

THE ANIMAL SPIRIT DANCE: AMERICAN INDIAN CEREMONIAL REVIVAL
AND "NEW TRADITIONS"

by

Kathleen L. Dorn
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables	vii
Abstract.....	viii
1. Introduction	1
Statement of the Research Problem.....	1
Ceremonial Controversies.....	3
Literature Review.....	6
The Attraction to Indian Culture.....	6
History and the Collective Consciousness – Merging Past and Present	8
Ceremony and Holistic Healing.....	9
Ceremony and Tribal Politics	12
Ceremonial Corruption	13
Revival of Native Identity and Culture	15
Revival of Ritual and Ceremony.....	17
Native Reactions	18
Methodology.....	21
Research Population	21
Data Collection and Protection.....	24
Ceremonial Detail	26
Participant Observation and Reciprocity	27
Analytical Approach	28
2. Indian Identity – Motives and Perceptions of New Ritual	30
Historical Background – Cultural and Identity Genocide.....	30
Contemporary Identity Pressures.....	34

Indian Culture - “Sharing Versus Wearing”	35
Pressures on the Core Value of Sharing.....	36
The Political Climate – What It Means To Be Indian.....	38
Definition of Indianness by Non-Indians.....	38
Definition of Indianness by Unenrolled Mixed-bloods	48
Definition of Indianness by Enrolled Culturally Acclimated Indians	57
Racialization of Indianness.....	62
3. The Animal Spirit Dance – Practice and Purpose	66
Definitions - Symbology and Ritual	66
Function and Structure	68
Preparations.....	69
Communal Meals	71
Sunrise Ceremony	72
Mixing and Mingling	74
Water Ceremony – Gathering of Nations and Community	74
Sweat Lodge – Cleansing and Preparation.....	76
The Animal Spirit Dance.....	78
4. Perceptions of the Dance and the Participants	82
Perceptions of Purpose.....	82
Animal Symbology	83
Perceptions of Function and Outcome	87
Community and Cultural Continuity	87
5. Authentication and Acceptance of New Ceremony.....	91
Prophecy, Hermeneutics and Oral Traditions.....	91
The Process of Validation.....	95
From Vision to Implementation.....	96
The Process of Change	101
Defining Ceremonial Protocol.....	109

6. Conclusions	124
Bibliography	129

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Table 1 – Ceremonial leaders who participated in the Animal Spirit Dance.....	22
2. Table 2 – Ceremonial leaders who were not affiliated with the Animal Spirit Dance.....	22
3. Table 3 – Non-Leaders who attended the Animal Spirit Dance.....	23

ABSTRACT

THE ANIMAL SPIRIT DANCE: AMERICAN INDIAN CEREMONIAL REVIVAL AND “NEW TRADITIONS”

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Since the 1980's American Indian ceremonies have appeared that seem to draw on past forms of ritual while incorporating new forms of cultural practice. These ceremonies include prayer circles, seasonal ceremonies, and animal dances reminiscent of earlier forms practiced in the 1800's and before. Some of these ceremonies are promoted for the purpose of unifying tribes and nations while bringing back a form of culture and practice that existed prior to colonial contact. However, to some degree, the cultural practices deviate from what reservation-born Indians view as valid traditional forms. The ceremonies also reach out to non-Indians and individuals with distant Indian heritage without direct reservation ties, thus requiring event locations outside of reservation boundaries.

The ceremonies have generated controversy from both sides of the reservation boundaries. Promoters and supporters champion the ceremonies as a constructive

promotion of Indian culture, legitimized by a common Indian core value of sharing, as well as fulfillment of various native prophecies that foretell a time of unity among nations and a return to traditional values. However, others, especially reservation-born Indians with direct reservation and cultural ties, have developed concerns, which can lead to exclusionary tactics that impact the culture of sharing and agendas of unity.

Some concerns are related to the sharing of culturally sensitive ceremonial practice with individuals who lack proper understanding of Indian ceremony. They believe that improper usage of sacred objects, or the performance of sacred ceremonies without proper knowledge, may subject attendees to spiritual and health related dangers. However, the greater concern about sharing ceremonial knowledge focuses on “sharing versus wearing,” or when those with distant Indian heritage attempt to use ceremonial knowledge and practice as a qualification while building an “Indian cultural résumé” to justify wearing the title “Indian.” Enrolled Indians, especially those with direct ties to reservations, fear further dilution of tribal roles and government benefits by “Wannabee¹” groups seeking enrollment and tribal recognition. As a result, these new ceremonies exacerbate a racially and politically motivated conflict affecting the perceptions of the people who attend as well as the legitimacy of cultural practice.

This thesis focuses on one new form of ceremony named the “Animal Spirit Dance”, and seeks to understand reasons for the formation of these ceremonies, the types

¹ The term “Wannabee” has become a common description of non-Indians who wish that they were Indian, or who try to imitate Indian dress and culture, or claim Indian heritage without proof. It is a play on the term “want to be” to describe a fictitious “wannabe” tribe that exists in the imaginations of Indian culture and title seekers. I’ve heard it pronounced as both the “Wan-na-bee” and “Wan-na-na-bee” tribe.

of people attracted to them, and the perceptions and practice of ceremony by those who attend and participate as well as members of the Indian community who stand at a distance. The research group includes three major categories of people: 1) Individuals with no traceable or provable Indian heritage. 2) Individuals with traceable but distant or diluted Indian heritage whose blood quantum, tribal affiliation or politics disallows them a formal tribal enrollment. 3) Indians enrolled in state or federally recognized tribes.

The results of this study illustrate that the formation and acceptance of new forms of ceremony are not immediate. Rather, they constitute processes of change that occur over time in response to the perceptions and needs of the people within the community. Acceptance and validation are defined by those who practice the ceremony and not necessarily negated by critiques from those who do not. However, certain practices and protocols are critical to the process of validation. Both historical and contemporary cultural clashes with non-Indians affect perceptions of both the dance and those who attend when those perceptions become projected into the validation process. Perceptions can be affected by types of people and actions of those who attend as much as the protocols of the ceremony, due to differences in the definition of "Indian". This adds pressure to the identity that Indians are attempting to create for themselves.

1. Introduction

Statement of the Research Problem

Since the 1980's new forms of American Indian ceremony have arisen that appear to draw on past forms while incorporating new forms of cultural practice. These ceremonies include prayer circles, seasonal ceremonies, and animal dances reminiscent of earlier forms practiced before and during the 1800's. Some of these ceremonies are promoted for the purpose of unifying tribes and nations while bringing back a form of culture and practice that existed prior to colonial contact. To some degree, these cultural practices deviate from what reservation-born Indians consider traditional forms. The ceremonies reach out to non-Indians and Indians with distant Indian heritage, requiring event locations outside reservation lands. While some champion these ceremonies for their promotion of Indian culture and core values, others have criticized them due to the practice of sharing culturally sensitive knowledge and practice outside of reservation boundaries.

The multi-ethnic outreach draws a large number of individuals with distant Indian heritage without direct reservation ties who want to learn and experience their ancestral culture. Lack of access to other more traditional forms of Indian ceremony leads some within this group to seek tribal enrollment in order to gain entrance to ceremonial

circles. The fear of further dilution of tribal rolls and government benefits by “Wannabee” groups seeking enrollment and tribal recognition promotes a form of separatism and exclusion that sometimes stretches beyond tribal enrollment politics to ceremonial practice. As a result, despite the fact that these ceremonies are promoted as a means of unity and cultural restoration, preexisting racially and politically motivated conflicts related to tribal enrollment result in a projection of negative perceptions of the people who attend them as well as the perceptions of what constitutes legitimate cultural practice. The introduction of the dance further crystallizes preexisting tensions over the definition of Indian identity and the prerequisites for enrolled tribal status. The resulting conflicts can create impediments to the unity that the practice seeks to create.

This thesis focuses on the “Animal Spirit Dance” to answer the following questions:

- What motivates the creation of this new type of ceremony?
- What about the dance or culture surrounding the dance makes it attractive?
- What types of people are attracted to the dance?
- How do enrolled and reservation-born Indians perceive the validity and function of the dance? How do the perceptions of the dance differ between tribally enrolled Indians, mixed-bloods who are not tribally enrolled, and non-Indians.
- What controversies arise from the creation of this new dance form, and why do they arise?

Because of preexisting conflicts that surround the creation and acceptance of the dance, the order of these questions do not necessarily reflect a relation between cause and outcome. In other words, the controversies related to the dance are not isolated to the creation of the dance or those that attend. The controversies arising from the dance as

well as the creation of the dance itself could also be viewed as arising from the preexisting political conflicts related to tribal enrollment policies. Any discussion of the subject in part would be incomplete without consideration of all these questions in total.

The Animal Spirit Dance attracts a multi-ethnic following. This study includes three major categories of people.

1. Individuals with no traceable or provable Indian heritage. These individuals generally have a strong spiritual or environmental consciousness. Most are drawn to Indian culture because their perception of traditional Indian culture fits their spiritual or environmental viewpoint. Some within this category believe that their spiritual or environmental consciousness is a manifestation of distant Indian blood surfacing, or part of a past life.
2. Individuals with traceable but distant or diluted Indian heritage whose blood quantum, tribal affiliation or politics disallows them a formal tribal enrollment. Lack of enrollment may inhibit participation in ceremonies limited to enrolled members within reservation boundaries. Thus these ceremonies provide a means for them to practice their beliefs as part of a distant cultural heritage.
3. Indians enrolled in federally or state recognized tribes. Indians in this group fall within two sub-groups; those who have a mix of reservation and urban living experience, and those who have lived exclusively in urban areas. Boarding school policies, the Indian Reorganization Act and other governmental policies effectively eradicated many forms of traditional Indian language and ceremony. Thus individuals in this group may or may not have full access to their tribal ceremonial practice.

Ceremonial Controversies

The Animal Spirit Dance was started by an individual who is racially and politically situated among the three groups specified above. As a result, both he and those who support and promote the dance form a controversial cultural and historical bridge between the other two groups. The ceremonies have generated controversy from both sides of the reservation boundaries. Promoters and supporters champion the ceremonies

as a constructive promotion of Indian culture, legitimized by a common Indian core value of sharing, as well as fulfillment of various native prophecies that foretell a time of unity among nations and a return to traditional values. However, others, especially reservation-born Indians who do have direct reservation ties have developed concerns, which in some cases leads to exclusionary tactics that may compromise the culture of sharing and agendas of unity. The sharing of culturally sensitive and sacred ceremony is as controversial subject among Indians regardless of enrollment status or blood quantum. Culturally acclimated Indians, especially those who attempt to maintain traditional practice, are reluctant to share the more sacred and traditional practices because they fear that lack of understanding and acclimation may cause harm. Using the recent Sedona Sweat lodge death incident² as an example, four ceremonial elders told me that when individuals lacking proper cultural understanding and acclimation attempt to use sacred objects or conduct sacred ceremonies incorrectly, it may subject attendees to spiritual and health related dangers. However, a more political critique occurs over “sharing versus wearing” culture. This occurs when those with distant Indian heritage attempt to use ceremonial knowledge and practice as a qualification while building an “Indian cultural résumé” to justify wearing the title “Indian.” Increasing numbers of Indian title seekers add to an already existing fear of further dilution of tribal roles and government benefits

² According to a MSNBC article as well as other news reports, a spiritual retreat run by the “self-help expert” James Arthur Ray that began October 3, 2009 resulted in two deaths. Reports state that twenty-one out of sixty-four people received medical care after the incident. The incident is frequently referred to as the “Sedona Sweat lodge” incident. See the msnbc article last updated October 10, 2009: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33243288/ns/us_news-life/

by “Wannabee” groups seeking enrollment and tribal recognition. As a result, these new ceremonies sit within a racially and politically oriented conflict that affects the perceptions of the people who attend as well as the perceptions of the legitimacy of cultural practice. However, despite the controversy, the dance has gained a degree of acceptance from both Indians and non-Indians and serves as a means of cultural exchange and access to some forms of Indian ceremony that are generally restricted to enrolled members.

The results of this study show that the formation of new forms of ceremony and acceptance of them are not immediate. Instead, they constitute processes of change that occur over time in response to the perceptions and needs of the people within the community. Acceptance and validation are defined by those who practice the ceremony and not necessarily negated by critiques from those who do not. However, certain practices and protocols are critical to the process of validation. The study also illustrates that both historical and contemporary cultural clashes with non-Indians affect perceptions and the validation process. Perceptions can be affected by types of people and actions of those who attend as much as by the protocols of the ceremony. This may be due to differences in the definition of “Indian” which adds pressure to the identity that Indians are attempting to create for themselves.

