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# Who Goes to Powwows? Evidence from the Survey of American Indians and Alaska Natives

**KARL ESCHBACH AND KALMAN APPLBAUM**

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## POWWOW AND THE PERSISTENCE OF INDIAN ETHNICITY

Indians and non-Indians alike have long viewed American Indians' communal dances as a critical element and index of community solidarity. At the end of the nineteenth century, the US government sought to suppress traditional Indian dances because they were seen "as a great hindrance to the civilization of the Indian."<sup>1</sup> A century later the dancing continues, particularly in the context of the powwow, an emergent form of social celebration that incorporates traditions of dance, song, and dress from many Indian peoples.<sup>2</sup> Richard Hill, an American Indian scholar, expresses sentiments shared by many powwow enthusiasts: "The dance circle draws us in. The powwow has now spread coast to coast, and while some see it as a pan-Indian fabrication, I now see that it serves a vital catalyst for cultural renewal.... No matter how we dance, how we dress, or how we live, for a few moments of the song we stand together as a people, united by tradition and connected in the certain belief that dance is essential to the expression of ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologists in the 1950s regarded powwow as both an emergent and a dying social institution—a kind of last gasp of communal expression before the final assimilation of Indians into the mainstream.<sup>4</sup> But powwows did not disappear. Instead they have flourished as one of the premier collec-

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tive expressions of Indian identity amid what Joane Nagel has called the renewal of American Indian ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Today powwows form a national circuit with several thousand events taking place annually. At one end of the spectrum there are competition powwows at which thousands of dancers in regalia compete before tens of thousands of Indian and non-Indian spectators for prize purses that may exceed \$100,000. At the other pole are small-scale events sponsored by specific institutions, such as colleges and social service agencies, which might be held in a gymnasium or at a local park with an attendance of a few hundred people.<sup>6</sup>

A central question in the study of contemporary American Indian ethnicity concerns the concurrence of the increasing heterogeneity with the endurance of Indian ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of the powwow circuit is an exemplary case in point. The circuit emerges alongside the growing urbanization of segments of the Indian population and the integration of these sub-populations into social relationships with non-Indians. The powwow circuit flourishes in off-reservation settings. Powwows that are organized by urban Indian centers, college Indian programs, powwow clubs, and other sponsors provide an institutional context for the expression of Indian identity and an off-reservation connection to the Indian community. At the same time, a large segment of the American Indian population continues to reside in reservation communities that are spatially and socially isolated from non-Indian populations. The powwow circuit flourishes in these settings as well, in some cases helping to revitalize the lapsed ritual cycles and tribal identities of these communities.

One of the most persistent questions arising from the diverse social contexts in which the powwow circuit is represented concerns the authorship of the circuit: Which Indians make and sustain the circuit by their interest and participation in these events? On the one hand, the persistence of rural reservation communities makes it natural to assume that powwows, along with other cultural and institutional innovations that give substance to modern Indian ethnicity, are primarily nourished in these settings. On the other hand, alternative models of ethnic dynamics suggest that it is those Indians who live in conditions of dispersed settlement and with a high degree of integration with non-Indians who may be most likely to look for new institutional and expressive forms to ground a subjective sense of ethnic identity in a living Indian community. From this point of view, some components of ethnic renewal may have arisen in reaction to the increasing integration of Indians and non-Indians in urban areas and other off-reservation settings.

In this article we address this question by analyzing variations in the rates of attendance and participation across diverse Indian sub-populations. The data we use are self-reports of involvement in powwows in response to the 1987 Survey of American Indians and Alaska Natives (SAIAN), which was administered to a nationally representative sample of Indians living in the service area of the Indian Health Service (IHS). We report multilevel logistic regression models for each type of powwow involvement to explore the relationship between this involvement and the personal characteristics of individual Indians, as well as the social contexts in which they reside. We situate our

analysis with respect to two alternative models, each of which ostensibly provides a plausible account of the primary dynamic by which individuals are mobilized to participate in powwow: (1) the conventional assimilation model and (2) a model of "ethnic consumption," or the expression of ethnic identity through the purchase of objects and experiences that symbolize the individual's sense of affiliation with an ethnic group.

We begin our analysis by addressing the question, Why have powwows become and remained such an important form of expression of American Indian identity? We then review scholarly debates about powwows, and discuss how these debates reflect underlying questions about the constituency powwows serve. We relate these debates to the two models of ethnic behavior whose predictions we test. We then introduce the survey data used in our analysis and discuss its strengths and limitations for the purpose of adjudicating competing theories of the dynamics of powwow involvement. Finally, we report and discuss multilevel logistic regression models describing the correlates of involvement in powwows by individual Indians.

