throat and is hardly able to return to the shore. She is victorious as if she had set a world record; then she slips the seaweed back into the sea, doing everything with a great earnestness, as if to show that the whole thing was just a demonstration, after which she runs to the mountains with her wet garments flapping about her. While this is going on, her man, completely unruffled, goes out in his kayak, as if the whole thing did not concern him at all, and catches a big walrus just outside the settlement. Completely exhausted and red all over her body, Inaluk ends up in my tent, where we have to wrestle with her, as she wants to smear our faces with soot and blubber. Finally, she comes to and gets into my sleeping bag. A hot cup of tea! . . . Troubled thoughts settle in our minds, swarming in and then fleeing like migrating birds about to depart. Faint with powerlessness, even the strongest of us shiver a bit, now that life is to be led in the dark, as the glowing sun sets in the sea and the day closes its eyes. Thus we slip into the darkness, with some anxiety and shudder.  |
| Mar. 24, 1928      | Sakeeungwa      | Native Sakeeungwa entered the detachment this afternoon & appeared to be suffering from light headiness, he was not accountable for his actions for an hour or so, but with a slug & a little medicine he appeared to be O.K. again.  
Place: Rache Peninsula R.C.M.P. Detachment, Ellesmere Island.  |
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<td>Apr. 6, 1928</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>Native Coolitanga's wife went crazy this evening. She went some way out on the ice and tore off all her upper garments and created a great deal of noise. She had previously complained of dizziness for which I gave her medicine. She appears to be suffering with some lung complaint, which if contagious, is a menace to the natives living with her. <strong>Place:</strong> Bache Peninsula R.C.M.P. Detachment, Ellesmere Island. <strong>Source:</strong> National Archives of Canada, RG 18, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Records, Vol. 3015, Daily Diary, Bache Peninsula Detachment, Entry for 24 March 1928.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr. 19, 1928</td>
<td>Name not given</td>
<td>Native Ahkeeo's wife suffering with unconsciousness. treated as per directions. <strong>Place:</strong> Bache Peninsula R.C.M.P. Detachment, Ellesmere Island. <strong>Source:</strong> National Archives of Canada, RG 18, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Records, Vol. 3015, Daily Diary, Bache Peninsula Detachment, Entry for 19 April 1928.</td>
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