Literature Review

The Attraction to Indian Culture

In recent times, the attraction to Indian culture has stretched beyond “new-agers”³ to include large numbers of individuals claiming distant Indian heritage⁴ seeking to become Indian, or at least wear the title. While attempting to explain interest in Indian culture and ceremony, most researchers focus on various forms of fetishism by non-Indian new-agers looking to create a utopian cultural reformation. For example, according to Phillip Deloria (1998:136, 158)⁵ Indian enthusiasts in the 1960’s and 1970’s were communal hippies drawn to the communal nature of Indian villages. They associated the communal lifestyle with a form of social harmony that they desired to replicate. They and other “Hobby Indians” “played Indian” through powwows and other promotion and practice of Indian culture in order to preserve what they saw as a vanishing but constructive form of culture. It appears that communalism and “Hobby Indian” activities have been advanced further by other utopian seekers. Lisa Aldred (2000) argues that the New Age movement is a “Consumerist movement” comprised mostly of affluent non-native, mostly “white” and “middle aged baby-boomers” who have “romanticized” American Indian traditions in a manner that fulfills a feeling of void within their own culture. Their adaptation to capitalism naturally leads them down the

³ The term “new-age” has become a popular term to describe advocates of global peace, harmony and optimum health through alternative practices outside the mainstream.

⁴ Those with distant Indian heritage are people who have Indian ancestry several generations ago, and far enough back that there are no direct communication or cultural ties to Indians enrolled in their tribe.

⁵ Originally printed as the author’s thesis in 1994.

path to consumerism of both native objects and ceremony as a means of cultural identification. Tinker (2003:223-229) asserts that these “New Age aficionados,” are a form of “clergy” who attempt to re-invent or reinterpret Native American traditional teachings, or to Christianize native belief systems to satisfy the curiosity of “white” people drawn to the exotic Indian image. However, the focus on “white” “new-agers” paints only a partial picture.

Research by Nagal (1995:947-948) offers statistical evidence of increased claims to Indian heritage through an examination of the 1960’s and 1980 – 1990 census figures that show a rise in tribal enrollment numbers. The increase in enrollment petitions has raised suspicions concerning the motives of those claiming Indian heritage, resulting in an increase in exclusionary politics to reduce enrollment numbers. However, Miller’s (2004:7, 210) research illustrates an interesting irony within enrollment politics. Federal Acknowledgement Policies (F.A.P.) are based on “legal fictions and cultural stereotypes.” The process has “forced” groups petitioning for enrollment into a position of *having* to “play-Indian” to “multiple-audiences” including the public, recognized tribes and the federal government in order to authenticate their claims to Indianness. Numerous past government policies resulted in varying degrees of cultural loss of language and cultural practice. As a result, unrecognized groups capitalize on pan-Indian practices including powwows, sweat lodges and new forms of ceremony including the Animal Spirit Dance as a means of restoring culture. Comments suggest that the “eclectic” hybrid cultures and practices that result may create negative perceptions among traditional enrolled Indians.

The feelings and reactions from reservation-born and enrolled Indians has progressed from tolerance to anxiety, which may further lead to exclusionary tactics that stretch beyond enrollment politics⁶ to include virtually any form of attempt by outsiders to gain access to Indian culture or title. My research suggests that any new form of ceremony with even the slightest hint of “new-age” agenda, or with large followings of non-Indians or unenrolled mixed-bloods becomes drawn into the middle of tribal politics and the controversy over “who is Indian and who is not.” This projects negative feelings and perceptions into the interpretation of the authenticity and appropriateness of new forms of ceremony as well as those that attend and lead the ceremonies.

History and the Collective Consciousness – Merging Past and Present

Historical events that have become part of a collective common memory among Indian peoples constitute another element that affects perceptions of new ceremonial forms involving large groups of non-Indians. The term “Indian” is generally used to describe over four hundred separate groups of indigenous peoples that populated North and South America prior to European contact in the 1400’s and later. In reality, each tribal group may practice separate cultural practices and speak separate languages. From a linguistic and ceremonial standpoint, comparing a southwestern Navajo Indian to a southern Seminole Indian or Northern Lakota Sioux Indian to an Eastern Mohawk or Seneca of the Six Nations Iroquois might be like comparing a Irish Protestant to an Italian Catholic, or a Buddhist Korean to an Iranian Muslim. However, several enrolled

⁶ Enrollment politics focus on defining who can claim the title “Indian” in order to determine who can claim tribal benefits including access to reservation lands, ceremony, receipt of casino royalties, mineral right royalties and other economic benefits.

Indians emphasized “a common history of interaction” with non-Indians. History, in addition to a common American-based land identity, provides a strong unifying force that draws Indians under a common cultural orientation as part of their self described identity as “Indian.”

The events and emotions resulting from these histories can be interpreted using Durkheim’s concept of “collective consciousness” which incorporates belief systems and core values into a “mechanical solidarity” within their overall society (Durkheim:1982). Volkan (1997:42-44) states that ongoing discussions of traumatic memories associated with colonial contact create a form of “psychological DNA” that passes down from generation to generation. The inheritance of memories of the past causes a “projection of antagonism” towards others and events in the future, even if the current events and people involved were not related to the historical event.

The legal suppression of language, culture and ceremony promoted by the Indian Boarding School policies during the 1800’s and early 1900’s began a formal policy reversal in the 1930’s (Bucko:1998:227). Based on recommendations from the Meriam report, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the educational approach became more multi-cultural, allowing a greater degree of native cultural expression (Archuleta:92,105-106). With the 1978 passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, formally suppressed ceremonies including the sweat lodge, potlatch and sun dance resurfaced.

Ceremony and Holistic Healing

The Animal Spirit Dance is promoted as a healing dance that uses a holistic approach based on traditional healing methods that include prayer, community support,

dance, drumming and cleansing rituals. The goal of healing provides a large part of the motivation for attendance, but also adds to the perception that the dance is a “new-age” practice. According to Aldred (2000:330), the “new-age” approach seeks to create a harmonious future through personal transformation and optimum health through alternative healing. However, healing has long been considered a valid function of Indian ceremony including the Lakota Inipi sweat lodge (Bucko:1998:59-60) and does not necessarily signify a new-age practice. Nor does it seem to be sequestered within the primitive “noble savage” image of the past.

Many alternative healing methods involve a holistic approach that marries the spiritual, emotional and physical in the approach to treatment. Some modern research suggests that music, drumming and dance can be used as therapeutic forms. Almost all traditional American Indian ceremonies incorporate drumming, singing and dance. Merriam (1964:70-77) states that for Plains Indians, a third or more of the year was taken up by ceremony with a significant portion related to healing ceremonies that included the entire community. This practice has sparked interest among researchers and as a result, various forms of music and drum therapy have become a professional practice as part of a holistic approach to medicine. It appears music and rhythm stimulate brain function in a curative fashion. Anthropologist Edith Turner provides some insight from her own ritual experience.

... in the Chihamba ritual at the end of a period of ordeal, a strong waive of curative energy hit us. We had been participating as fully as we know how, thus opening ourselves to whatever entities that were about. In another ritual for fertility, the delight of dancing in the moonlight hit me vividly, and I began to learn something about the hypnotic effect of singing and hearing the drums.”
(Edith Turner:1997:1)

Some preliminary background research (Bruscia:1991, Aldridge:1993, Hillard:2001, Bittman:2001) indicates that music and rhythm, in particular, enhances the immune system and affects the brain, resulting in changes in behavior and aiding recovery from neurological impairment. Research by Dr. Floyd Darden (2008:81,8) further illustrates that drumming can change brain wave patterns and blood chemistry in a manner to help one cope with stress.⁷ It appears that instead of seeing Indian ceremony as primitive, the holistic approach used is viewed as a superior but lost technology that should be restored, and as such, provides a strong attraction for those who seek medicinal help outside of mainstream medicine.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to prove or disprove the validity of the healing effects from a scientific perspective, it is important to note that from a western perspective, receptivity to medical practice is based on understanding whatever level of medical technology exists at any given time. Physicist Michio Kaku, author of “Physics Of the Impossible,” and author of one of the currently accepted ideas of “string theory” quotes Sir William Osler to remind us that “The philosophies of one age have become the absurdities of the next, and the foolishness of yesterday has become the wisdom of tomorrow (2008:xv).” His focus on physics seeks to uncover the technologies that are

⁷ According to Darden, “High levels of unpleasant sounds cause blood vessels to constrict increasing the blood pressure, pulse and respiratory rates. It also causes the release of extra fats into the bloodstream, making the blood’s magnesium fall. ... Drumming helps. This slow, soothing, and vibrating rhythm produces a mediating atmosphere also beneficial for lowering one’s blood pressure. He quotes Dr. Barry Quinn, a Clinical Psychologist specializing in Neuro-Bio feedback (NBT) for stress management to say, “Drumming for brief periods can actually change a person’s brain wave patterns dramatically reducing stress.”

considered “impossible” today that may be commonplace in the future. There is some degree of research that validates an underlying scientific basis for certain types of healing related to music and drum rhythm that was not known or accepted within the scientific community in prior centuries. However this type of healing has been accepted within indigenous cultures for centuries and has just recently sparked the interest of those with a western perspective as a lost or unknown form of knowledge. This begs the question whether other elements of the dance including spiritual energy or actual spirits may also have some degree of scientific basis that remains undiscovered. One can imagine the reaction within the 1800’s medical community to the claim that usage of magnetic energy such as currently used in MRI machines would assist physicians in seeing inside the body to provide a 3D image. As Michio Kaku states: “Technologies that are impossible for our current civilization are not necessarily impossible for other types of civilizations. Statements about what is possible and impossible have to take into account technologies that are millennia to millions of years ahead of ours (2008:xvii).”

The future may provide new scientific insights. And it will be interesting to see if The Animal Spirit Dance and other similar forms or Indian ritual join the ranks of Yoga, Tai Chi, and acupuncture as a valid form of alternative medicine advertized in hospital brochures for cancer and other medical treatments in years to come.

Ceremony and Tribal Politics

The increase in enrollment petitions creates a great deal of anxiety within the Indian community. There is a popular belief among enrolled Indians and others that the motive for enrollment is economic. Thomas (2000:227) estimates that one in thirty-five

claim Indian heritage, which may lead to excessive and artificial swelling of tribal enrollment numbers. This fear is met with resentment by “authentic Indians” who question the claims of enrollment entitlement. However, some researchers see other reasons for interest in enrollment. McGaa (1990) argues that the appeal results from claims of an awakening of ancestral indigenous blood that calls to them and others like them to get in touch with their Indian ancestry and traditional practice. This leads one to question whether access to ceremony rather than government benefits or casino payments promotes the interest. The Animal Spirit Dance enthusiasts seem to have no interest in any benefit other than identity and access to ceremony.

Ceremonial Corruption

The cultural and geographical borders that defined earlier traditional forms of ceremony have expanded in contemporary times due to a combination of factors including inter-tribal contact and urban Indian residence. Traditionally inclusive ceremonial boundaries are pressured to stretch across bloodlines with the attraction and attendance of non-Indians, which raises mixed reactions within the Indian community. According to Bucko (1998:224, 227), the Lakota have allowed non-Indian participation since before the 1970’s. The “sweat in particular and ceremonies in general” provide the basis for encounters between the Lakota and the outside world, which allows a “secure” platform of encounter on their own terms, or one that puts them in control. He further asserts that some Lakota would level an “accusation of lack of authenticity” against those that excluded non-Indians since, “if the four colors represented the four races of people, then no one could be excluded from a ceremony on the basis of race.” However, Tinker’s

(2003:223-229) comments illustrate a general shift in perception that has occurred over time with increasing numbers of Indian cultural seekers. He argues that the infiltration and influence of external players results in a “spiritual give-away”⁸ and “new prize possession of the colonizer,” which may allow subtle changes to occur, eventually leading to corruption.

Tinker (ibid) argues that non-Indians feel an inappropriate degree of entitlement to Indian ceremony. I’ve heard this sentiment expressed many times from non-Indian culture seekers, especially tourists who complain about the lack of accessibility to reservation ceremony. However, it appears that the transition of a ceremony from something shared to a stolen “prize” occurs when non-Indians attempt what might be described as a coyote shape-shift⁹ from non-Indian to Indian. This occurs when a person attempts to switch their identity to Indian in later life, or if they attempt to take pieces of Indian ceremony to create a new form of ceremony that does not follow traditional practice. It is not uncommon for cultural seekers to apprentice themselves to respected elders or become formal tribal and family adoptees, then go do their own thing. From the

⁸ A “give-away is a common and cross-cultural practice that might be observed at many Indian gatherings and may have been modeled after the traditional North West Coastal Potlatch ceremonies. This practice involves giving of gifts to staff, friends and even some strangers. It is historically meant to indicate the common Indian value of generosity and friendship. The history of many tribes includes acts of generosity to settlers that were viewed as being unappreciated, or resulted in further exploitation. Within the context of Tinker’s article he states that sharing of ceremony constitutes “a spiritual give-away in which Indian generosity has been pressed to an extreme of dysfunctionality.” He further states that the European “right to Know” attitudes and perceptions of “white privilege” are reinforced by invitations to Indian ceremonies.