#### WHY POWWOWS?

Many American ethnic groups have used periodic celebrations of some kind—festivals, dances, parades—to forge and display group solidarity.<sup>8</sup> Powwows appear to play an unusually prominent role in American Indian ethnicity, addressing problems of both internal cohesion and external recognition. Why are powwows so important? The answer may lie in the unique and changing status of American Indian ethnicity in the American polity and civic culture in the twentieth century.

American Indian ethnic renewal has occurred in the context of a shift both in the way Americans think about American Indian ethnicity, and in the institutionalized incentives for the expression of American Indian identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States government tried to assimilate Indians by disrupting the social and political structures of tribes, and by denying recognition of Indian identity to individuals who did not live in segregated Indian communities.<sup>9</sup> During the course of the twentieth century, policies toward Indians changed dramatically. For instance, the federal government reversed their course with respect to tribes and has now institutionalized tribal government as one component of the United States federal system. The policy of "self-determination without termination" has become the defining framework of US Indian policy since the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act in 1975.<sup>10</sup> With respect to individual Indians, Americans came to view Indian identity as a personal choice for Indians of mixed ancestry, rather than as an ascribed artifact of residence in a socially isolated reservation community.<sup>11</sup>

The revitalization of Indian ethnicity created challenges for the maintenance of internal cohesion in Indian communities. This happened for several reasons. First, for many tribes, both collective institutions and communities had atrophied during decades of suppression and needed to be rebuilt. Second, a growing intertribal and pan-Indian identity arising from a communal con-

sciousness implied the emergence of a shared Indian identity spanning tribal boundaries. Third, the growth of urban Indian populations provided a new context for the maintenance of Indian identity because the diversity of local Indian populations implied the possibility of multi-tribal Indian communities. Fourth, the expanding social contexts in which Indian identity was expressed greatly increased the internal diversity of Indian communities and thereby the potential for mutual misunderstanding about and disagreement over the meaning of Indian ethnicity.<sup>12</sup>

Dimensions of external recognition of Indian ethnicity became more problematic amid the renewal as well. Expanded claims of Indian identity often puzzled non-Indians because they came from Indians who did not meet conventional stereotypes of how Indians are expected to look and act. Attempts by unrecognized tribes to regain formal state and federal recognition excited opposition from state and local governments, and sometimes from other recognized tribes. The question of authenticity of Indian identity lurked in the background of ethnic renewal at both the individual and tribal levels.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps in response to these dilemmas, the renaissance of expressive culture has been a central component of Indian ethnic renewal. As Phillip Deloria argues, powwows' resonance with non-Indian stereotypes about Native cultures make them compelling displays of cultural authenticity.<sup>14</sup> More substantively, powwow celebrations provide a framework for strengthening the solidarity of established tribes and create the grounds and opportunity for cohesion among reorganized claimants to tribal status. They also demonstrate cohesion and cultural persistence to outsiders, foster intertribal cooperation in the preparation of shared events, and serve as the ritual focus of emergent multi-tribal urban communities.<sup>15</sup>

#### PAN-INDIAN OR TRIBAL EVENTS?

Much of the scholarly debate over powwows is framed around James Howard's original argument that powwows are pan-Indian rather than tribal celebrations.<sup>16</sup> Howard describes pan-Indianism as a transitional form of identity that arises with the disintegration of local Indian communities. The implication of Howard's thesis here is that powwows emerged as part of the formation of a new kind of ethnic identification for American Indians, one grounded in pan-Indian rather than specific tribal classifications. The powwow circuit, from this point of view, emerged as a way station on the road to full assimilation. This analysis leads to the suggestion that the most fertile soil for the emergence of powwow is in the margins between tribal communities and non-Indian American society, rather than in the core of the most strongly bounded tribal communities.

Much of the subsequent literature on powwows challenges the usefulness of the distinction between pan-Indian and tribal identity and, particularly in light of recent history, the implied assimilation model within it. Nancy Lurie and Anita Herle, for example, both argue that powwows reinforce both pan-Indian and tribal identities; the two need not be contradictory.<sup>17</sup> Recent scholarship corroborates this point, even as most accounts acknowledge the

syncretic and commercial elements of powwows.<sup>18</sup> All accounts point to the central symbolic role of powwows in forging and maintaining the solidarity of contemporary tribal communities.<sup>19</sup>

The overt implication of this view of powwows as events that express and reinforce core tribal identities is that individual participation in them should vary concomitantly with an individual's engagement in tribal society. In the only systematic quantitative study of powwow involvement, Patricia Barker Lerch and Susan Bullers assert this point.<sup>20</sup> They analyzed attitudes toward powwows reported in a survey of tribal community members in North Carolina and found that beliefs that powwow attendance was an important way to express tribal identity was strongest among Indians with traditional orientations and among Indians in racially endogamous marriages. Our analysis, based on national-level data, will suggest a somewhat confounding inference to this deduction.

