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The Powwow as a Public Arena for Negotiating Unity and Diversity in American Indian Life

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INTRODUCTION

The powwow[1] is often cited for its importance in contemporary Indian life as a constituent of tribal and Indian identity, and as a unifying force in Indian life.[2] Although each of these testimonies may be true, each tells an incomplete story. Each downplays or ignores entirely the disagreements and conflicts that occur within the powwow grounds and that swirl around powwow practices. Each erases the multiple differences among Indians and implies that Indian identity and commitments are simply reinforced and reproduced through powwow practices, rather than debated, negotiated, and changed. Each also erases the constitutive presence of power and politics within the powwow arena. Powwows are constituents of identity and a unifying force in contemporary Indian life, but they are also arenas of conflict and disagreement in which power plays an important role and in which Indians implicitly and explicitly debate their identity and mutual commitments.

In this article I will argue that the powwow can best be understood in these dual, paradoxical terms: It plays a unifying role in Indian life while providing a public arena for negotiation of differences and disagreements. The unifying role played by pow-

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wows is especially significant in light of the diversity within and among tribes. Although others have argued that the powwow plays a unifying role in this context of diversity, much can nevertheless still be added to our understanding of the specific practices that foster this unifying role. In the first part of this article, I will examine specific powwow practices in light of their unifying role. I will interpret the powwow as a communicative arena in which common experiences help create and sustain a common ground of memory, experience, identity, and commitment out of disparate experiences and identities.

On the other hand, the powwow is also a public arena where Indians explicitly and implicitly negotiate their differences and their disagreements over their identifying traits and mutual commitments. This role of enabling the negotiation of differences and disagreements helps manage the tension between unity and diversity, making Indian communities more resilient and adaptable. As in other public arenas, the role of power at a powwow is central in helping determine both the nature and the outcome of disagreement and negotiation.

Throughout this article I will be using the terms *Indian, American Indian,* and *indigenous people* to refer to indigenous people of Minnesota and western Wisconsin and, unless I say otherwise, only those people. The powwow practices that I describe should be viewed as specific to the region and not necessarily generalizable beyond the region. Whenever possible, I will refer to specific tribes. Although this paper focuses primarily on the powwow experiences of Ojibwe, Dakota, Winnebago, and Menominee tribes of Minnesota and western Wisconsin, it is often difficult to speak only in terms of select tribes. Members of many different tribes and bands live in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, especially in urban areas such as the Twin Cities. Many of these people attend powwows in the area, most of which are now intertribal.

THE POWWOW AS A UNIFYING FORCE IN INDIAN LIFE[3]

Indian tribes differ widely in tradition, custom, commitment, and interests. Multiple differences also exist within each tribe. According to one Ojibwe expression, "If you put five Ojibwe in a room together, there will be at least ten different opinions on any subject."[4] With the exception of powwows hosted by supratribal and intertribal organizations such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) or university-based American Indian centers, pow-

wows are usually hosted by a single tribe. However, most modern powwows are attended by members of several or more tribes. As many as sixty or more tribes from the United States and Canada may be represented at a large powwow. Although there are significant differences between tribes, powwow practices among tribes of Minnesota and western Wisconsin remain largely the same, enabling me to write at a certain level of generalization. The practices that I emphasize are generic to powwow experience in the region. Some of the specific powwow elements and practices that play a unifying role in this context of diversity include the philosophy and spirituality that underlie powwow practices; the emcee; music and dance; and explicit community-affirming practices such as feasts, honoring, giveaways, and rituals of inclusion.

PHILOSOPHY AND SPIRITUALITY

Although contemporary powwows include many secular dimensions, they are supported by philosophical and spiritual traditions that emphasize unity and inclusiveness.[5] For example, the physical space in which communicative interactions occur, a circle, is itself rich with significance for this discussion of American Indian unity and diversity. Among Indians of Minnesota and western Wisconsin, the circle carries spiritual significance as an embodiment of all living creatures, and relations within this circle are characterized by unity, harmony, and inclusiveness. This imagery of the circle permeates powwow experience. The dance arena is always set up as a circle, or an oval if the physical space will not accommodate a circle. This includes powwows held indoors in gymnasiums, auditoriums, church basements, and other square or rectangular physical spaces. Musical performance is organized into drum groups—groups of approximately four to ten drummer-singers who encircle the drum in performance. These drum groups set up either in the center of the dance arena or around its perimeter. Dancers move in a circle around the arena. Around the dance arena are seats for the audience, and around these seats are various food and craft vendors. Each powwow is thus a material embodiment of the underlying philosophy represented by the circle, and participation in a powwow signifies membership in the circle.