⁹ Among many plains Indian tribes, the coyote symbolizes a trickster who shape shifts from one form to another to fool or deceive.

perspective of traditionalists, adoption and mentoring comes with responsibility and accountability. The lack thereof creates suspicion. Bucko [1998:214] quotes Andy Smith, a Cherokee critic of New Age appropriation to illustrate this point.

Moreover, white women want to become Indian without holding themselves accountable to Indian communities. If they did, they would have to listen to Indians telling them to stop carrying around sacred pipes, stop doing their own sweat lodges, and stop appropriating our spiritual practices. Rather, these New Agers see Indians as romanticized gurus who exist only to meet their consumerist needs. Consequently, they do not understand Indian people, or our struggles for survival, and thus they can have no genuine understanding of Indian spiritual practices.... This trivialization of our oppression is compounded by the fact that, nowadays, anyone can be Indian if she wants to be. All that is required is that a white woman be Indian in a former life or that she takes part in a sweat lodge or be mentored by a “medicine woman” or read a “how to book”. [Smith:1991:74-75]

Revival of Native Identity and Culture

There are numerous academic discussions concerning identity reformation, especially among minority or suppressed groups placed under subjection to a conquering government. For example, Rubenstein (2003:64) states that political disempowerment creates a need to create a “defensible and recognized” identity which can in turn create a further source of conflict. Tinker (2003:223-224) verifies that resistance to oppression included persistence of Indian ceremony. Yet, their resistance and revitalization includes some degree of acclimation and reformation. As Gleach (2002:500) and Warren and Jackson (2002:17, 23, 181) point out, in response to attempts of erasure, Indian groups and communities to “revitalize,” “repatriate,” or “reinvent” traditions and identity. Identity is a moving target that forms and reforms in response to changing times.

Increased attraction to Indian culture may complicate the process of identity formation when new cultural practices and integration of modern economic opportunities

come under criticism from outsiders attempting to define Indianness according to a romanticized or textbook image. Research by Zorn (2004:18, 142), Montego (2002:129) and others illustrate that the term “indigenous” conjures up visions and expectations of by-gone eras or snap-shots in time that may no longer fit the current lifestyles and customs. Zorn (2004) and Montego (2002) assert that tourists in particular create their own image far removed from the image of identity created and “preserved” by non-indigenous observers who create self-accommodating exotic images. Or market pressures require that a group “internalize” western views of “authentic” identity or tradition and “freeze” a particular culture within past time-frame. Miller (2004:13, 18) places this problem within the realm of tribal politics when he states that the federal acknowledgement policies created the same time-freeze pressures. In order to qualify, groups petitioning for federal acknowledgement must “play Indian” in order to convince multiple audiences of their Indianness. In a similar vein, citing the works of Alcida Ramos (1990), Rappaport (2005:37-38) states that the Columbian state requires indigenous communities to prove cultural authenticity within the context of a “hyperreal Indian,” or “culturally perfect” “insider,” that conforms to the exotic image representation create by the dominant society.

The descriptions of Indianness by non-Indians and unenrolled mixed-bloods verify that outsiders do not comprehend the definition from the point of view of reservation-born Indians and enrolled Indians. The focus on romanticized notions of spirituality and environmentalism pressures the identity and lifestyles that Indians wish to create for themselves. However, the images associated with the “Noble Savage” image

are normally depicted as technologically backward and inferior. This is in stark contrast to the descriptions I received from those that I interviewed. Non-Indians and unenrolled mixed-bloods view traditional Indianness as part of a superior knowledge and lifestyle that has been lost, and which they seek to revive.

Revival of Ritual and Ceremony

Various forms of the Ghost Dance have caught the interest of numerous researchers seeking to explain reasons for cultural and identity revival in the form of ritual. Many writers including Hittman (1973) and Carroll (1975) focus on structural impositions of conquest, and socio-economic deprivation as the cause. However the formation and practice of the Ghost Dance took place on tribal land and was largely attended by tribal enrollees. This is in sharp contrast to the Animal Spirit Dance, which is performed on private lands, attended primarily by mixed-blood, urban Indians, many of whom belong to tri-racial groups who were separated from Indian land, language and culture by several generations.

Motivation for formation of the Animal Spirit Dance appears to have a three point platform. Cultural genocide and deprivation resulting in lost language and ritual has created an interest in reviving lost ritual and cultural practice. Global environmental impact has led to fears over the future of the planet, leading many to seek simpler lifestyles associated with perceptions of traditional Indian lifestyles. With globalization, ideologies of multiculturalism and racial tolerance have become popularized. However, the cultural pressures and conflicts resulting from rapid globalization are leading people to try to find a common religious and ideological ground to reduce conflict.

Native Reactions

Authenticity – Revival versus Corruption

Individuals practicing forms of Indian ceremony outside of reservation settings may find themselves the focus of criticism and speculation from enrolled Indians living both on reservation and urban settings. Individuals on both sides of reservation and racial boundaries raise questions concerning the authenticity and legitimacy of ceremonial practice. The considerations include the following:

- 1) The location of the ceremony and the appropriateness of locations outside of traditional or reservation land boundaries.
- 2) The cultural qualifications of the person conducting the ceremony including tribal authorization.
- 3) Adherence to proper protocols. This may also include the expectation that some parts of the ceremony included recital of knowledge within a traditional Indian language, and those leading and attending the ceremony are dressed in appropriate attire.
- 4) Adequate ceremonial preparation. Preparation required varies according to ritual. And the degree of preparation is generally greater for those conducting the ceremony versus those who attend.

These considerations become complicated when the ceremony is frequently conducted in public settings outside tribal lands, when the ceremonial leader is mixed-blood, and whose upbringing has breaks in cultural ties to their tribe, when some of the differences in protocols are not verifiable because the ceremony is promoted as new or a revival of a lost practice, or when participation is open to those unfamiliar with native culture, and who are unaware of standard protocols, or lax about following them.

The Animal Spirit Dance was created by a mixed-blood individual with Indian, Jewish and other European heritage, but who is enrolled in a western tribe. His

acclimation to tribal culture began in his teen years and includes an eight year participation in the Sun Dance. When discussing his ceremonial role as a point of controversy, he describes himself as a balding, white-skinned, bearded man who some full bloods think is “too white.” Yet others accept him based on his ceremonial and tribal experience. Researchers have noted that ceremonial practitioners working between cultures serve as bridge or ferry of knowledge. For example, Rappaport (2005) states that indigenous educators, academics and activists whose cultural acclimation or education creates a form of consciousness or world view that positions them on the “outside” of the community where they work, and must continually cross “inside”/“outside” boundaries. This can stress their ability to claim “privileged vision” or emotional sentiments and experience required to fully comprehend the “frontier” of research. However, some view activism and education as tools that differentiate them as “bearers” of a form of “consciousness” that categorizes them as a “special type of internal actor.” The process of crossing between boundaries spawns a process of boundary redefinition, creating a bridge between both positions (Rappaport: 2005: 6, 51 111). This echoes the assertions of Laura Graham (2002:182-184, 187), who states that Indians serving as mediators between indigenous and non-indigenous groups may become “uncomfortable bridges” between the two factions. As Graham illustrates, the very act of crossing may cause both insiders and outsiders to question their authenticity. Warren and Jackson (2002:9) further argue that cultural synthesis of technology, “popular culture,” revitalized or “reborn” ritual, and tactics result in forms of cultural hybridity that cause some to question the cultural legitimacy of indigenous leaders. As Laura Graham points out, western ideologies

maintain specific images and expectations of specific ethnic markers to define what constitutes inauthentic or authentic. The lack of these markers within the appearance and speech of indigenous spokesperson can degrade their effectiveness.

“Revitalization” versus “Invented Tradition”

Despite the various controversies, the Animal Spirit Dance has achieved some degree of acceptance within the Indian community. The process of acceptance and validation has a similar “processual structure” to Wallace’s (1956:268) description of revitalization movements that include “Steady State,” “Period of Individual Stress,” “Period of Cultural Distortion,” then “Period of Revitalization.” However, given the expressed claims and belief that this form of animal dance is based solely on personal vision versus any specific known traditional ceremony, it is difficult to define the “steady state” or ritual basis of this process. The perception of ceremony bears closer similarity to Hobsbawm’s (1983) discussion of an “Invented Tradition” which lists several elements. “Invented Traditions” may occur either because certain ceremony is no longer available or no longer used. Any appearance of movements that defend revival of lost tradition indicates a “break” in continuity. Traditions that are alive have no need for revival or invention. The attempt to replicate historic practices governed by certain behavioral norms “automatically implies continuity with the past.” And finally, for rituals where change or resistance becomes part of the focus, the practice may provide precedent for social continuity and natural law.

Regardless of whether the Animal Spirit Dance fits into Wallace’s revitalization structure or Hobsbawm’s “Invented Tradition,” as Siebold (1992:190) points out,

“Today’s practices are tomorrow traditions.... What we see at any given moment is a snapshot in time and represents a transitory representation. What is considered traditional today may have been the latest fashion 50 years ago.” This suggests that all “tradition” was created new at some point in time. Within discussions of the definition of authenticity, legitimacy and correctness, this begs the question of how much weight should be applied to historical context. Each new tradition lengthens the gap between current and past practice.

Methodology

My research seeks to determine the reasons for the formation of the dance, the reasons why people are attracted, the types of people who attend, their reactions to the dance, and the differences in views between tribally enrolled and unenrolled mixed-bloods. To achieve this end I interviewed individuals from a mixed range of tribes, enrollment statuses, and direct involvement in the dance itself. Given the sensitivity of cultural knowledge and past problems with some researchers who some Indians assert have been inadequately sensitive to Indian culture and viewpoint, I set forth an interview approach that was suggested by the Indians participating in the research.

Research Population

The main research population includes three main overlapping categories: ceremonial role, enrollment status and gender. The ceremonial category might be described as ceremonial elders versus non-ceremonial elders. Ceremonial elders are viewed as such within their respective Indian communities because they have all undergone one or more traditional mentoring processes with their respective tribal elders

in order to carry an “alter” or authorization to conduct a traditional ceremony. The other group is comprised of people who attend Indian ceremony but have taken no formal steps to obtain authorization to lead ceremony. However, some have leadership titles associated with various cultural and politically oriented Indian organizations. Another category might be described as enrolled Indians versus unenrolled. Enrolled Indians meet specific blood quantum and other requirements specified by their respective tribe. I’ve included state and federally recognized tribes in this category. The unenrolled group can be further divided into mixed-bloods versus non-Indians. Mixed-bloods are those whose blood-quantum or degree of blood affinity, in addition to other specific tribal enrollment rules deny them federally or state recognized tribal membership status. The gender group distinguishes male versus female. The following chart illustrates the gender and cultural mix of those interviewed.

Table 1 - Ceremonial leaders who participated in the Animal Spirit Dance

Tribe	Gender	Tribal ID Card	Full Blood	Rez Born	Has Rez Ties	Adoption	Ceremonial Leader	Participant
Ojibwe	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
NW Coast	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Anishinabe	M	Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes
Anishinabe	M				Yes		Yes	Yes
Shawnee / Lakota	F				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cherokee	M						Yes	Yes

Table 2 - Ceremonial leaders who were not affiliated with the Animal Spirit Dance

Tribe	Gender	Tribal ID Card	Full Blood	Rez Born	Has Rez Ties	Adoption	Ceremonial Leader	Attended Animal Spirit Dance
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Algonquin	M	Yes				Yes	Yes	
Naise-WaiWash	F	Yes				Yes	Yes	
Lakota	M	Yes		Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	

Table 3 - Non Leaders who attended the Animal Spirit Dance

Tribe	Gender	Tribal ID Card	Full Blood	Rez Born	Has Rez Ties	Adoption	Ceremonial Leader	Attended Animal Spirit Dance
Cherokee	F	Yes	1/4		Yes			Yes
Cherokee	M		1/4					Yes
Cherokee	F	Yes	1/4					Yes
Micmac	F		1/4					Yes
Cherokee	F		1/8					Yes
Seneca	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
Onondaga	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
Non-Indian (Russian)	F							Yes
Non-Indian	M							Yes
Non-Indian (Finland)	M							Yes

Six within the ceremonial elder category were directly involved with the Animal Spirit Dance consisting of two females, and four males. I also interviewed three other ceremonial elders who were not involved, in order to gain a more rounded perspective.