#### WHICH INDIANS ATTEND POWWOW? MODELS OF ATTENDANCE IN SOCIAL CELEBRATIONS

Debates over the dynamics of Indian ethnicity may be linked to general models of ethnic dynamics. We suggest the contrast between two families of these models: structural isolation models and what we will call "ethnic consumption" models. Models in each family make generally contrasting predictions about the correlates of involvement in ethnic social celebrations.

Structural isolation models suggest that ethnic solidarity is strongest in the context of structured barriers limiting the contact between members of a minority ethnic group and other members of the society of which they form a part. The so-called straight-line assimilation model is the most familiar of the structural isolation models. This model posits the monotonic decline of ethnic consciousness as a function of social integration with members of the encapsulating society. The model assumes that both ethnic sentiment and the coercive power of a group over an individual decrease as the individual's social relationships diversify across ethnic boundaries. In a classic rendition of this process with respect to participation in social celebrations, Robert Redfield chronicles the devolution of traditional "Holy Days into holidays," and thence to tourist kitsch, as Native communities progressively integrated into market society.<sup>21</sup>

The assimilation model is presently unpopular as a description of the ethnic dynamics of contemporary American society because of its inability to account for the persistence of ethnicity as a principle of social organization in the context of increasing social contact between members of different ethnic sub-populations. As a case in point, the straight-line assimilation model obviously fails, when employed by itself, to explain the emergence and growth of the powwow circuit in the second half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, other variants of the structural isolation model have been used to explain the emergence of ethnic self-consciousness in immigrant populations, suggesting that some aspects of such models may accurately describe the dynamics of ethnic identity during ethnic renewal in complex modern societies.<sup>22</sup> The essential prediction of these theories is that some degree of institutional and social

isolation of ethnic populations helps to generate ethnic sentiments and behavior that expresses these sentiments.

Structural isolation models call attention to two dimensions of inter-group relations that could explain variation in group-ritual involvement rates among members of an ethnic group. One of these is the integration of primary group relationships. Declines in ritual involvement may occur if increasing social contact across group lines results in diminished subjective consciousness of ethnicity. Heterogeneity in the social relationships of group members may also diminish the ability of the ethnic group to control the behavior of its members because individuals have greater flexibility to choose social relationships without regard to their ethnic content.<sup>23</sup> For both of these reasons, the integration of primary group relations should be expected to lead to diminished participation in ethnic group celebrations and rituals. The second relevant dimension of inter-group relations is acculturation, as reflected, for example, in processes of linguistic assimilation, occupational mobility, and formal schooling. Education has often received considerable attention as a mechanism of acculturation. Crude models postulate a simple opposition between the content of lessons taught through formal schooling and taste for participation in traditional cultures. More sophisticated explanations of a negative education effect on involvement in ethnic rituals could point as a mechanism to a correlative diversification of the ethnic content of social networks, or to changes in aesthetic tastes that devalue ethnic ritual as an expressive form.<sup>24</sup>

We contrast these familiar predictions of structural isolation models with those of what we call the ethnic consumption model. This model points to several plausible mechanisms linking increased inter-group contact with increased participation in ethnic celebrations. First, higher social and economic status increases the resources available to group members for cultural displays, and abates the costs of participation in such displays by reducing discrimination. Second, as group membership becomes less determinative of social roles and obligations, assimilated members of an ethnic group may choose to supplement diminishing ethnic social ties in daily life with participation in the cultural events sponsored by formal voluntary associations in order to give social form to personal identity.<sup>25</sup> More generally, modern consumer culture puts pressure on individuals to display personal identity in their lifestyle and consumption choices. In fact, the very term *lifestyle* betokens this framework for action. Assimilation into this culture could increase interest in the expressive culture of one's sub-group.<sup>26</sup> Acculturation might therefore be expected to increase rather than decrease participation in ethnic ritual insofar as American middle-class culture encourages the expression of identity through such leisure activities.

#### DATA AND METHODS: THE SAIAN SAMPLE

To test these models of involvement in powwows, we use self-reported information about attendance and participation in powwows from the 1987 SAIAN.<sup>27</sup> This survey was administered in 1987 for the Agency for Health Policy Research, with the primary purpose of assessing health-care use by Indians.

SAIAN was administered in three rounds using in-person interviews. Questions about involvement in powwows were included in a traditional activities module on a supplemental written questionnaire. Eighty-five percent of respondents completed all three rounds. The final sample included 3,187 American Indians or Alaskan Natives of at least eighteen years of age who gave valid answers to questions about celebration involvement.