At the core of powwow experience in Minnesota and western Wisconsin is the drum, which, in American Indian philosophy in this region, symbolizes the heart of all living creatures and of

indigenous people. As some see it, without the drum there would be no powwow and no indigenous people. In secular terms, the powwow relies on the drum for its central activities of singing and dancing. Since the drum is "the heartbeat of our sacred circle," and since the "sacred circle" refers to an inclusive wholeness of humans and all living creatures, the drum also has a deep spiritual significance in American Indian philosophy. It is considered the heartbeat of all living creatures and, "if ever that heartbeat should discontinue, we are gone, everyone is gone."[6]

Of course, not everyone brings philosophical or spiritual interests to a powwow. Although many, perhaps most, Indians can recite the philosophical and spiritual meaning underlying powwow practices, it is unclear how many take it seriously. As we will see later, some Indians are concerned with a trend that they perceive of an increasing secularization of the powwow. Regardless of the philosophical and spiritual orientation of participants, the powwow represents for most people a place where differences can be set aside, at least temporarily, in favor of fellowship and unity. Adding a philosophical and spiritual dimension intensifies this commitment to, and experience of, fellowship and unity for some participants.

THE EMCEE

In addition to his (the vast majority of emcees are men) role of announcing the order of events and keeping the powwow moving, the emcee plays a central role in informing participants and observers of the significance of the events and practices as they unfold, and in (selectively) enforcing tribal and Indian customs. The emcee frequently explains what is happening and the reason for it. Much of this is directed at non-Indians and members of other tribes, but it is also intended to remind tribal members of the meaning of their practices. Some emcees accomplish this through appeals to collective memory, exhorting listeners to "remember." Collective memory is also reinforced in the powwow program guide with articles on tribal history, dedications to prominent tribal members, and central events in indigenous peoples' history such as Wounded Knee. At other times the emcee enforces tribal customs and traditions with statements such as "children should not be carried in the dance arena" and "dogs are not allowed in the powwow arena unless they arrive in a cooking pot," and exhorts participants to "watch the leaders and do what they do."[7]

In making public and explicit some of the assumptions and beliefs that underlie powwow practices, the emcee recalls to participants' minds the significance of their actions, including, sometimes, their philosophical and spiritual dimensions, and reinforces collective memories. The articulation of shared memories reminds tribal members and others of common histories. Overall, the emcee contributes to a common awareness among powwow participants of the significance of their actions, of their similarities and differences, of partially common histories and traditions, and of partially common interests and commitments. Of course, different emcees handle their role differently. Some emcees limit their role to moving things along and entertainment, while others are more likely to offer explanations and commentary. The emcee and other featured speakers also sometimes endorse particular stands on key political issues such as American Indian self-determination, sovereignty, tribal treaty rights, and the environment. This is especially true of the powwows organized by AIM, but often is true for other powwows as well. The articulation and rearticulation of these issues contribute to a common awareness among participants of political issues facing them at tribal and supratribal levels.

MUSIC AND DANCE

Beliefs and commitments that foster unity are embedded in the music and dancing. The aesthetics of the music and dancing, which emphasize repetition and unison, reinforce the commitment to unity represented by the circle in which they take place. The most common rhythms are straightforward duple, with occasional "honor" beats struck on the offbeat to honor Mother Earth or a specific person, event, or idea. The musicians drum and sing entirely in unison except for the leader's brief solo introductions. One measure of the quality of performance is the extent to which the musicians achieve a tight, cohesive sound. Although songs vary widely in intent, meaning, style, and sound, the song structure remains standard within each type of song. The so-called incomplete repetition form, or AA/BCD/BCD, is the most common and, like the other song forms, is quite short.[8] Thus, in order to play for a dance, the song is repeated in "pushups" a designated or requested number of times, normally four or five times but usually longer during a grand entry and sometimes longer for popular dances.