Ceremonial acclimation is not consistent with enrollment status. There is some overlap in characteristics as follows: All adults can be placed into two main categories, those with some degree of Indian ancestry and those with no documentable Indian ancestry. Those with some degree of Indian ancestry include the following subgroups: 1) Reservation-born tribally enrolled Indians currently living in urban settings, 2)

Unenrolled individuals of mixed Indian and Northern European blood living in urban settings who have mentored under Indian ceremonial elders to become culturally acclimated 3) Non-Indians. Those with no documentable Indian ancestry are categorized into three subgroups: 1) Those who claim that they were an Indian in another life, 2) Those who claim that the lack of documentable evidence is irrelevant because they believe that their Indian ancestors are calling to them to find their Indian ancestry, and 3) Those who do not claim to be Indian, but have an interest in Indian culture because their perception of the spiritual and environmental values fit within their world view. (There were some children in attendance, however, they were not included in the interviews). All participants in the ceremony are seeking to maintain or gain ties to native culture, especially ceremony. It was my observation that the number of men and women at the three dances were roughly equal. However, given that most ceremonial leaders were men, those that I interviewed were primarily male. My research strongly suggests that gender does not affect perceptions of the dance.

Data Collection and Protection

Confidentiality

There is some controversy within the native community about the validity or authenticity of new dance and ceremony forms as well as the admission of unenrolled or non-native people to some ceremonies that are traditionally private and tribal specific. As a result, I felt that it was important to protect the identity of the informants. My notes contain demographic questions including gender, age range and tribal affiliation. During the interview introduction I made it clear that no names would be recorded that would

enable someone outside of the study to directly tie the interview back to the individual. If information about their personal history or background was included in the interview, elements relevant to the origin of their views could be included without reference to a specific individual.

I decided not to record interviews. I chose instead to record the interview by typing as they talked for the following reasons. A recording could compromise my attempts to protect the identity of the informant. I learned in prior research projects that, due to the negative history with non-Indians, requests for signatures and voice recordings generate suspicion. And my concern was validated within interviews. My approach also provides those interviewed with an opportunity to revise their statements. While contemplating their answers, many might start, then restart their answer, then ask me to read it back. After later reflection, some would ask that I reword the answer to provide better clarity or in other cases remove the comment altogether. Having visual written text made that process easier as well as giving them a degree of control over the interview process.

I used a pre-formatted list of open-ended questions as the basis of the interview. I went into the study with the expectation that race and tribal politics would affect perceptions of the function and validity of the dance. However, my questions were deliberately vague in order to ensure that the questions did not steer anyone towards a particular conclusion. During the course of discussions, many political and cultural issues easily surfaced without prodding. While the subject was not mentioned in interviews with

non-Indians, politics was discussed in all interviews with both enrolled and non-enrolled mixed-bloods with one exception. Several people seemed intent on discussing specific political issues and questioned the vagueness of the questions. Some even suggested that I should ask more specific questions. I answered by pointing back to the content of their answers and explained that I left it up to the individual to define the most salient issues. With that in mind, some went into great detail concerning specific issues to ensure that the subject was covered. The average interview lasted three or more hours.

Ceremonial Detail

Virtually all forms of Indian ceremony are considered sacred. A long history of conflict between Indians and non-Indians resulted in violence and cultural suppression. Regaining freedom of religion has been a long and arduous process fraught with legal battles and conflict. In order to protect their religion, Indians took ceremonies underground. Even with legalized freedom, some ceremonies are still practiced in private settings, and the details of practice and symbology kept secret. I am distant heritage Eastern Cherokee and have many friends in the Indian community who have invited me to a number of private ceremonies, and agreed to provide information for this thesis with the understanding that for specific details, “what happens at the lodge stays in the lodge.” Within this thesis I mention many forms of ceremony in comparison to the Animal Spirit Dance. But there is a limitation on the details that I can discuss. However, the originator of the Animal Spirit Dance has granted permission to include the details of practice, many of which are also provided on the Many Horses Foundation Website <http://manyhorses.org>.

Participant Observation and Reciprocity

Understanding Indian ceremony is not something that can be accomplished as an “armchair anthropologist.” Nor would I have been allowed to passively stand by as an observer even if that had been my protocol. Within most Indian tribes, ceremony is a community event where all attendees, regardless of their role, are also required to help in the preparations in some manner. All ceremonies require many hours or days of prior preparation to prepare the land, prepare the food, and supply materials including wood and botanicals¹⁰ for the ceremonial fire. I was expected to help in many of these tasks including gathering and assembling wood and branches for the sweat lodge, dance arbor and ceremonial fire as well as supplying tobacco and sage and food for the dancers.

The concept of sharing and reciprocity is an integral part of Indian culture. Given the agreement that I would receive information in the form of interviews, a certain degree of reciprocity on my part was expected by helping people who took part in the study with various community tasks. My participant observation for the Animal Spirit Dance included compiling mailing lists, creating and emailing event information packets, handling email correspondence, supplying items for giveaways, and performing certain roles within the ceremony. At other times, I became involved in helping with events and tasks not directly associated with the Animal Spirit Dance. The subject of racial Indian politics became a frequent topic within the interviews. In August 2010, I was asked to

¹⁰ The term “botanicals” is a common Indian term used to describe various plants used as aromatics and prayer vehicles during ceremony. Depending on the tribe or ceremony, botanicals may include tobacco, sage, cedar, lavender or other dried plant products.

compile related information about Virginia Indians to be given to Indian political leaders unaware of the issues. One Indian elder directly involved in helping me compile this information helped me proof a separate copy to be given to the governor of Virginia and certain Virginia tribes involved in the politics.

Analytical Approach

Edith Turner (1997:1) reminds us that all too often, anthropological analysis of indigenous ritual is viewed through a lens of skepticism or “positivists’ denial.” This results in what Talamentez (2003:274) describes as intriguing suggestions and interpretations about ritual practice and symbolism, but lacking in substance because they are made from outside native culture and intellectual perspective. Victor Turner (2001:363) and others argue that the researcher will provide a clearer interpretation due to the “special techniques and concepts.” However, the problem, as stated by Pesantubbe (2003:212,218) is that “theorizing from culture” requires consideration of language and inclusion of interpretations and theories from the viewpoints of those studied which are all too frequently omitted. In other words, to provide a clear picture, a researcher must attempt to view things from a native lens.

There is some controversy over the degree of immersion in the native viewpoint that researchers should be allowed to adopt on a personal level. Edith Turner argues that in earlier times, “going native,” or attempting to turn participant observation into a personal experience would result in academic suicide. However, given the stated desires by informants that this study provide clarity to the politics of conflict surrounding the Animal Spirit Dance, and even at the risk of being accused of “going native,” I have

attempted to balance the two viewpoints while ensuring that the participants of this study are given a voice. As Edith Turner (1997:1) has argued, if we ignore a belief system on the premise that our world view is automatically superior, we deny “the people’s equality with ours.”¹¹

In addition to clarifying points of conflict, this study seeks to illuminate the reasons for attraction to healing ceremonies. Those viewing indigenous ceremonies from a western non-native orientation have a tendency to invalidate the legitimacy of spiritual and ritual healing approaches, preferring instead to focus on symbology and cultural function. I’m inspired by the words of Edith Turner whose personal awakening to ritual teaches the importance of keeping an open mind.

There is spirit stuff. There is spirit affliction; it is not a matter of metaphor and symbol, or even psychology. And I began to see how anthropologists have perpetuated an endless series of putdowns about the many spirit events in which they have participated-“participated” in a kindly pretense. They might have obtained valuable material, but they have been operating with the wrong paradigm, that of the positivists’ denial. (Turner:1997:1)

While proving or disproving the effectiveness of spiritual healing is beyond the scope of this study, my approach includes items of scientific research that provide some support to the validity of the practice and a possible explanation for the results.

¹¹ I might state also that I am an unenrolled mixed-blood with Cherokee and Northern European heritage. This places me squarely in the middle of the controversies discussed. Thus it is important that I attempt to discern from both sides of the controversy, including that of my own Indian heritage.

2. Indian Identity – Motives and Perceptions of New Ritual

Historical Background – Cultural and Identity Genocide

During the period from the 1800's to the early 1900's, a multitude of government policies led to assaults on and legal suppression of native culture and identity . For example, boarding school policies were deliberately structured to suppress language and cultural practice among native children. The Indian Religious Crimes Code legalized suppression of religion and ceremony. The Dawes Land Allocation Act reduced the size of tribal land areas. This led to a reduced population growth on reservations due to lack of land resources and forced migration to urban areas. The Federal Acknowledgement Process promoted blood quantum requirements to provide a legal definition of who is Indian and who is not. According to Adams (1997) and Archuleta (2000), the legalized suppression of culture created a form of cultural genocide that forced cultural practices and self identification as an Indian to go underground. However, I'm reminded of a Volkswagen "Beetle" commercial back in the early 1970's. You see the "bug" driving around in circles until it's flattened with a huge fly swatter. At first you think it is dead. But it waits until nobody is looking, restores itself to normal shape, shakes its tires, and snickers as it drives merrily on its way. Like the VW, Indians simply refused to be erased. The term "We're still here" has become a form of battle cry declaring their resilience. Culturally suppressive government policies began to undergo reversal in the

early 1900's, leading to various forms of revitalization and restructuring of cultural practice. For example, powwows, traditional gatherings that began among Indians settled near army forts, have evolved into intertribal social gatherings. In current times they have advanced further into formal dance competitions. For those who travel the "powwow trail," i.e. going from powwow to powwow, competition powwows serve as a significant form of economic sustenance, similar to traveling the American rodeo circuit. However, it also serves as a source of networking and enhancement of Indian identity by allowing Indians to wear traditional apparel and share knowledge with other Indians. An example of ceremonial revival includes the Native American Church (N.A.C.) which, according to several N.A.C. members that I talked to, formed as a means of bridging Christianity and more traditional Indian ceremonial forms. The Christian elements and usage of peyote have caused some degree of controversy within the Indian community, resulting in some degree of change to include two forms of ceremony. There are specific tribal N.A.C. chapters. Currently however, N.A.C. members have expanded the ceremony outside reservation boundaries to private lands to make the ceremony more accessible to Indians who have moved away from the reservations. These urban placed ceremonies have become inter-tribal in nature with Indians from all across the country in attendance.

Revitalization of Indian culture has attracted the attention of non-Indians and individuals with distant Indian heritage who converge on powwows and attempt to access other Indian events and ceremony in an attempt to connect with Indians and Indian culture. Given the historical rejection of Indians and Indian culture, the sudden interest has been met with suspicion from members of the Indian community. Many of those who

attempt to become active participants in Indian culture are shunned or ignored by tribally enrolled or “full-bloods” who consider the others less “Indian.” In the course of this research, I’ve heard them called “Johnny-Come-Lately’,” “Instant Indians” or “Apples” because they were raised as “white” by mixed-blood parents who chose not to raise them as Indians¹². The population of attendees at the Animal Spirit Dance and similar contemporary revival practices suggests that these types of rebuffs are mitigated by contemporary ceremonial groups that allow multi-ethnic admittance to Indian ceremony and knowledge where attendance is normally limited to tribal members. The dance also draws non-Indians who identify with publicized images of Indians that focus on environmental respect and spirituality, allowing them to strengthen and practice their belief systems.

Some researchers including McGaa(1990) assert that these new forms of ceremony may serve as a means of bridging a cultural gap between Indians with access to traditional culture and non-Indians or mixed-blood urban residents with little or no access. However, in the view of enrolled Indians, a historical gap exists that cannot be easily bridged through cultural exposure. Those with distant Indian heritage are lacking in direct experience with the history of the conflicts related to contact between Indians

¹² There are different reasons for the choice not to raise children under Indian culture. Some choose Christian or the general American culture due to lack of personal acclimation resulting from multiple generations of separation. Several older Indian boarding school graduates stated that their parents considered traditional ritual as “bygone ways of the past” and have substituted Christian practice in it’s place. People I interviewed across the cultural and racial spectrum feel that boarding school brainwashing and negative stereotype images of Indian culture and lifestyles led many to hide their culture and identity from the world as well as their children. Those that hid felt that adoption of mainstream U.S. culture would provide a better future for their children.

and non-Indians. This history serves as the foundation of Indian identity for reservation and enrolled Indians, credentials that non-Indians and mixed-bloods with distant Indian heritage are unable to claim. Some newer forms of practice, including the Animal Spirit Dance, are promoted as a restoration of an earlier or original form in practice that existed before culture became corrupted due to colonial incursions and other impediments. Increasing numbers of people claim to have received visions from the “Creator” or other spirits telling them to revive traditional forms that have been lost. Thus these new forms not only serve to bridge culture, they appear to be an attempt to bridge history by tying the revival form to a historical form which existed prior to colonial periods when blood lines became diluted.