The population of inference for SAIAN is American Indians who are eligible for medical care services provided by the IHS, and who live in areas where these services are provided. Eligibility for IHS services requires provable descent from a federally recognized Indian tribe. IHS service areas are on or near American Indian reservations, a designation that covers most metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in US states with one or more Indian reservation. Approximately half the population who classified themselves as American Indian on the US census live in these areas. The sample was drawn using a multistage area probability design. Stratification criteria included seven geographically defined IHS service regions, urban and rural status of place, and density of Indian population.

The geographical restrictions on the sampling frame have advantages and disadvantages for a study of the correlates of involvement in powwows. The advantage of the restriction to IHS service areas is that in them the Indian population is well-defined because intermarriage rates are relatively low and Indian ethnicity is highly salient. The corollary limitation is that we do not observe behavior in places in the United States where the Indian population is sparsely settled and highly integrated with non-Indians, and where Indian ethnicity consequently has little visibility. In short, the data are truncated to certain values of independent variables of considerable theoretical interest. Nonetheless, we believe that these data help to understand the dynamics of powwow involvement in a broad and interesting subset of the American Indian population. We do observe a range of community contexts, both because of the stratification of the sample to include rural and urban areas in all regions of the country, and because reservation communities are themselves diverse social contexts.

### **Dependent Variables**

SAIAN data contain two measures of involvement in powwows. One question asks about active participation in celebrations: "Do you ever participate in celebrations, powwows, or other such social occasions as a dancer, drum member, organizer, or other active participant?" The second question asks about attendance at celebrations, without respect to participation: "Do you ever attend celebrations, powwows, or other such social occasions?" Just over half—52 percent—of respondents reported that they attended celebrations, and 19 percent said that they were participants. We classified respondents into three mutually exclusive categories: participants (19 percent), non-participating attendees (34 percent), and non-celebrators (47 percent). We studied the determinants of attendance and participation separately.



## Methods

We estimated multilevel logistic regression models comparing the odds of participation and attendance at celebrations to the baseline category of non-involvement in celebrations. This technique estimates parameters that approximate those of a multinomial logit model, with a small loss of efficiency compared to simultaneous fitting using iterative procedures.<sup>28</sup> We report random-intercept logistic regression models estimated using the HLM (Hierarchical Linear Models) statistical package. The communities used in the analysis are the twenty-two sampling clusters distinguished in the data. The clusters are US counties or contiguous county groups. The clusters are not identified by name in the data set. Cluster variables were calculated from the sample.

The use of multilevel models means that we analyze celebration involvement as a function of both individual level variables and characteristics of the Indian community in which the individual lives or lived. The use of contextual variables is important because ethnic celebrations are community events. Individual participation in these events depends on their sponsorship by the community, and theory suggests that individual participation rates will vary as a function of community conditions. Attendance rates vary across clusters from 21 to 55 percent. Participation rates vary from 2 to 40 percent. Five percent of the variance in attendance and 10 percent in participation occurs among clusters.

## Independent Variables

Variables used in the analysis are described in Table 1. Two variables describing contextual conditions in local Indian communities are theoretically most important. Gordon's concept of structural integration of primary group relations is operationalized by the proportion of Indian families in a cluster that include a non-Indian member. Clusters varied on this measure from 0 percent of families in one cluster to more than 70 percent of families in two others. These extremes indicate sharply different degrees of permeability of ethnic boundaries in different local communities. Second, the average number of years of schooling reflects the degree of exposure of local Indian communities to an important acculturating institution of mainstream society. While we also measure schooling as a personal characteristic, the average level of education in a community may affect the formation of a community consensus encouraging or discouraging this form of identity expression.

Other contextual variables in the models include an indicator of metropolitan status and a measure of per capita income in the cluster. Metropolitan areas are most typically assumed to be more assimilative environments than are non-metropolitan communities. Per capita income is intended as a control for the resources available in a community to sponsor powwows. We also estimated models (not reported) with Indian population size, median travel time to IHS clinics (an indicator for the spatial density of the Indian population), the proportion of Indians receiving IHS care, and measures of the proportion of cluster residents who speak an American Indian language. We

found no relationships between these variables and powwow involvement.

At the individual level, three variables represent measures of exposure to acculturating influences: years of schooling, occupation, and language characteristics; that is, whether English or an American Indian language is the respondent's first or only language. We also include a dummy variable that