The drumming is associated with both aesthetic and spiritual power. Whatever the drumming might lack in complexity it makes up for in intensity and forcefulness of expression and reception. In his study of Menominee powwow music, J.S. Slotkin refers to "the tremendous dominating drumbeat which makes everything vibrate to it. . . . I never had such a sense of rhythm penetrating me."[9] The unison singing, when done with skill and conviction, adds power and forcefulness to this shared affective experience. The net effect is a potent physical and, for some, emotional experience shared by musicians, dancers, and listeners. Everyone in the powwow grounds shares the physical experience of hearing and physically feeling the drum. It focuses attention and experience, contributing to a sharing of experience. Powwow participants share this experience in qualitatively different ways and to varying degrees of intensity, but most find it hard to ignore. For people who bring spiritual interests to the powwow, the drum is also "the most important material embodiment of [spiritual] power."[10] Since the drum is considered the heartbeat of Mother Earth, beating on the drum puts people in touch with spiritual powers. It is a form of communication between humans and spiritual powers, a means of summoning strength from the spiritual world.

The "intertribal" dance is the most common social, noncontest dance. Anyone can dance, including non-Indians and people wearing street clothes. The step is a basic one-two, touch-step requiring only minimal expertise, but experienced dancers sometimes display their more advanced steps during an intertribal. There are several dancer categories on the Northern Plains powwow circuit, each characterized by a distinct set of stylistic norms and movements. These include, for men, traditional, grass, and fancy dancing and, for women, traditional, jingle dress, and fancy shawl dancing. Individual expression occurs, but within the parameters of each type of dance. Despite the variations in style, each dance builds on multiple repetitions of the simple one-two, touch-step that characterizes the grand entries and the intertribal dancing. Variations are woven around the basic step according to the artistic fancy of the dancer. For most dances, the dancers must pay close attention to the singers in order to stop dancing at the same time that the singers stop. This is especially true for contest dancing, where points are deducted or the dancer is disqualified for not stopping on cue. Attention is thus necessarily focused intently on the singing and the drumming in order to follow the

song and know where the singers are in the song. This is made easier by the fact that most songs have a similar structure and that the musicians provide various cues such as slight changes in drumming patterns.

These aesthetic qualities of repetition and unison found in powwow music and dancing complement and reinforce in sound and motion the philosophy underlying the powwow experience of unity and inclusiveness. They add impetus and reinforce them by making them material. They encourage a concentration and focusing of attention, and intensify the experience of sharing during the powwow, as different participants engage simultaneously, if temporarily and at varying levels of engagement, in the central practices that define the powwow. The net effect is at least a partial unifying and integrating of experience within the powwow grounds.[11]

EXPLICIT COMMUNITY-AFFIRMING PRACTICES

Several powwow practices explicitly affirm and reinforce unity among Indians. One practice that occurs frequently at a powwow and that reinforces the implied and explicit commitments to respect and fellowship within powwow experience is the custom of "honoring." Implicit forms of honoring include the grand entries—the inaugural events occurring several times during a powwow in which the dancers "enter the circle" to the sound of singing and drumming—which are led by honored military veterans. Many instances of honoring occur explicitly. Participants generally funnel their requests through the emcee to honor a relative, friend, or member of another tribe, so it is usually done publicly and often is accompanied by a giveaway. The giveaways themselves are explicit expressions of honor and appreciation for one or more individuals. This custom of honoring plays the role of affirming and cementing social relationships among various tribal members. It is a formal means of publicly acknowledging an important social relationship, and of expressing an enduring commitment to other members of the tribe and, sometimes, to members of other tribes.

Various formal and informal mechanisms are used to invite inclusion and participation in the powwow circle. For example, the emcee typically issues an explicit invitation to join the circle, welcoming tribal members, members of visiting tribes, non-Indi-

ans, and other prominent visitors and encouraging everyone to participate. Other powwow practices such as the communal feasts to which everyone is invited reinforce this invitation to join and participate. Other mechanisms for inviting or signalling inclusion involve ritualized use of singing and dancing. For example, grand entries are led by military veterans, signaling to powwow participants their integration into the circle and their place of honor within it. This holds special significance to Vietnam veterans, for whom reintegration into U.S. life has sometimes proven difficult. Other ritualized welcomes can occur at the request of powwow participants who wish to "return to the circle" themselves or to invite or signal another's return or entrance into the circle. One such event occurred at the 1993 Prairie Island Dakota powwow. A young man who had been "out of the circle" for six years wished to return. Working through the emcee, he announced a special song and dance, accompanied by a giveaway and a public honoring of his grandfather, to mark his return. Accompanied by two special friends and followed by tribal elders and family members, he began dancing slowly around the arena. People from the audience entered the arena to greet the young man and welcome him back, then joined the dancers at the rear. As they danced around the arena, slowly increasing in number, family members strewed blankets, shawls, and money around the arena, which members of the audience were free to pick up. The arena gradually filled up with tribal members dancing the young man back into the circle and with others participating in the giveaway. During this event, the emcee told the young man's story of falling away from the circle and his reasons for wishing to return, articulated the importance of this public affirmation of his return, and encouraged everyone to "come down and welcome him back."[12]