Newer forms of practice that deviate from known traditional forms generate a degree of controversy among Indians. While the concepts of personal vision and spiritual guidance in ceremonial practice are accepted as valid within the overall Indian community, the implementation of practice is generally expected to follow a fairly strict set of protocols, including interpretation of the vision by a recognized elder, and acceptance of any new cultural practice by “the people”¹³. Questions concerning these new ceremonies have arisen partially because of fears that these protocols are not being followed, and partially because of historically based fears of “white” cultural incursion and tampering. Thus the anxieties are multifaceted. They may be based on valid concerns

¹³ The phrase “the people” is commonly use when referring to a collective group of Indians. The translation of the traditional names of Indian groups including Indé (Apache) and Diné (Navajo) are translated as “the people”.

of ceremonial corruption, partly resulting from anxiety fostered by historical collective community memories, and partially motivated by internalized racism, resulting in a fundamentalist and exclusionary form of identity revitalization. Even in cases where a ceremonial leader can document tribal affiliation and adherence to the proper ceremonial protocols, if the person is not a full-blood and living on a reservation, some express doubt and suspicion.

Contemporary Identity Pressures

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, some new situations have contributed to a new form of pressure to Indian identity including: 1) The increased numbers of people seeking enrollment or the ability to claim the title Indian, 2) Wide differences in the meaning of what it means to be Indian between non-Indians, unenrolled mixed-bloods and reservation-born tribally-enrolled Indians, 3) Fears that those lacking cultural acclimation will treat Indian ceremony and their Indian hosts in a disrespectful manner. In all three instances, pressures are even stronger when outsiders attempt to use the Indian title as a means of gaining cultural access.

The majority of people interviewed for this research asserted that some degree of change to cultural practice, including emergence of new forms, is a normal part of ongoing cultural progression. These new forms are generally validated based on evidence of the motive for change, the function the ceremony serves, the effects and outcome, and acceptance of the people that participate. In current times, tribal groups are less isolated providing more opportunities for cultural exchange and inter-tribal participation in social rituals; events including powwows, sweat lodges and formal prayer. Thus, even with the

Indian community, inter-tribal ceremonial attendance can complicate the authentication process due to variations of cultural practice between tribes. The process is further complicated when a new practice is led by someone of mixed-blood, and the event is held outside of reservation boundaries with a large non-Indian or mixed-blood attendance.

Indian Culture - "Sharing Versus Wearing"

The newness of any unfamiliar form of practice can generate controversy, especially when the form is practiced in a nontraditional setting. However, the current political climate associated with exclusionary tribal enrollment policies has injected the concept of race into the overall perception of ceremonial validity and practice. In some areas and for some cultural practices, the same policies of exclusion used to determine tribal status are being used to determine access to ceremony. My research indicates that for many individuals attracted to new forms of ceremony like the Animal Spirit Dance, interest in tribal enrollment comes into play only when needed as a route of access to culture. It appears that conflict occurs when an unenrolled individual attempts to access culture in order to legitimize claiming Indian title. I've heard the practice described as wearing the title like a badge of honor, similar to the ball caps with military logos that some veterans wear for social recognition. One minute they are without the hat. Then the next minute they are, thinking that wearing the hat transforms them into a different type of person. An enrolled tribal leader stated that this type of identity switching is puzzling or "hard to comprehend." For others who have expressed this puzzlement, feelings varied from amusement to anger. However, given the sacredness of ceremonial practice, attending ceremony for any purpose unrelated to the traditional function of the ceremony

may be interpreted as disrespectful, and resulting in exclusionary policies. Within tribal enrollment politics, reservation Indians seek to push urban, and mixed breed Indians out of native social and political groups (Hill:2003:24). Ceremonial attendance policies may include closing the doors to a traditional Indian ceremony, or denouncement of a form practiced outside reservation boundaries. These policies create a double edged sword. Exclusion results in a push for enrollment, which in turns leads to more policies of exclusion.

Pressures on the Core Value of Sharing

Exclusionary ceremonial policies create an interesting irony. Indians have effectively turned the tables and placed non-Indians in a position similar to their own experience in the 1800's and early to mid 1900's when Indians were excluded from certain benefits of American society. While one must question whether the tactic might have vengeful motives, my informants' statements did not indicate revenge. Their focus was more defensive and protective than offensive. However, the degree and manner in which protectionism results in exclusionary tactics is controversial among both enrolled reservation-born Indians and unenrolled mixed-bloods. There seems to be a common perception that policies of exclusion may compromise common core Indian cultural values and rituals of sharing. For example, during a discussion concerning the practice of exclusion, a reservation-raised Onondaga elder stated:

“That’s wrong because part of our culture is sharing. How do you draw the line between sharing and sacred. Part of the message is to share. It doesn’t mean preserving for ourselves. If you were to question whether wannabees should be, you missed the message. The message is that you share who we are. The sharing concept is very strong with northern tribes. Just like Potlatch and urban powwow give-always. Sometimes they can’t afford and they apologize that they can’t do

more, then list names to receive a gift. It goes back to the same philosophy. Ritualized sharing.”

I’ve heard often that “the doors to the sweat lodge” and other ceremonies “must remain open.” There is a commonly held view that anyone with a good heart and good motives should be allowed access to ceremony if needed, Indian or not. It appears that the concern is more about title snatching than cultural sharing. As one tribal elder put it, “If it [attending ceremony] provides greater understanding [about Indian culture] that’s cool. But I don’t want to give them a vehicle to claim being Indian by it.” It is becoming a common practice for those who express interest in Indian culture to “morph” into an “instant Indian” and attempt to claim Indian heritage that they cannot prove. Or one may claim that certain beliefs, practices or special spiritual gifts defines them as an Indian, despite the lack of direct blood, cultural and historical ties. Spirituality and environmentalism are presented as qualifications in lieu of a tribal card.

Conflicts with non-Indians attempting to wear the Indian title have complicated policies of ceremonial access by using the same exclusionary criteria as tribal enrollment policies. Thus, concerns over those who lead and attend native ceremony place this controversy square in the middle of an ongoing political conflict over the definition of “Who is Indian and Who Is Not” and what elements define authentic Indian cultural practice. Out of all individuals with Indian heritage, discussions concerning race, tribal politics and conflicts over claims of Indianness surfaced in all interviews except one. While the colonial construct of race and skin color has crept into the politics of exclusion, motives for exclusion cannot be written off as a matter of simple racism. However, before

understanding “race” from an Indian perspective, we must first define “Indianness” or what it means to be Indian. As shall be illustrated, variations within the understood definitions of the term “Indian” contributes to concerns about sharing culture versus wearing the title Indian. Non-Indians and unenrolled Indians do not fully comprehend what it means to be Indian from a tribal Indian’s point of view, and this leads to offense and protectionism.

The Political Climate – What It Means To Be Indian

The political and cultural position of the observer has a profound impact on the perception of Indianness and ceremonial legitimacy as it relates to each participant and observer. This in turn affects the perception of authenticity and validity. In order to understand the differences I have divided the participants into three main categories: 1) Non-Indians, 2) Unenrolled individuals with distant heritage, 3) Enrolled individuals. The perception of what it means to be “Indian” varies widely in each of these groups. It also varies according to how the subject is referenced within a conversation, or whether they are talking about the term or the people.

Definition of Indianness by Non-Indians

In contrast to those with Indian heritage, for non-Indians, the references to Indianness and Indians as a people has little variation, and is generally based on the more publicized associations of spirituality, environmentalism and understanding of animal language and behavior. There seems to be a common belief that non-Indians view Indians as the “Noble Savage,” an image often associated with a “primitive” and “dark-skinned”

individuals living a backward technologically deficient lifestyle (Miller:2004:7). However, within the more “new-age” approach to understanding Indian culture, it appears this image has changed to a new form of interpretation. When discussing Indianness with both non-Indians and cultural latecomers, I found no references to backward or primitive. Behaviors and practices associated with Indianness are viewed on the same level as lost superior technological and cosmological knowledge from theoretical lost civilizations. They are taken as an indication of superior intelligence and knowledge, which Indian culture enthusiasts are seeking to gain or revive through ceremony and communication with ancestral spirits. Mentions of lost knowledge occurred within two primary categories: animal communication and holistic medicine.

Oral stories from multiple tribes illustrate a common belief that in earlier times, animals and humans shared a common form of language. Humans learned many survival skills including some degree of technology from animal teachers and guides¹⁴. A mixed-blood woman belonging to a ceremonial group demonstrated this belief when she told me: “They [the animals] teach us things, how to live, how to accept what is given to you.... Animals are always teaching.” Varying levels in university education and western cultural acclimation create differences in the degree to which both enrolled and mixed-blood Indians view this belief as literal fact or the subject of a traditional winter story telling. However, modern stereotyping of Indians as spiritually superior beings through TV, books and movies has engrained this idea within the minds of non-Indian

¹⁴ Examples stories where animals served as teachers and helpers may be found in the books Pima Indian Legends by Anna Moore Shaw and Seneca Myths & Folk Tales by Arthur C. Parker.

and unenrolled mixed-bloods who are seekers of a higher spiritual awareness. However, personal encounters have also added to this perception. In the course of this research, I was told numerous stories of modern encounters with animals where the observer believed that the animal was attempting to communicate or exhibiting behavior that signaled approval of a ceremonial activity. For example, an elderly self described “old hippie” married to a mixed-blood tribally adopted woman told me that during a trip to visit the originator of the Animal Spirit Dance, they encountered a bear that stayed and sang to them during a drumming session. On another occasion they encountered a bear while driving. The animal walked across the road to get their attention. When they got out, the bear sat down in stance similar to a “man sitting” and listened patiently while the humans attempted to talk to him. I encountered another example in 2008 when I attended a D.C. event where a hawk landed on a newly erected teepee at a D.C. native gathering. The hawk stayed to visit while an Indian grandmother offered him a song. This visitation was perceived to provide a sign that the placement of the teepee was correct. Visitations from eagles, hawks and other types of raptors are generally viewed as a sign of fortune, luck and approval.

From a western perspective, the validity of these claims is difficult to comprehend. In earlier times, animals were believed to be inferior to humans because of their lack of language and reasoning skills. However, recent publication of formal academic research related to animal behavior and language suggests that animals and even insects have, and use formal language tokens. There is also evidence that animals can learn new language tokens in order to communicate with humans (Pepperberg:2009,

Fouts:1998, Dudzinski:2010). During the course of interviews, this type of information was detailed by my informants. This scientific research is taken as a form of proof that animals and humans could have communicated in earlier times, and in the same manner discussed in Indian stories and folklore. This leads to the belief that the ability to communicate is a superior but lost form of knowledge that is being restored through Indian culture. However, this is not the only attraction.

Multiple informants spanning the range of blood and cultural categories championed the holistic approach of native healing in relation to ritual. The holistic approach which marries the spiritual, emotional and physical appears to generate a high degree of interest in Indian ceremony. When asked about the reason for the attraction to Indian culture and ceremony, one non-Indian woman of German heritage told me that it fit within her view of spirituality and respect for the planet. She also stated:

“You get what you need. I don’t think there is one to the exclusion of another. Some was physical, some definitely emotional. When you heal your emotional self you heal your physical. I don’t recall [the ceremonial leader] saying what type of healing they would get. I went in with the attention that I would get what I needed most. It was not what I expected, but that’s OK. Sometimes what you expect is not what you need.”

Ongoing advancements in alternative forms of medicine have illustrated that holistic approaches with the inclusion of indigenous forms of healing including drum, dance and singing have some degree of success (Bruscia:1991, Aldridge:1993, Hillard:2001, Bittmen:2001, Darden 2008:81,8) . This research suggests that it is possible that a significant part of the attraction to Indian ceremony and dance is based on

dissatisfaction with the non-holistic approach of standard medical practice and practitioners.

An example from this research illustrates this point. The founder of the Animal Spirit Dance told me that in his work with autistic children, he has seen results similar to those recorded in professional studies. The parents of an autistic child approached him to help their autistic son. During his first attempt he wasn't sure what to do because he had no training as a physician. But he started his approach with singing, a drum and rattle based on a common Indian belief that all people relate to a drum beat because it mimics a mother's heartbeat when they are in the womb. While singing and drumming he noticed that the child reacted to "two step drum beats." After a number of sessions the boy started to talk. Nobody was sure why the boy responded, but he instructed them to "keep the child on the drum." He has since worked with seven other children and noticed that they all "get into the heartbeat." He stated that one autistic boy eventually became self sufficient and went on to college.

One primary difference between Western and Indian approaches to holistic medicine is the relationship to respective lifestyles. Western approaches view holistic medicine as therapy while Indians view it as "how you live your life, not just a therapy." The perception of holistic healing stretches beyond the self to include the environment as well as its animal and other living inhabitants. The originator of the Animal Spirit Dance stated: "We are all interdependent. All need to have interdependency with life. We are co-dependent with all creation including earth and rocks and animals. If we don't take care of the earth we will not survive." Collectively, the term "Indian" describes not only a

people who are genetically Indian, but a people who are believed to demonstrate an acute environmental and spiritual awareness.