**Table 1**  
**Variables in Models of Celebration Involvement**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Clusters (n=22)</b>				
% families with non-Indians	21.68	0.00	70.45	23.29
Mean years of schooling	10.50	8.05	12.64	1.14
Metropolitan	0.32	0	1	0.099
Per capita income (1000s)	4.189	1.648	9.117	1.965
<i>Celebration Involvement</i>				
% attend	0.32	0.21	0.55	0.09
% participate	0.26	0.02	0.40	0.10
<b>Individuals (n=3187)</b>				
Years of schooling	10.49	0	18	3.42
Am. Indian monolingual	.089	0	1	0.005
Am. Indian first	.260	0	1	0.008
English first	.073	0	1	0.005
English monolingual	.553	0	1	0.009
Non-Indian in family	.197	0	1	0.007
White Collar	.229	0	1	0.007
Blue Collar	.426	0	1	0.009
Takes care of home	.144	0	1	0.006
Never worked for pay	.106	0	1	0.005
Receives IHS Care	.751	0	1	0.008
College enrollment	.052	0	1	0.004
Per capita income (1000s)	5.076	-4.984	43.083	5.094
Poor health	.045	0	1	0.004
Age 18-44	.678	0	1	0.008
Age 45-64	.215	0	1	0.007
Age 65-74	.063	0	1	0.004
Age 75+	.044	0	1	0.004
Male	.475	0	1	0.009
Married	.563	0	1	0.009
Own children in home	.511	0	1	0.009
<i>Celebration Involvement</i>				
Attend	.344	0	1	0.008
Participate	.180	0	1	0.007

**Table 2**  
**Odds Ratios for Attendance and Participation at Powwows**

Variable	Attends	S.E.	Participates	S.E.
Cluster				
% families w/non-Indian member	0.98**	0.007	0.98	0.137
Years of Schooling	1.35**	0.169	1.41	0.328
Metropolitan	1.31	0.437	1.71	0.632
Per capita income (1000s)	1.05	0.091	1.01	0.161
Individual				
Years of schooling (centered)	1.04*	0.021	0.88**	0.050
Years * Years (centered)			1.01***	0.003
English 1st or monolingual	1.21	0.152		
Language not reported <i>vs. Am. Ind. 1st or only</i>	0.78	0.227		
Schooling * English	1.09**	0.032		
Schooling * Language unknown	1.03	0.104		
English monolingual			1.30	0.358
English First			2.21**	0.658
Am. Indian First			1.36	0.333
Language not reported <i>vs. American Indian Only</i>			1.38	0.537
Family with non-Indian	0.91	0.127	0.70*	0.138
White Collar	1.67**	0.303	1.55*	0.351
Blue Collar	1.34*	0.215	1.29	0.257
Cares for Home	1.29	0.241	1.07	0.247
Occupation Unknown <i>vs. Never paid worker</i>	2.02***	0.391	1.43	0.358
Receives IHS Care	1.29**	0.142	1.49**	0.217
College Enrolled	0.98	0.190	1.25	0.292
Per capita income (1000s)	0.99	0.009	0.99	0.012
Poor health	0.60**	0.131	0.52**	0.158
Age 45-64	1.07	0.130	1.18	0.181
Age 65-74	1.94***	0.381	1.61*	0.425
Age 75+	0.87	0.213	0.86	0.277
<i>Vs. Age 18-44</i>				
Male	0.91	0.084	1.08	0.126
Married	0.74***	0.073	0.77*	0.099
Has children	1.08	0.117	0.94	0.131
Intercept	0.02***	0.025	0.01**	0.014
n	2614		2091	
Clusters	22		22	
Log likelihood	3795.162		3053.364	
* p < .10	** p < .05		*** p < .01	

indicates whether any member of the respondent's family is a non-Indian, and an indicator for receipt of medical care services from the IHS. We expect that receipt of ethnically targeted health care services is associated with a higher rate of involvement in celebrations.

We control for several factors that could confound the relationship between theoretically relevant variables and celebration involvement. Elderly status and poor health (reporting a physical disability or poor health) may impede this involvement, and also be more prevalent in low education and rural populations. Current college enrollment may increase powwow involvement because college Indian centers frequently sponsor these events. Two aspects of family structure, marital status and presence of one's children in the household, may influence powwow involvement. We hypothesize that each variable increases celebration involvement, by analogy to models of church attendance that suggest that one reason for involvement in identity expressing events like powwows is to socialize children and other family members into an identity.

## RESULTS

The results offer a split decision about the predictions of contending theories: powwow involvement decreases as a function of increasing community heterogeneity, but increases rapidly as a function of schooling. This result holds for both cluster and individual level effects, and with both attendance and participation as the dependent variable. Language-use variables show a more mixed result: powwow attendance is highest for persons who speak English only and participation is highest for bilingual Indians. Results are reported as odds ratios for attendance and participation in Table 2.