The invitation to participate is not unlimited. While an effort is made to make the powwow experience inclusive, participation requires at least partial respect for and adoption of the norms of the host tribe or organization. The host tribe expects visitors to respect its customs and behave more or less in accordance with them. Also, financial considerations partially underlie the commitment to welcoming and inclusion. The powwow committee often needs the gate receipts of members of other tribes and of non-Indians to pay the bills, which include the honorariums for dancers and singers, the feasts, and prize money if it is a contest powwow.

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In daily and weekly powwow experience, these practices reinforce and recreate existing beliefs and commitments, and foster their common possession. This process of "making common" occurs at both tribal and supratribal levels. Specifically tribal identity is recreated and reinforced at a powwow through the articulation of distinctively tribal commitments, as well as through the frequent references to tribal memory, history, and tradition, and through the reinforcement of tribal customs and styles of singing and dancing. A similar process of identification occurs for many across tribal boundaries at a powwow through the articulation of commitments that span tribes, through the development and reinforcement of common memories and histories, and through the occasional references to political, social, cultural, and economic issues that span different tribes. The partial consolidation of musical and dance styles that characterizes contemporary Northern Plains powwow practice[13] both reflects this growth of a supratribal identity and helps create it. Identification at a supratribal level does not replace tribal identification. Some powwow participants identify *only* with their particular tribe. For others, a supratribal identification, representing points of commonality spanning tribal differences, complements their tribal identification without replacing it.

In sum, the powwow is a unifying force in American Indian life at both tribal and supratribal levels. It gathers diverse Indians together where communicative interactions can take place that, taken together, define a partly common ground of identity, belief, and commitment. The practices that define the powwow experience—the singing and dancing, the feasts and giveaways, the fry bread and Indian tacos—together help define a sense of "who we are," of what it means to be both a member of a particular tribe and an American Indian. In affirming and recreating tribal and supratribal identity and commitment, powwow practices contribute to social cohesion and the survival of Indians as Indians. Participants leave a powwow with a reinforced sense of what it means to be a tribal Indian and an American Indian.

POWER AND POLITICS IN POWWOWS: NEGOTIATING AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT

Thus far I have treated the powwow as an arena in which unity and social cohesion among American Indians is fostered. While

acknowledging differences between individuals and tribes, I have posed this discussion in terms that downplay the role of power and that are free of disagreement and conflict. Indeed, most powwow practice concerns the routine reinforcement of existing beliefs and practices. However, the powwow arena is constituted partly by differences and disagreements that provoke conflict and challenges to existing beliefs and practices. These disagreements sometimes fuel explicit debate over powwow practice as Indians discuss among themselves the relative merits of different practices. The debate occurs within the powwow arena and on its sidelines, among members of powwow organizing committees, in informal interactions among powwow participants, and in discussions and arguments entirely outside of powwow grounds. Sometimes these disagreements are worked out directly within powwow practice, while others are not. Also, sometimes the debate occurs in wordless challenges to existing practices and the responses by others. Since these various powwow practices embody communal identity and commitments, challenges to them and debates over them are, by extension, challenges to and debates over communal identity and commitment. In other words, Indians do not simply reaffirm and reinforce their mutual identity and commitments through powwow practices; they negotiate them.

In this light, the powwow can be viewed as a public arena of negotiation and deliberation over American Indian identity and commitment. The outcome of these disagreements and deliberations depends at least partly on power, understood to mean both domination (control of others) and capacity (possession of the abilities and resources necessary to formulate goals and bring them to fruition).[14] In the following pages, I will discuss disagreements and conflicts generated around gender differences, the tension between secular and spiritual interests, and the relations between Indians and non-Indians.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Powwow practices are gendered in many ways, and these gendered practices both reveal and reinforce relations of power between genders. This is apparent in music and dance performance. Music performance is organized into drum groups, or groups of approximately four to ten male singers who sit around the drum and beat on it with a drumstick as they sing. In Canadian tribes and tribes

of the western and northwestern United States, women sometimes join or form drum groups, but in Minnesota and western Wisconsin women rarely participate in drum groups. Women's roles are generally limited to occasionally "helping the men" musically by singing along an octave above the men's voices. Day-to-day musical performance implicitly reinforces the commitment to this form of gender exclusion. Some women have attempted to challenge this practice of exclusion by forming all women drum groups. However, their efforts have met with limited acceptance, and today women are not active participants in drum groups in the Minnesota and western Wisconsin powwow circuit.[15]