The lifestyle approach to holism may explain part of the attraction to Indian ceremony as was demonstrated when discussing the understanding of the purpose of and impetus for creation of the ceremony. For example one self-described new-age non-Indian woman stated:

“I thought it was to heal the relationship between humanity and the animals. I guess as you heal yourself you heal everything around you.”

“We are entering a time of change. Energetic changes. Humanity has come as far in this direction without destroying everything. Energy is being raised. It’s time for more people to realize that we are all one. When we hurt another, or animal or earth we are hurting ourselves. This is a cog in the overall consciousness that’s meant to rise the vibration of the earth. As we heal ourselves in relation to everything else we heal the earth. Everything [the Animal Spirit Dance] shows up [is created] when it’s time for it [when it is needed to help raise awareness].”

Whether romanticized or not, the spiritual and environmentalist images associated with Indianness are viewed as components of a holistic approach to healing and lifestyle and a beneficial commodity available primarily through Indian ceremony.

While spirituality, environmentalism and holism are components of traditional Indian culture, they illustrate only a small part of Indian identity from the standpoint of reservation-born Indians. Failing to recognize and understand more salient identity elements creates anger and distrust. These feelings project into perceptions of the Animal Spirit Dance and other new ceremonial forms when the aforementioned components provide the main attraction. As one tribal leader stated: “I’m tired of non-Indians crying

over garbage on TV¹⁵. We are not a people of romantic past or irrelevant present. They romanticize the past. Pocahontas wannabees professing kinship with nature. It's a song and dance and dog and pony show.”

As other researchers point out, (Rappaport:2005:37-38, Warren and Jackson:2002:20) it also appears that the focus by non-Indians on the romanticized notions and images like the “ Noble Savage”, backward stone-age lifestyles, and other images popularized through TV and movie, add pressures to the Indian identity that contemporary Indians struggle to structure and maintain. These imposed western descriptions assault an already wounded identity, especially when adoption of specific elements of modern lifestyles and economic opportunities lead non-Indians to assert that there are no more “real Indians.” In some instances non-Indians will literally protest when Indians adopt a modern lifestyle. During a visit to the Hopi reservation, a Hopi guide was explaining a renovation project at 2nd Mesa, a historical site build by Hopi ancestors around 900 AD, and currently occupied by modern Hopi. For both economic and structural issues, the Hopi builders choose to use cinder blocks and other modern building materials. They then finished the outside with cement so that the outside would still provide the appearance of a historical adobe dwelling. One blond lanky female tourist turned to me and said “This is a historical site! That’s terrible that they are using cinder blocks. Can’t they force them to use the traditional stone blocks?” I asked her if she would like having the local

¹⁵ He was referring to the general reaction to the 1971 commercial created by Keep America Beautiful Inc. showing Iron Eyes Cody crying when he saw trash along the highways and in the rivers. The commercials were early environmentalist attempts to make people aware of the environmental impact of garbage and waste material.

government force her to live in a thatched roof two room stone cabin consistent with her Irish ancestors, but the point seemed totally lost on her.

The romanticized notion of indigenous environmental practice provides a strong example of this conundrum. The popular image of Indians made popular by TV and movies portrays all Indians as a people seeking a primitive lifestyle, void of technology and with perfect execution of environmental conservation. Logging practices decimated the forests of Easter Island, and the 1700's and 1800's trade practices reduced deer and beaver populations in Canada and the northeastern area of the United States to dangerous levels (Krech:1999:177). This illustrates how, even when a culture demonstrates ecological awareness, lack of knowledge concerning long term environmental practice can cause unintended degradation. However, one must use caution when making value judgments about historical practices.

Shepard Krech's (1999:22-26) research on the "Ecological Indian" illustrates that confusion over the meaning of the concepts of "ecology", "environmentalism", and "conservation" can lead to misjudgments. All of these concepts are heavily influenced by spiritual belief systems leading to culturally specific moral standards that affect practice. According to Krech, the term "ecology" focuses on maintaining a balance within the interaction between humans, animals and the planet. The meaning of "environmentalism" varies according to the culturally imposed boundaries of environmental usage. From a western standpoint, practices of "conservation" focus on sustainability which, in some cases, leads to laws mandating maintenance of land in a pristine or undisturbed state. In contrast, indigenous conversation seeks a balance between use and misuse, or to avoid

waste that leads to extinguishment. Krech is careful to state that indigenous resource management practices were influenced by cultural moral standards based on spiritual beliefs about how nature regenerates. Contemporary western concepts of these aforementioned terms cannot be neatly applied to historical indigenous cultures where both the environmental conditions and level of scientific knowledge about environmental impact differ. As Snow (2001) points out during a critique of Krech's research, what "modern" Americans and others assume they know about sound ecological practice in relation to actual indigenous practice is "firmly rooted in shallow current ideology." Thus, it cannot be assumed that these errors resulted solely from callous or deliberately irresponsible practice, nor can it be assumed that all Indian people prefer to live, or should be relegated to live in primitive conditions in order to maintain an Indian identity.

Global warming, refuse dumping, water contamination and other issues have received a generous amount of press and criticism in recent times with a push to advance technology in order to allow resources usage without further damage to the planet. While both Indians and non-Indians offer criticism about environmental policies and impact, they seem to approach the subject of environment responsibility in a different manner. This results in cultural and political clashes. During one interview, a Northwest Coast tribal leader complained that Indians are ridiculed by PETA, the Sierra Club and GreenPeace for the practice of whaling. Environmental groups believe that whaling should not be allowed. However, whaling was the basis of survival by Northwest Coast Indians for centuries. Currently, whaling has ceremonial as well as practical value to Indians living on the Northwest Coast. From a practical viewpoint it is no different to

them than cattle herding is to non-Indians, leading Indians to wonder why one form of hunting is sanctioned over another.

Indians walk the same fine line between resource availability and survival as non-Indians, and they have similar views that the resources of the earth are meant for their use. However, the approach to use is what defines the difference. Informants spanning ethnic and tribal and enrollment boundaries told me that non-Indians, especially those with a Christian orientation believe that land is something to be conquered and subdued. Scripture is used to justify the notion that they can simply "go out and take." Indians have a different approach. A traditional Indian enrolled in a Northwest Coast tribe told me "We have ceremonies for everything. We pray for and to our food, including spam. We take nothing for granted. My mother prays to the lard she is cooking in. We have to pray at restaurants." This respectful approach is part of the knowledge and awareness that the Animal Spirit Dance seeks to advance with the hope that an awareness that the earth is a living being will decrease exploitation and irresponsible usage. However, there are concerns among Indians that too much focus on this one element may further advance romanticized notions of Indianness that freeze them in time to a "romantic past or irrelevant present." As one enrolled tribal leader told me "My carbon signature is huge." However, like others, he would like to see development of responsible and sustainable technology to help reduce the carbon signature rather than being forced back into an 1800's lifestyle.

Definition of Indianness by Unenrolled Mixed-bloods

In order to compensate their lack of cultural acclimation, many unenrolled mixed-bloods have taken steps to immerse themselves in Indian culture by association with enrolled and culturally acclimated Indians through membership in Indian organizations, attending powwows, and mentoring under a respected ceremonial leader. This association generally exposes them to “Who is Indian and who is not” politics, and as a result, puts them in a defensive position when attempting to define their personal attributes of Indianness. As a result, in contrast to non-Indians, the mixed-blood definition of Indianness becomes more detailed and complex in terms of specific ethnic markers, cultural practice and claims of spiritual awareness.

Enrolled Indians caught in the politics of the Federal Acknowledgment Process (F.A.P.) focus on blood quantum, and cultural and geographical continuity as a means of responding to the many groups and individuals seeking enrollment. By using this criteria, they also hope to prevent depletion of their tribal funds. These are attributes that distant heritage mixed-bloods attempting to fit in with the Indian community are unlikely to obtain, making it difficult for them to gain enrollment and access to already over-stretched tribal funding and land areas. Even for those with no economic motives, mixed-bloods are placed in a position where they must defend their right to access to traditional Indian ceremony. In many social and ceremonial circles, conflicts over various issues may create a competition over who is more Indian in order to legitimize a political position. The defense of their “Indianness” may include what one enrolled Indian defined as building an “Indian cultural résumé”. This enumerates a long list of attributes with the

hope of providing unenrolled mixed-bloods with a more favorable position within the proverbial “who gets to decide,” question over rights of access to resources and activities. However, their definition of their own Indianness generally focuses on the attributes that they believe that they have. Their definition of another person’s lack of Indianness focuses on the elements that the other person lacks.

The term “Wannabee” is generally used to describe people who are trying to promote themselves as an Indian when they are viewed as not truly Indian by the Indian community. Asking mixed-blood individuals to define the term “Wannabee” provides an indication of the specific elements used to define their own Indianness; by what they have versus what someone considered less Indian may lack. It is not unusual for urban-born full-blood Indians to assimilate into mainstream American society to the degree that phenotype features, a tribal card and occasional attendance at a powwow or other Indian event may be the only visible identity marker. Some urban Indians define Indianess¹⁶ based on blood versus lifestyle. However, unenrolled mixed-bloods see things differently. I asked several mixed-blood ceremonial initiates how direct tribal affiliation or blood quantum affected their definition of the term “Wannabee.” Many of them told me that spiritual practice and lifestyle could outweigh blood ties. I have observed that they add ceremonial focus and experience to their cultural résumé as a credential that places them at an equal or higher level than tribal members who don’t focus on ceremony. I heard this

¹⁶ The term “Indianess” refers to Indian identity: the definition of what it means to be an “Indian”, or someone having direct blood and cultural ties to one of many tribes of indigenous peoples who populated the North American continent before the time of Columbus.

sentiment while talking to a female member of a local mixed-blood ceremonial group. Members of this group promote a strong dedication to traditional ceremony with daily morning cleansing prayers and smudging and fairly regular formal ritual including solstice and equinox ceremony. When I asked her if she thought that blood or enrollment defined Indianess she stated:

“No. It’s a cultural thing. But it might have something to do with blood quantum too. But I know full bloods that are not spiritual and have lost the whole meaning of spirit. There non-natives that are walking the Red- Road more or better than full-blood natives. Whole families of them.”

All enrolled Indians I talked with agree that that blood quantum does not necessarily define cultural acclimation. However, they also describe variances in acclimation by stating that Indians can be traditionally or non-traditionally oriented. In contrast, some unenrolled mixed-bloods in defensive positions describe cultural acclimation as an indication that someone is not truly Indian. Definitions of Indians from this group may go beyond an attempt to achieve equal status. Several mixed-bloods told me that they believe that the level of cultural acclimation earned by ceremonial training and practice, or their spiritual sensitivity to the voices and instruction of their Indian ancestors defines them as more Indian than a non-traditional full blood or reservation-born Indian. They give greater weight to cultural acclimation and practice than blood ties or history. This perception was frequently associated with mixed-bloods who promote ceremonial forms as “lost” or “original” forms no longer in practice. Thus, while mixed-bloods lack the direct cultural and historical ties claimed by reservation-born Indians, the new forms of

ceremony jump the cultural and historical gap by connecting them to forms that existed before blood dilution and cultural genocide occurred.

In contrast to the somewhat dubitable economic motives for enrollment exhibited by many enrollment seekers, all enrollment seekers participating in the study, sought enrollment to gain better access to ceremony. Those without direct ties to a reservation frequently form social/ceremonial groups to hold fire circles, sweat lodges and other forms of prayer ritual on privately owned land as a substitute for tribal access. During meals and breaks after ceremony, enrollment policies and the definition of Indianness became a frequent topic of conversation. However, lack of enrollment was discussed as a problem only when expressing frustration with lack of access to reservation based ceremony, or access to exclusive medicine societies that would allow them greater access to culture and acknowledgement of their spiritual talents. There was no indication of desire for economic benefits, casino royalties or mineral rights payments. In fact, a good number within this group expressed absolute disgust towards “wannabees” with this type of motive. As one individual stated “people back on the rez are living in abject poverty. I am not. Why would I want to take money from my own people?”

Conversational topics provide many relevant clues to how both unenrolled and enrolled Indians define Indianness. During social gatherings, Indians trade war stories concerning personal and ancestral history. Among unenrolled Indians, the conversation generally contains a mix of stories about ceremonial events including the ghost dance, sun dance, and governmental impositions that include the cultural genocide during the

boarding school era, broken treaties and environment impact issues related mineral extraction. Discussions of these topics are generally dominated by a mix of publicized historical knowledge with knowledge of incidents experienced by ancestors or relatives. There are generally two or more generations between them and a direct Indian ancestor. While unenrolled individuals have knowledge of Indian history, in most cases, their examples center on descriptions of distant ancestors and politics of unrelated tribes rather than personal experience. As one would expect, those with the greatest dilution in direct blood ties and direct cultural experience illustrate the greatest lack of personal experience, especially with events related to governmental impositions. This lack of personal experience is a key element in the perception by full-bloods and reservation-born Indians that mixed-bloods born in urban areas are not true Indians.