### Cluster Effects

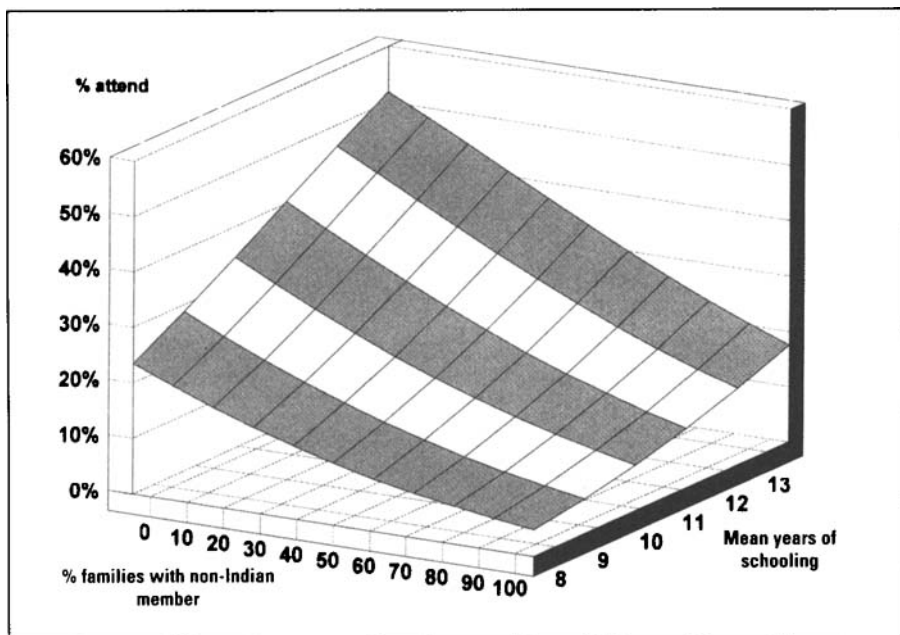
The countervailing effects of structural integration and acculturation are particularly apparent in the cluster effects of ethnic heterogeneity and education. These effects are nearly identical in both the participation and attendance models, though conventional significance thresholds are exceeded only in the attendance model. The attendance model implies that each additional year of schooling for an area's Indian population increases the odds of attendance by 30 percent. An increase of one percentage point in the proportion of households with a non-Indian member reduces these odds by 2 percent.

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted probability of non-participating attendance as a function of ethnic heterogeneity of families and cluster education. It should be noted that predicted probabilities were calculated from the logistic regression coefficients and then deflated to reflect the percentage of the full sample used in the attendance model. The shaded surface pictured in the figure represents the predicted attendance rates in different communities given different combinations of average years of schooling and degrees of ethnic mixture in Indian families. For example, the figure implies that given an average thirteen years of schooling and no ethnic mixing in households, just

over 50 percent of all Indians in the community would attend powwows. This is the highest predicted attendance rate within the pictured range of the data. By contrast, given a community average of eight years of schooling and complete ethnic intermixture (every Indian family has at least one non-Indian member), about 5 percent of community members would attend powwows. Other combinations of community characteristics yield predicted attendance rates somewhere between these two predicted extremes.

These two extremes are not likely to be observed in an actual Indian community, because the two independent variables are themselves strongly correlated. For example, the social conditions that produce a local Indian community that is highly educated also are likely to produce a high degree of interethnic contact and intermarriage between Indians and non-Indians. Conversely, a very high intermarriage rate is unlikely in an Indian community with extremely low levels of formal schooling. These considerations imply that most real world Indian communities cluster in a band across the middle of the sheet, with an attendance rate in a range between 20 and 30 percent.

**Predicted Powwow Attendance in Indian Communities Given Community Education Levels and Ethnic Intermixture Within Families**



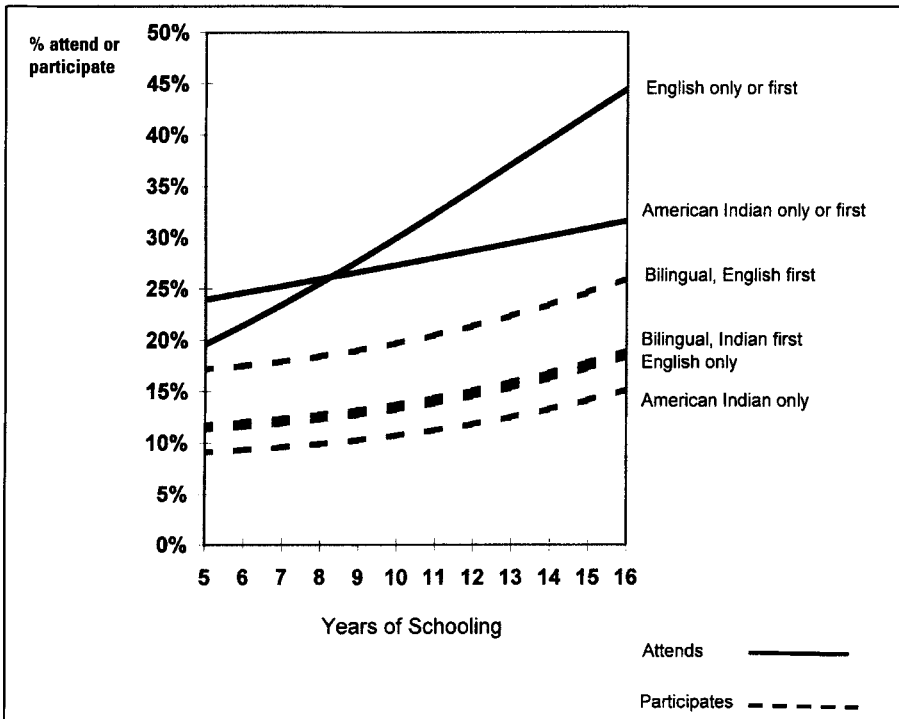
**Figure 1** Note that illustrative predictions are made using coefficients from attends model (see Table 2). Predicted attendance rates are for married males in good health who speak English, work in blue collar jobs, and receive IHS care.