A more successful attempt by women to challenge gender roles occurred in powwow dancing. Traditionally, male dancing is athletic and vigorous, while female dancing is relatively demure and restrained. However, one of the most popular contemporary forms of dancing for girls and young women, fancy shawl dancing, involves spirited and athletic movements. Fancy shawl dancing is a relative newcomer to the powwow scene, introduced within the last thirty-five years by girls and young women who persisted in its practice in the face of opposition by many who believed that its spirited athleticism was inconsistent with traditional expectations of women. Now it is an accepted form of dance on the Northern Plains powwow circuit.[16]

The outcome of challenges to gendered practices depends on relative power. The attempts by some women to redefine their status within powwow practices depend partly on the support or nonsupport of the emcee, who is responsible for articulating and enforcing tribal customs—a role that most emcees play selectively. The emcee represents a dominant voice, chosen by a dominant powwow organizing committee, and may or may not fairly represent the interests and views of the entire tribe. The attempts by some women to redefine gender relations also depends on their ability to enlist the support of other women and men, and to challenge other related commitments such as the commitment to unity that pervades powwow experience and discourages participants from raising public challenges to prevailing norms and practices.

SECULAR V. SPIRITUAL INTERESTS

Another point of disagreement that sometimes surfaces in contemporary powwow experience is over the relative weight in

powwow experience of secular v. spiritual concerns. Some Indians fear that the powwow is being increasingly secularized, denuded of its spiritual content. One expression of this disagreement concerns the use of the eagle bone whistle or similar carved whistles. These whistles are carried by select military veterans and, in traditional usage, are blown during the start of spiritual ceremonies in order to call in the power of the spirits. However, some of these whistle carriers now also use it for secular purposes during powwow music and dance performance. In contemporary powwow practice, a dancer with a whistle will sometimes blow it in order to signal to the members of the performing drum group that they should play another pass through the song. Given that twenty or more drums may show up to play at a powwow, the time allotted to each drum can be very small. One way for dancers who have been honored as whistle carriers to prolong the play of favorites is to blow their whistles. Some powwow participants object to this secular use of the whistle, arguing that it dilutes its spiritual significance. Sometimes, the emcee or a spiritual elder will interrupt the dancing to publicly admonish the whistle carriers for using their whistles in this secular way.[17]

Another example of this disagreement over the relative weight of secular v. spiritual matters concerns the growing prominence of financial concerns in powwow experience. As the number of powwows multiplies, there is more and more competition among powwow organizing committees to attract dancers and singers. One way to lure them is to offer more prize money and honorariums. The development of a casino economy among some Indian populations has made considerably more money available to devote to powwows. Some Indians fear that these developments encourage greater emphasis on financial incentives and less emphasis on spiritual, cultural, and political incentives for participating in powwows. Some Indians also believe that the increasing emphasis on contest dancing and singing introduces unhealthy competition into the dance arena, which disrupts the "good medicine" of friendship and fellowship. Contest powwows are observably disruptive of at least some traditional practices such as the giveaways, which are likely to be shunted aside to early morning hours, and the social dancing, which must be deemphasized in order to free enough time for the contest dancing.

A related disagreement concerns the practice associated with some contest powwows of making the powwow a "closed drum"

event. Traditionally, the powwow organizing committee simply issues a general invitation to drum groups to show up and register to play on a first-come-first-served basis, sometimes up to an advertised limit of twenty to thirty drum groups. Some of the drum groups that show up to play are composed of seasoned and accomplished veteran musicians, while others are composed of amateurs whose musical performance may be well short of accomplished. In traditional practice, no attempt is made to favor drum groups, and musical performance simply occurs on a rotating basis. In hopes of assuring better quality musical performance and attracting more and better dancers, some organizing committees now hire one or sometimes two or three exceptional drum groups to play the role of host drum(s). Some powwow organizing committees further limit musical participation by designating their powwow as a "closed drum" powwow, meaning that only invited drums whose musical performance is assured can play. This is a controversial practice, since many believe that it contradicts the powwow ethics of welcoming and inclusiveness.