Indian Reactions to Wannabee Claims of Indianness

. Given the cultural genocide of the 1800's and early 1900's, loss of language and forms of ceremonial practice affected almost all tribes in one form or another. As a result, there are variations in the number of cultural elements that established tribes can claim to prove Indianness. Like individuals in the mixed-blood group, when defining Indianness, enrolled Indians focus on elements of Indianness they can prove. It is not uncommon for them to pull out an enrollment card to assert authority over someone who lacks one. However there are two primary differences in their approach to the definition of Indianness: claims to achievement in ceremonial knowledge, and discussion of history.

Among culturally acclimated Indians there is common knowledge that true medicine persons or spiritual leaders will rarely identify themselves as such. It is their

function and acceptance within the community that defines them. They rarely discuss ceremony or spiritual issues outside the ceremony, and when they do, it is rarely a topic of casual conversation. The more acclimated ceremonial initiates become, the more likely they are to acknowledge and follow this practice. However those that are newly exposed and have fewer true claims to Indianness are prone to use claims of spirituality, spiritual knowledge, special dreams, vision, abilities to see and communicate with ancestral spirits, and a virtual travel log of attended events and ceremony as a cultural passport in lieu of a tribal card. These claims may be voiced even within casual conversation when meeting new people. This definition of Indianness holds little credibility among enrollment members. “Lumbee, Wannabee, Gonnabee is what I call them,” a tribal leader and political activist told me ” He further told me that these are people that are determined to claim the title of Indian regardless of gaps in blood line, language and culture. They will go to any extreme to prove that they are Indian.

While attending powwows, and other Indian social gatherings, I’ve observed that people attempt to identify with Indian culture by adopting forms of dress and adornment that they associated with Indian¹⁷. While many enrolled natives adopt a specific form of dress related to their tribe at powwows and ceremony, these elements are demonstrated within specific settings, and not viewed as a single indication of Indianness. When Indians see someone wearing certain items outside of a specific tribal culture or event

¹⁷ Adornment and apparel usually includes items popularized by powwow vendors including turquoise jewelry, ribbon shirts, and plains style chokers. In addition, both women and men grow their hair long or wear it in braids. In some cases woman with brown hair will die their hair black.

they become offended. A tribal leader from a western tribe told me it “starts out with a choker, then emerges to braids and other stuff.” He added that he got so tired of seeing people parading around in chokers that he stopped wearing them. The reaction might be similar to that of a recent religious convert attempting to demonstrate their faith and religious zeal based on the wearing of apparel that, while might provide the perception that they are associated with a particular religion, is inappropriate to wear or use in a social setting. An example might be non-Catholics trying to become a Catholic by wearing a rosary as a necklace at a dinner party. The item would be totally out of place in that setting. And the lack of knowledge of the function of a rosary would disprove rather than prove their cultural acclimation. Some cultural late comers go beyond dress and adornment to begin carrying and using sacred objects and pipes to ceremonies without authorization, or proper knowledge of the function of the object and associated responsibilities for carrying them. While some urban Indians may view this with silent amusement, those with a more traditional orientation, especially ceremonial elders will attempt to correct the problem.

I attended a teaching circle conducted by an enrolled and authorized ceremonial leader where he addressed these concerns to a group of mixed-bloods belonging to a local ceremonial circle. The room was set up in a typical teaching circle structure. Most people sat on cushions on the floor; however, elders and those over fifty including myself were allowed to sit in chairs if needed. Pipe carriers sat within an inner circle closest to the teacher, followed by bundle carriers without pipes in an outer circle. Those without either pipe or bundle sat in the farthest outer circle. While waiting for the teaching to begin, I

was intrigued by the contents of the various bundles while their owners busied themselves arranging an array of colorful objects including colored stones, beaded jars containing sage or tobacco. The jars immediately caught my attention since the patterns looked like they came from India or China rather than from an Indian artisan. The pipes carried by some of the pipe carriers ranged from plain to colorfully beaded. One mixed-blood woman opened a “feather box”¹⁸ and began fondling an eagle feather by stroking the shaft and waving it around like a trophy. I found that curious, since eagle feathers are considered one of the most sacred objects. It is acceptable for enrolled Indians to attach them to powwow eagle staffs, prayer sticks or dance regalia. But they are not supposed to be dropped or touched in a casual manner. In addition, within the continental U.S., ownership and possession of raptor feathers is legal only for tribally enrolled Indians, and she was not in that category.

It appeared that the bundle contents and feather handling also caught the attention of the teacher. He began the teaching by stating that non-natives or people with distant heritage would come to ceremonies and see others sitting with pipes and bundles with “pretty things” in them and decide “I really want one of those.” This would allow them to sit closer to the front and feel like they were part of the group. However, with his admonishment, he was quite careful to add that they were not bad people for doing this. They just needed “to be taught.” He explained how objects selected for a bundle should

¹⁸ Eagle and other raptor feathers are considered sacred and as such must be handled carefully. Generally they are stored within a wrap of red cloth and carried in a “feather box” or wooden case specifically designated for storing feathers. However, I have seen other sacred objects stored in the same box.

be according to prayerful guidance rather than being chosen just because they were colorful and pretty. Carrying a bundle or pipe meant accepting a responsibility because they were sacred objects with power. If the objects were not respected they would lose their power. “They may be taken from you, or they could bring sickness to your family” he told us.

He then told several stories about how arrogance about one’s status or one’s possession of objects could cause one to lose an object like a pipe or an eagle feather. During his younger days, he had been a powwow dancer and was quite proud of the eagle feather he wore with his regalia¹⁹. The feather detached from his regalia and hit the ground, causing it to be split down the middle. If an eagle feather touches the ground at a powwow, a special ceremony must be performed before it can be retrieved and returned to the dancer. In this case, because the feather split, it had to be destroyed, resulting both in embarrassment and a deep feeling of loss. He believed that the loss of the feather was meant as a lesson to admonish his pride. Then he cautioned that if the motive for carrying sacred objects was pride, the same thing could happen to the people in the room. In addition to teaching proper protocol for carrying sacred objects, the teacher illustrated the notion that obtaining and carrying sacred objects might be improperly viewed as another element people add to their Indian résumé. However, ownership alone could not equal or displace, cultural acclimation, time and experience.

¹⁹ Indians use the term “regalia” to describe the attire worn at powwows, ceremonies and other Indian gatherings. The term “costume” used by non-Indians to describe this attire is considered insulting. The term “costume” refers to make believe dress up.

A tribal leader from a northern tribe described a process whereby people attempt to undergo a metamorphosis from non-Indian to Indian during a period of exposure to Indian culture or history. I've heard this tendency jokingly referred to "Instant Indian." The tribal leader told me that he was teaching an Indian Studies program at a local community college. During the course a student told him that she felt like she was Indian. At the end of the 12 week course, she suddenly claimed a linkage with the Cherokee nation, later saying she was part Cherokee. He warned her to be careful about this type of claim and asked for her papers. She could not produce them. But despite that, during finals week, to affirm her affinity, she came in wearing a turban and colonial dress consistent with Cherokee culture during the 1700's and 1800's. This example provides an interesting illustration of the lack of historical connection and knowledge demonstrated by mixed-bloods seeking to connect with ancestral history. Cherokees are known as part of a group of first civilized tribes who attempted to economically and culturally acculturated with "whites." The woman's choice of dress and adornment is the publicized colonial dress that was adopted after this period of acclimation began. Her knowledge includes only what she learned from her course and lacks direct historical connection to Cherokees and Cherokee culture prior to colonial contact.

Definition of Indianness by Enrolled Culturally Acclimated Indians

Reservation-born Indians describe Indianness as "an orientation," "a lifestyle," one that requires direct childhood cultural experience, and at least some degree of knowledge of ancestral language to even comprehend. Cultural orientation is rooted within two concepts that most cultural latecomers cannot obtain: land identity and an

unbroken historical link to conflicts with non-Indians. This link is sometimes seen as synonymous with blood quantum. For example, a Northwest Coast tribal leader stated

“When you get to be 1/8 Indian, the odds you are Indian are remote. There is an orientation, culturally being Indian. It’s a common history of interaction of non-Indians. People with lesser degrees have no history. They do not understand.”

The key point in this statement is having “no history.” In the eyes of reservation-born enrolled Indians, a direct connection to history is a critical element that defines an Indian. I realized this when examining the content of casual social conversations during various ceremonies, especially conversations between people that are newly acquainted. It is typical for Indians meeting other Indians to introduce themselves by identifying their tribe, clan and family. However there are less obvious forms of sharing identity information when casual conversation begins. This was demonstrated during an impromptu social gathering between a group of five people before the May 2010 Animal Spirit Dance. The group included one non-native, two mixed-bloods, and two enrolled reservation-born American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) members. One, a nationally well known Indian political activist had been present during the 1973 Wounded Knee incident. Both reservation-born individuals had attended the A.I.M.-led 1978 Longest Walk to protest congressional bills that would threaten treaty rights. “This is my rez tattoo” the female A.I.M. member said to the activist. She then lifted her sleeve to reveal a scar on her arm from a bullet wound that was one of several that had killed her father during a shootout on the Comanche reservation. That discussion was followed by another story from the activist concerning his experience with an undercover F.B.I. agent during the Wounded Knee incident in the 1970’s. For the A.I.M. members, the definition of Indian

came with shared memories of direct personal history of pain, fear, deprivation and attempts to overcome them.

In other cases I've noted where Indians exchange stories of economic deprivation and social inequality, especially when talking to someone of mixed heritage as a test to see if they have a common background. While exchanging information about tribal affinity, a full blood Indian who was raised on an Oklahoma reservation gave me a detailed list of his childhood living conditions which included lack of electricity and indoor plumbing and other deprivations. I had not been raised on a reservation; however during my childhood, I had spent many of my summers on my aunt's farm where similar conditions existed. This seemed to satisfy him. I've heard similar exchanges between others in an attempt to gain an understanding of their upbringing as a way to claim affinity.

Several Indian elders told me that the degree or lack of personal history impacts the way enrolled Indians' perceive Indianness in others. If someone comes to live on the reservations, learns the culture and language, they become a part of the Indian community, but not Indian per se. "I have no problem with that [someone learning the culture]" one elder told me. "But that doesn't make them an Indian." The man who said this was born and raised on a federally recognized reservation, yet moved to an urban area and adopted a mostly modern American lifestyle. He holds memberships in several Indian organizations with mixed-blood members in addition to working with numerous tribal groups across the country attempting to gain state and federal recognition. He is not

only aware of, but quite vocal on the contradictions in the Federal Acknowledgement Process (F.A.P.), especially where forced dilution of blood and cultural loss occurred due to political policies. I've worked with him on a number of Indian organization projects and have seen that he embraces friendships with people regardless of ethnicity, and has never demonstrated any degree of bigotry. Yet he, like most others enrolled Indians feels the need to set boundaries on the definition of what is Indian or not.

Over the years, I've been told countless times that prior to the 1800's, it was common practice for people to move into an Indian community and in some cases become adopted by the tribe. There was little or no restriction on the title of Indian prior to the Dawes Act, Indian Reorganization Act and other government impositions. When I asked this elder why things have changed so that they don't readily accept distant heritage natives back into the tribe, the answer was insightful. He said that there is a general feeling that there have been several generations since they or their ancestors lived as Indians. Since they have lived as "white," they have benefitted from the perks of American society and have not directly suffered the same prejudices and violence as Indian people. It's a matter of both blood and history. In past conversations, I've heard enrolled Indians who have chosen to remain on reservations offer a stronger opinion. They say that not only are they no longer culturally Indian, because they have not suffered, but also they don't deserve the title.

The term "We're Still Here" has become the title of books, songs, and a virtual battle cry that describes the heroic survival of a people in the face of government policies

resulting in physical, cultural and spiritual genocide. If you haven't personally suffered what they have suffered, you simply don't deserve the title. The western notion of how learning can transfer title does not apply to Indian identity or ceremonial knowledge. You don't learn by reading books or asking questions. You learn by "being there" and "doing."

For some Indians who remain on reservations, especially those with extreme improvised living conditions, even a direct historical link is insufficient for defining Indianness. Acculturation to American society with the associated benefits may provide the perception of deliberate choice to separate oneself from culture. A ceremonial elder told me that he and his family had been born and raised on the Pine Ridge reservation, but had moved to the Virginia area many years ago. Despite his relocation, he has held onto his Lakota cultural beliefs, practices daily ceremony, and become an authorized pipe carrier²⁰. Like many Indians, he lives in two worlds. His home is picture book clean with modern furniture and appliances. He works in a local government office setting wearing appropriate western attire. However his dress also includes Indian ethnic markers including a medicine bag, and waist length hair. He told me that had taken trips back to Pine Ridge to bring supplies and financial gifts. At one point he was told to "Go back to your money. You are not one of us anymore." Enrolled members of both eastern and northern tribes who left to pursue a career in urban areas have told me that when they

²⁰ A pipe carrier is a highly respected position. This is a person who has taken an oath to serve spiritual and ceremonial the needs of the people. They may be called upon day or night to pray or perform ceremony for someone in need.

returned to the reservation to visit relatives, they were chided as being an “apple” or one who is “red on the outside and white on the inside.” I’ve been told by enrolled Indians of multiple tribal affiliations that the Lakota tribe has a rule that prevents children from being enrolled in the tribe unless they are born on the reservation. Life on Pine Ridge as well as many other reservations is one of extreme poverty where the focus is “all about survival.”