### Individual Level Effects

The strong effect of community education is complemented by an equally strong and positive individual level effect of schooling. The relationships between participation and attendance are shown in figure 2. The implication of the model is that attendance rates for college graduates who speak English are about 20 to 25 percentage points higher than for persons with a grade school education. Participation rates are about 5 percentage points higher for college educated persons than for persons with a grade school education.

The specific functional form relating education and language-spoken to attendance and participation are different for each dependent variable. The models reported in each case are those with the best fit to the data. A significant interaction term in the attendance model implies that attendance rates rise much more quickly with increasing education for persons who primarily speak English than they do for persons who primarily speak an American Indian language. By contrast, a significant quadratic term for years of schooling in the participation model implies that participation rises at an increasing rate as education increases.

**Predicted Powwow Attendance and Participation: Individual-level Effects of Education and Language**



**Figure 2** Note that illustrative predictions are made using coefficients from attends and participates models (see Table 2). Predicted attendance rates are for married males in good health who have blue collar jobs, receive IHS care, and are at average values for other variables.

Table 3 shows the interplay between individual and community education levels. It reports the percent of persons involved in powwows as either participants or attendees as a function of both personal and community education. Two-thirds of Indians who attended college reported that they go to powwows; this involvement is invariant with respect to the education level of the community. However, for persons with lower levels of schooling, powwow involvement increases as a function of both personal and community levels of education. In clusters with the highest average levels of education, powwow involvement rates for all groups converge on the rates of the college educated. This variation across clusters suggests that in communities with relatively high average levels of education, the community's enthusiasm for powwows diffuses to persons with personal characteristics who in other contexts show much less interest in these events.

The education effect is complemented by the higher overall rates of attendance by English-language speakers and by the higher attendance and participation rates of white collar workers compared to those with other occupations. Linguistic acculturation is also associated with increased powwow attendance. This appears in the interaction with education that has already been mentioned. The effect means that except at very low levels of education, where powwow attendance is uniformly lowest, persons who report that English is their first or only language attend powwows at higher rates than persons who speak a Native language first or only. Thus, acculturating experiences promote rather than discourage involvement in powwows. A partial exception is that bilingual Indians who speak English as their first language are somewhat more likely (by about 5 percentage points) to participate in powwows than are other language-use groups.

<b>Table 3</b>					
<b>Percentage of Indians Who Attend or Participate in Ethnic Celebrations</b>					
<b>By Individual and Cluster Education</b>					
Individuals' years of schooling	Percent attend or participate in ethnic celebrations				Row n
	Mean years of schooling of Indians in cluster				
	< 10	10-11	> 11	All	
Missing	45	62	48	49	121
Less than 9 years	40	37	61	41	619
9 to 11 years	40	47	62	50	812
12 years	46	54	63	54	1076
Some college	66	68	64	66	559
All	46	51	62	52	3187
Column n	944	1451	792	3187	

### **Other Individual Effects**

The dummy variable indicating that the respondent's family includes at least one non-Indian member is associated with a reduction in participation (3 to 4 percentage points), but not attendance. Receipt of IHS health care services is associated with a boost in both attendance and participation of about 3 to 5 percentage points. This effect may reflect in part the more active tribal membership of persons who exercise their right to receive these tribally targeted benefits, though we cannot exclude a straightforward effect linking the receipt of a targeted benefit to increased participation. In sum, individual-level measures of involvement in Indian communities that are available in SAIAN point in the same direction as the more substantial community-level effects. In other words, increased ethnic community ties seem to increase involvement in powwows.