Indians also disagree over whether it is appropriate to politicize the powwow. Some Indians distance themselves from any political uses whatsoever of the powwow or powwow practices such as drumming. These Indians argue against political uses of powwow practices on the grounds that politics is divisive and this contradicts the ethic of unity and the spiritual dimensions (which emphasize wholeness and unity) that they believe should pervade powwow experience. They also object to the introduction of political themes by the emcee or by others. In contrast to these Indians who disavow any political significance or use of the powwow and powwow practices, others explicitly and pointedly introduce political themes and issues into the powwow arena and carry the powwow drum into other explicitly political arenas such as demonstrations. This is especially true of the powwows organized by members of AIM.

In this ongoing disagreement over secular v. spiritual concerns in powwow experience, the secular power of factors such as casino money plays an increasingly influential role in determining the nature of powwows. Especially when viewed in the context of economic marginalization experienced by many Indians, it is not surprising that this secular power often overwhelms the power wielded by spiritual elders and others who are determined to maintain the spiritual character of powwows. Similarly,

the spiritual authority of elders is sometimes overwhelmed by the wholly secular interest held by many, especially youth, in having a good time dancing to the best drum groups, whose play is prolonged by blowing an eagle bone whistle. Finally, members of AIM sometimes enlist the power of the media in publicizing their political goals through powwows or powwow practices. For example, members of AIM garnered national television attention during the 1991 baseball World Series and the 1992 football Superbowl, both held at the Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, by organizing political demonstrations to protest the use of American Indian names and symbols as mascots: Braves and Redskins, respectively. Demonstrators at both events were led by American Indian drummers who were present to summon spiritual and aesthetic power, to focus attention, and to encourage solidarity. These events inevitably encouraged national audiences to associate American Indian drumming with political protest, whether or not the majority of Indians view the association as appropriate.

RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIANS AND NON-INDIANS

Disagreements over the appropriate relation between Indians and non-Indians are sometimes negotiated in and around powwow practices. While the invitation issued by the emcee to non-Indians to participate in powwow practices appears genuine, it is sometimes uncertain how to handle situations that arise such as inappropriate dancing or photography of dancers. Although the majority of non-Indians who attend powwows may behave respectfully and appropriately, some do not. A common sight at a powwow is a non-Indian snapping photographs of dancers. This strikes some Indians, especially those for whom the powwow carries spiritual significance, as inappropriate, especially when the photographer actually gets in the way. Some Indian dancers, on the other hand, are apparently happy to oblige requests for posed photographs. Another common sight at some powwows is the attempt by some non-Indians to participate in the social dancing. While some fit well into the dancing, others stand out by attempting to improvise. Sometimes inappropriate behavior is studiously ignored, sometimes it is guardedly ridiculed, and sometimes the emcee or others may intervene.

It is also uncertain if the invitation issued to non-Indians should extend to participation in drum groups. Participation by non-

Indians in drum groups is rare in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. My research turned up only one non-Indian who regularly participates in a drum group on the powwow circuit in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, and his presence occasionally provoked controversy as some Indians questioned his presence and his right to join in the practice of "drum-hopping" in which drummers circulate among various drum groups.

Indian relations with non-Indians are also partly negotiated at powwows in discussions and debates over the best response to the appropriation of Indian culture by non-Indians. One example, already noted, is the use of Indian symbols and names by sports teams. At some powwows one can observe simultaneously a representative from AIM decrying such uses and several Indian youth wearing sports caps and jackets imprinted with the offending logos. It may be tempting, on the one hand, to discount the wearing of these sports logos as the ignorance of youth or, on the other hand, to romanticize it as a defiant gesture of reappropriation. These may both be true. However, another plausible interpretation would simply emphasize that some Indians do not object to the use of these names by sports teams. The powwow is apparently open and flexible enough to accommodate these competing views on this issue, even when AIM is the powwow organizer. Another example of disagreement over the best response to the appropriation of Indian culture by non-Indians concerns the use by New Age spiritualists of American Indian practices such as drumming and sweat lodges. Some Indians cooperate in these appropriations for various reasons, including to make a profit and to help non-Indians gain spiritual guidance and understanding. On the other hand, other Indians criticize these practices on grounds of cultural appropriation and theft of key identifying symbols and practices which, many believe, degrade and dilute their significance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Focusing on specific powwow practices enables us to see more clearly how the powwow fosters at least some unity and social cohesion among American Indians. However, it is important to move beyond this focus on unity and social cohesion to a recognition of the multiple differences that are present at a powwow, and the disagreements that arise from them. For most of these disagreements, there are no formal guidelines that could serve as

decision rules. Each disagreement is typically subject to debate and negotiation. The disagreements are worked out in various ways ranging from mutual tolerance to wordless acts of rebellion to explicit forms of conflict and negotiation. Actual outcomes of disagreements and conflict depend on multiple factors such as the emcee and his mood or inclination on a particular issue, the powwow organizing committee with its incomplete control over powwow events, the tribe and its customs, the mix of participants, and the relative power of different participants. The outcome of these disagreements also changes from powwow to powwow, even within a given tribe.

The powwow arena itself provides a communicative forum where these challenges and debates can occur in various implicit and explicit forms and processes. At other times, the powwow stimulates debate on the sidelines of powwow experience. This debate over powwow practices is, by extension, a debate over the character of indigenous communities. Out of the implicit and explicit negotiation surrounding powwow practices emerges a set of beliefs, commitments, and practices that partially determine the identity of Indian communities. This set of beliefs, commitments, and practices remains subject to future challenges, suggesting a shifting, dynamic tribal and Indian identity and a shifting border between Indian and non-Indian.

While the dual roles of the powwow—fostering unity while enabling disagreement and debate—may seem mutually incompatible, in fact they are complementary. The latter role of enabling disagreement and debate contributes to the resiliency and flexibility of Indian communities by helping manage the tension between unity and diversity. Disagreement and conflict are inevitable among diverse peoples. The significance of the powwow is partly understood in the terms that I have suggested of providing a public, communicative forum where differences can be expressed and potentially negotiated. This marks, on balance, a sign of healthy, vital communities that have available some communicative arenas for working out at least some differences without squelching them nor ignoring them. Powwow practices provide a means of finding sufficient unity for survival and partial prosperity in part because they enable and even foster healthy disagreement and discussion over differences that divide Indians.

NOTES

1. The term *powwow* derives from a Narragansett Algonquian word *pauau* initially meaning a gathering of medicine men for a curing ceremony but gradually coming to mean a gathering of people to celebrate an important event.

2. For example, R.D. Theisz argued that Lakota powwow songs and the powwow practices in which they are set are the "centerpiece" of contemporary Lakota identity formation. See Theisz, "Song Texts and Their Performers: The Centerpiece of Contemporary Lakota Identity Formulation," *Great Plains Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1987): 116–24. According to Lynn Huenemann, music and dance "are among the strongest overt expressions and measures of the perpetuation of Indian life and culture." See Huenemann, "Northern Plains Dance," in *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, ed. Charlotte Heth (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution with Starwood Publishing, Inc., 1992), 125. Chris Roberts argues that the powwow is the "heartbeat of Indian country" and exemplifies the "greatest renaissance [in Indian culture] since the late 1800's." See Roberts, *Powwow Country* (Helena, MT: American and World Geographic Publishing, 1992), 8. Thomas Kavanagh sees powwow music and dance as establishing an "emotional connection with the values of 'Indianness.'" See Kavanagh, "Southern Plains Dance: Tradition and Dynamics," in *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, 112. Paul Robert Parthun argues that "the powwow is central to the feeling of Indianess [sic]." See Parthun, "Ojibwe Music in Minnesota" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1976), 68. At least some powwow participants claim to experience a "unity," a "unity of spirit," a "unified mix of people," and a "feeling of belonging." See David Hopkins, "Truly an Explosion of Culture," *The Circle* (October 1991), 19; testimonies in Roberts, *Powwow Country*, 25, 72, 112. According to the editor of a Canadian Indian magazine, *Windspeaker*, "[p]owwows break down the barriers and unify all who take part. Whether you're from the southernmost regions of the United States or far northern Canada—common ground is found at a powwow." (Quoted in Roberts, *Powwow Country*, 9.)

3. The following portrait of powwow experience is based on the literature on powwows and on my empirical study of powwows in Minnesota and western Wisconsin during the period of approximately 1988–93. My interpretation adopts the methodological approach of researchers such as Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Helen Kivnick, *Where Is the Way: Song and Struggle in South Africa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990); and Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). These researchers interpret musical practices in terms of how they model social relationships and embody ethical and political commitments.

4. For one use of this expression, see Joseph Geshick, "Letter to the Editor," *The Native American Press* 2:10 (17 July 1992), 4.