Among other effects tested, poor health has an expected sizable and negative effect on both attendance and participation. The young old, ages sixty-five to seventy-four, show substantially elevated rates of attendance, controlling for other characteristics. The odds that this group will attend powwows are nearly double those for young adults, ages eighteen to forty-four. This finding suggests that celebration involvement may increase in part as a function of the greater leisure available with this age group, in order to replace social relationships broken during progress through the life cycle with new relationships formed through leisure activities. We had expected that powwow involvement would increase as a function of family formation and the presence of children in the household, reasoning that families would choose to become involved in powwows in order to socialize children into an ethnic identity. In fact, married people are substantially less likely than single persons to attend or participate in powwows, while having children had no relationship to either type of involvement. The implication may be that powwow involvement is a way that individuals who do not have stable family attachments express an affiliation to a larger community.

### **DISCUSSION**

Empirically the data show that Indians' involvement in powwows increases with standard measures of acculturation, but declines with decreasing embeddedness in a homogenous ethnic community. These findings exclude the two crudest stereotypes about the core constituency of powwows. On the one hand, powwows do not seem to be particularly popular among monolingual American Indian language speakers with little formal schooling and no involvement in the wage labor market. We do not know why these Indians are not attending powwows. Perhaps the neo-traditionalism of powwows is contrary to their sensibilities, or perhaps it is a mistake to think that these social characteristics generate an inclination for powwow participation. Our data do not help us choose between these hypotheses. The data do show, however, that Indians with these social characteristics were the least likely of any in IHS service delivery area to report involvement in powwows.

On the other hand, the data also exclude the stereotype that the core con-



stituents of the powwow are middle-class urban and suburban Indians who substitute an annual family outing to the powwow for deeper and more continuous involvement in Indian communities. To be sure, rates of attendance are highest among college-educated white collar workers. However, such an individual is most likely to attend powwows if he or she lives in an Indian community whose members tend to marry other Indians, and receives medical care at a local Indian Health Service clinic.

One of our principal findings is that exposure to acculturating influences increases rather than decreases involvement in powwows. Education, occupational status, and linguistic assimilation are correlated with involvement in these events. This finding should not be surprising. There is no obvious incompatibility between full participation in middle-class American society and appreciation for the aesthetic and social forms of powwow. This fact is evident from the popularity of powwows among non-Indians. Powwows can be thought of analogously to other forms of secular ethnic celebrations that have enjoyed popularity in the United States in recent decades.

The effects of ethnic homogeneity of community imply that such involvement serves more than expressive purposes. If, as participants state, powwows foster the social solidarity of Indian communities, it is most intuitive that the social contexts that do most to generate that solidarity through interactions with networks of affiliates and relations should also be most likely to foster involvement in celebrations. In these situations, individuals choose to attend powwows not as a personal lifestyle choice, but because of the influence or pressure (not taken here in a negative key) of the Indian community to which they belong. These two meld imperceptibly into one another given the at-a-distance friendship and commercial ties that may be forged and sustained at powwows, or more poignantly in observation of the fact that powwow is reputed to be a convenient setting for seeking a spouse. Here corporate group pressure and rational choice models of behavior cooperate to reproduce the possibility for community solidarity.

The social dimensions of powwow seen through the lens of demographic data on its attendance cannot, by itself, either explain the origins of powwow or reliably predict its future trajectory. This is both a limitation inherent in cross-sectional models and an indication of the broad scope of context required for a complete evaluation of powwow as a social, political, and ritual phenomenon. In contrast to what would be suggested in the adoption of a conventional assimilation model of ethnic group behavior, we must interpret American Indian patterns to be particular to the dramatic and ongoing political discourses Indian groups are involved in vis-à-vis whites as well as other Indian tribal groups. Ethnographic descriptions of powwow celebrations convey the rich sedimentation of political and symbolic discourse in powwow practice.<sup>29</sup> The present paper contributes analysis of an unusual data source, resulting in the offering of an additional "frame" within which the powwow phenomenon can be interpreted. Our findings imply that the emergence of the powwow circuit is to some extent rooted in structurally bounded Indian reservation communities. However, participation in acculturating institutions of non-Indian American society promotes rather than discourages involve-

ment in powwows. Interpretation of powwow anchored in the individual rather than collective experience of it renders this effect visible. Such an approach therefore provides a sensible addition to what we know of the phenomenon from other methodological and disciplinary orientations. In addition, the outcome of the logistic regression analysis revealed results somewhat unexpected or difficult to interpret in light of current ethnic demographic models available, particularly that of the conventional assimilation model. This model would tend to avert questions about the long-term trajectory of the social solidarity of Indian communities, or to deny that there can be a compatibility between modern social conditions and the persistence of distinctive ethnic community. The primary question arising about individual involvement in powwows concerns whether this involvement has been most encouraged as a function of the isolation of Native communities from socio-cultural relations with non-Natives, or by the increasing integration with non-Natives. The present study suggests no incompatibility between these two alternatives, once situated within an account of the Indian ethnic renewal and widespread patterns for the expression of ethnicity in the contemporary United States.

### NOTES

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