5. For one discussion of the philosophy and spiritualism that underlie powwow practices in Minnesota and western Minnesota, see, for example, Edward Benton-Benai', *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Red School House, 1988). Although Benton-Benai''s discussion is tied to the Ojibwe, the main themes that are pertinent to this article remain the same among tribes in Minnesota and western Wisconsin.

6. "Sixth Annual Heart of the Earth Contest Powwow Program" (Minneapolis, 1991), 2; emcee, Lac Courte Oreilles 20th Annual Honor the Earth Homecoming Powwow, recorded on tape by author, 16 July 1993, Lac Courte Oreilles, Wisconsin.

7. Emcee, Lac Courte Oreilles 20th Annual Honor the Earth Homecoming Powwow. Children are not allowed to be carried in the dance arena because doing so represents an invitation to Mother Earth to take the child into the spirit world. Dogs used to "arrive in a cooking pot" for ceremonial dinners. Although the use of dogs in ceremonial dinners is rare today, the custom of excluding live dogs from the dance arena is sometimes still enforced. The third reference to "watching the leaders and do what they do" appeared to be an attempt to discourage inappropriate improvisation by non-Indians participating in a two-step social dance.

8. For a discussion of this "incomplete repetition" form, see, for example, Thomas Vennum, Jr., *Ojibway Music from Minnesota: Continuity and Change* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press and the Minnesota State Arts Board, 1989), 8.

9. J.S. Slotkin, *The Menomini Powwow* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1957), 14, 15. See also Gladys and Reginald Laubins, who argue that in powwow music "there is strength and power. . . . With several men around the drum all striking it together, all singing at the top of their lungs, the stirring, throbbing pulse of the music vibrates right through you." Reginald Laubin and Gladys Laubin, *Indian Dances of North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 94.

10. Slotkin, *The Menomini Powwow*, 35.

11. Slotkin argues that powwow drumming and singing "welds" participants "into a collective unity." See Slotkin, *The Menominee Powwow*, 14. My argument that powwow music and dance both reveal and reinforce ethical and philosophical beliefs is consistent with the research that I cited earlier in endnote 3 above.

12. Recorded on tape by author, 9 July 1993, Prairie Island, Minnesota.

13. For an extended discussion of this partial consolidation of styles, see, especially, William K. Powers, *War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

14. The literature on power is extensive. A common, although by no means simple or uncontested, distinction made about power is between "power over" and "power to," referring to a sense of power as domination and constraint on

the one hand and power as a positive capacity on the other hand. See, for example, Thomas Wartenberg, *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) for both a summary of this basic distinction between power as domination and power as capacity and a challenge to it. For summaries and applications of contemporary literatures on power, see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), and Peter Digeser, "The Fourth Face of Power," *The Journal of Politics* 54:4 (November 1992): 977–1007.

15. See Thomas Vennum, Jr., "The Changing Role of Women in Ojibway Music History," in *Women in North American Indian Music*, ed. Richard Keeling (The Society for Ethnomusicology, Inc., Special Series No. 6, 1989), 20. The two most common explanations for women's exclusion from drum groups are that it is traditional and, as one scholar put it, "it is strictly taboo" for a menstruating woman to participate in certain ceremonial and cultural practices (Judith Vander, "From the Musical Experience of Five Shoshone Women," In *Women in North American Indian Music*, 5). This form of gender inequality is not necessarily indicative of gender relations in all aspects of American Indian life. For one brief discussion of an attempt to form an all-women drum group, see Vennum, "The Changing Role of Women in Ojibway Music History," 13. Vennum refers to a women's drum group at Minnesota's Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation, briefly active during 1973, which was "ridiculed during their first public performance" but later met with limited, grudging acceptance. Vennum does not say how long this women's drum circle remained active. Finally, it should be noted that American Indian women disagree over the significance of their exclusion from drum groups. While some are critical of this exclusion, others defend the practice.

16. Other examples of how powwows are gendered include the fact that most emcees are male, that military veterans—the vast majority of whom are male— often are honored, and that the related overall commitment is to warriorism.

17. This occurred, for example, at the 1993 Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, Ojibwe powwow (John Sanford [pseud.], interview by author, tape recording, 11 June 1993, Minneapolis, MN), the 1993 Prairie Island Dakota powwow (recorded on tape by author, 9 July 1993, Prairie Island, Minnesota), and the 1991 Black River Falls Winnebago powwow (Sanford, interview, 1993).