There are varying points of view from both inside and outside the Indian community concerning the decision of some Indians to stay on the reservation versus taking steps to better their lifestyle. For some, the desire to stay is motivated by a culturally engrained land identity in addition to concerns over loss of sovereign indigenous rights and culture freedom. For those who remain, one who becomes part of the “wasichu” culture, a rich man’s culture that “takes all the fat,” is no longer Indian. They are “apples,” “red on the outside and white on the inside.”

Racialization of Indianness

Some non-Indian and unenrolled mixed-bloods have suggested that exclusive ceremonial policies are racially motivated. My observations suggest that attempts to control attendance and general ceremonial practice result from a mixture of motives. Group definition generally includes an attempt to differentiate between insiders and outsiders. This may lead to marginalization and exclusiveness (Steven Lukes: 1993:357). Six informants including three enrolled Indians two unenrolled mixed-bloods, and one non-Indian stated that in earlier times the concepts of race and blood quantum were unknown among Indian people. There is a common perception that race is a culturally

constructed concept and blood quantum is a practice invented during the Indian Reorganization Act by The U.S. Government and has contributed to exclusionary policies. Prior to colonial contact it was common practice for outsiders to join a group and become one of “the people.” A Lakota elder described the following process:

“People several hundred years ago, whether you were Indian or not they would ask you what is your heart saying. The person said, I’m Indian. From that day you were Indian. When a family adopted you it was as if you were physically born to her.”

From a western perspective, the term race is closely associated with skin color as illustrated by usage of the term “blacks” in association with Negroes and “redskins” in association with Indians. Among Indians, the terms and metaphors used to describe non-Indians are more complex and not always associated with skin color. In current times, the term “white” has frequent usage. However the usage and meaning “white” has changed over time, and in current times, it varies depending on the subject of discussion. As an example, the meaning of the Lakota word “wasichu” has become adopted across tribal boundaries when describing non-Indians. In the 1800’s, the original term was used to describe one who was greedy, a “fat eater,” “one who takes all the fat,” or one who takes the best part for himself. Its literal definition, similar to many words or phrases Indians used to name their own people, describes a behavior rather than a skin color or physical attribute.

Integration of the concept of race into Indian culture, demonstrated by the term “white” when discussing the various behaviors and actions of non-Indians, illustrates how a form of stereotyping has occurred over time. However, the limitations of the English

language can lead to confusion over usage of the term “white.” In current times, I’ve heard the term “white” used interchangeably to describe people with white skin, and a government policy, lifestyle or practice. For example “white medicine” refers to the non-holistic western approach to medicine regardless of whether the doctor is European, Chinese, Guatemalan or African. Christianity may be described as a “white” religion even though the religion has members and preachers with African or Asian descent. It is also common for enrolled reservation-born and culturally acclimated Indians that have inherited white skin from a European relative to use the term “wasichu” when describing non-Indian behavior. They do not include themselves in that category even though their skin may be white and their hair color red or light brown.

When determining the extent to which racial concepts lead to exclusionary policies of ceremonial attendance, the interchangeable usage of the term white can lead to erroneous assumptions. The term “white” may used interchangeably when describing non-Indians with white skin, who may not necessarily have attacked or offended Indians, or the behavior of someone who is non-native who acts disrespectful towards Indians. Thus while there is a certain degree of racialization of the term Indianness in relation to the definition of cultural differences, the concept of race within Indian circles is more complex than the western concept. And as shall be shown, attempts to exclude “whites” or other non-Indians is not simply a matter of racial prejudice. The literal meaning of the term “wasichu” provides insight into this distinction. Concerns leading to exclusionary policies are based on both historical and contemporary experience with the disrespectful behavior of non-Indians towards Indians and Indian culture. And the concern extends

beyond tribal and cultural borders. As will be discussed, the Sedona Sweat Lodge incident and similar copy-cat ceremonies generate a great deal of concern for the safety of anyone attempting to practice sacred ceremonies without proper training and adherence to protocol. Thus, the concern cannot be easily dismissed as a matter of race.

3. The Animal Spirit Dance – Practice and Purpose

Definitions - Symbology and Ritual

My discussion with several ceremonial leaders during an attempt to understand the symbolic nature of the Animal Spirit Dance from a western perspective, especially in relation to other Indian ceremonies, was enlightening to say the least. Indians view things from a different perspective. I was immediately reminded of Edith Turner's (1997:1) exhortation that some ritual aspects should not be easily dismissed as "a matter of metaphor, and symbol or even psychology." Given the dual audience of readership for this thesis, it is important to explain how the terms symbol, ritual and ceremony are positioned between the native and western perspectives.

Victor Turner (1967:50-51) has suggested that a ritual is a common custom that can be distilled or condensed to identify many individual customs and "natural regularities" and norms. He uses the term "symbol" (1967:19) to describe each of the distilled ritual units with properties of "polysemy" and "multi-vocality" to describe how dominant ritual symbols may have multiple meanings. The dominant (1967:28-29) ritual symbols may be further described as having a "polarization of meanings." The "ideological pole" describes moral values or social order promoted by the ritual. The

“sensory pole” describes and relates to natural and physiological phenomenon used as a focal point to promote desired norms or sociological change.

One major difference between the western and Indian viewpoint includes the usage of the term ritual itself. While discussing N.A.C. ceremony, a Canadian Indian sweat lodge leader told me that Indians prefer to use the term “ceremony” in place of the term “ritual.” From a native viewpoint, a “ceremony” describes a group of individual events. Each event has a specific purpose that conforms to and incorporates specific values and goals that define the function of the ceremony overall. Community meals, prayer circles, sunrise ceremony, water ceremony, sweat lodge ceremony and talking circles are included as component events of the Animal Spirit Dance ceremony. Some events including the sweat lodge ceremony and water ceremony may be practiced as stand-alone ceremonies in other settings. Thus they are generally called ceremony rather than ritual. However, when non-Indians with a western viewpoint hear the term ceremony used to describe a sub-event, it leads to some confusion about the function, meaning and importance, and how it incorporates within the function of the primary ceremony. Within this section I generally use the native naming of these practices which may include the term “ceremony” versus “ritual.” However, I may refer to a component event as a ritual.

The usage of the term “symbol” creates another point of separation between native and western viewpoints. The western usage of the term attempts to designate and identify people, creatures, objects or practices that represent an idea, norm or core value by association. Indians, on the other hand, view the western designated symbols as more

literal than symbolic. The literal and practical aspects of ceremony must be taken into consideration in order to fully comprehend the function and purpose of Indian ceremony.

Function and Structure

Most Indian ceremony is a community event structured to serve a specific purpose such as healing, community prayer, honoring or preparation. As will be discussed one of the outcomes of the Animal Spirit Dance includes enhanced community unity and promotion of traditional values of environmental awareness, which fits within Turner's (1967:28-29) "ideological pole" of symbolic meaning. The practice of ceremony is a process of steps, beginning with planning and preparation progressing to the practice of each ritual. Thus, the best way to understand the practice, purpose and meaning of the Animal Spirit Dance is to describe each step from preparation to the performance of the ritual. The ceremonial elders who have invited me to various Indian ceremonies over the years have stated that one cannot expect to gain understanding while sitting on the sidelines. One leader of a local Indian organization was very clear about this while answering questions about powwow protocols. "Don't just be *at* the powwow. Be *in* the powwow. Get out in the arena and experience for yourself." The same holds true for ceremony. It is through the practice and experience of each preparatory step that one begins to understand the purpose and meaning of ceremony. In an attempt to enhance the reader's understanding, I will explain many of the preparatory steps from a first person participant's frame of reference.

Preparations

My experience with the Animal Spirit Dance stretches over a period of two years and includes attendance at three ceremonies in two different states. At two of the Virginia-based ceremonies I was asked by those hosting the dance to help with the preparations, which was not only a great honor, but an opportunity for learning related to my own cultural journey. The dance was scheduled for Saturday evening. However, participants and special guests began arriving four days before the event. For many Indian ceremonies participants begin their personal preparation of prayer and focus of thought the day they commit to attend the ceremony. And that may be a year in advance. Every ceremony and each ritual that is part of the ceremony has a specific function and meaning. One must be properly focused on that function and meaning, or negative thoughts and resulting actions could create problems for the participant and the others around. Practical preparation including abstinence from drugs and alcohol, in addition to preparation of the grounds, begins four days before.

There was much work to be done in preparation for the ceremony. I was counseled that with every step I must think and act according to instruction from the elders guiding me. Two of us spent the first morning of preparation gathering stones for the ceremonial fire circle and sweat lodge fire. A Buddhist monk we'd met through the Long Walk II event had revealed a special place near a Buddhist monastery where we could gather stones needed for the sweat lodge and dance fires. Stones were among the first creations on the planet. We call them the grandmothers and grandfathers because they have life and deserve special respect. When using objects from mother earth, one

must never just “go and take.” We would pray and ask for guidance, then offer tobacco in gratitude to each of those grandmothers and grandfathers as they revealed themselves, making them available for selection. They choose us rather than us choosing them.

Later that afternoon, four of us went down to the lower farm pasture to cut saplings for the dance arbor and fire. Like the stones, they reveal themselves to us. In most cases we choose branches or trunks that were clustered too close together. Crowding compromises the health of the trees, thus pruning and trimming makes them strong as well as providing the supplies that we need. It’s a cooperative effort and we offered each branch and trunk tobacco in gratitude for its offering.²¹

The next three days were spent preparing the grounds which included selecting the space for the sweat lodge, and arbor, then performing the construction. Much of this work was performed by the dancers as they began arriving. There was much socializing and sharing of food throughout this time with friends catching up with old friends as well as making new ones. Ceremony is a community event, one that brings people together. The evening before the event there was a community meal and gathering among those who had already arrived. Some retired early since Saturday would be a very long day. However Friday evening the ceremonial fire was lit and the designated fire keepers must keep watch over the fire to be sure that it stays lit. It must burn from Friday evening until Sunday when the ceremony ends. For some there would be little rest.

²¹ The ecological approach and mindset we followed offers another example of Shepard Krech’s (1999:22-26) discussion on the differences between western and Indian approaches to conservation.

Communal Meals

Ceremony generally includes one or more food rituals which may include a ceremonial food offering and/or a communal food offering. Ceremonial food offerings are offered to ancestral spirits as a token of respect and to signal that their presence is welcome. For example, before a communal meal, a designated person will take a small bit of each type of food on the menu, compile it on a “spirit plate” that is offered to one or more ancestral spirits. If the ceremony is a funerary memorial, the plate may be offered to the deceased along with cigarettes or other items they enjoyed in life. Preparation of the spirit plate is meant to welcome the ancestral spirit to the gathering and help maintain ancestral ties.

Most Indian gatherings including powwows provide some sort of communal meal for the participants. An elderly New York Indian discussed a phenomenon that I can personally validate from my own experience when he stated. “I can’t remember attending any Indian ceremony without some sort of food served, even if it’s only a taste.” For example, Native American Church (N.A.C.) ceremonies serve a ceremonial platter during the ceremony followed by a communal breakfast and lunch the following day. The food represents life, and the breakfast which usually includes pastries represents the sweetness of life. It is customary to serve a meal after any sweat lodge activity. Depending on the lodge, the meal may be supplied by the host or a potluck collective by the participants. Meals are also customary at informal gatherings and even business meetings, and the subject of joking that the food is the motivation for attendance. While helping me prepare for a property management meeting at my home for a local Indian organization, my co-

host joked “If you feed them they will come.” All joking aside, communal meals represent both life and the culture of sharing, which is considered necessary for the life and strength of the community. At potluck meals there is an expectation that each person will bring what they can according to their circumstances. If someone is unable to contribute or contributes little, their lack is balanced by the overall abundance of the others.

There were several communal potluck meals including Friday evening, Saturday afternoon and evening that served as a means of relaxation and networking opportunities where participants exchanged contact information or cultural knowledge. However, the ritual that made the Animal Spirit Dance unique compared to most other ceremonies was the ceremonial food offered to honor and nourish the spirits of the animals represented at the dance. Foods including various types of berries and meats were gathered to match the diets of each specific animal. The food offering represented a reciprocation of the service of animals to man, and preservation of the symbiotic nature of existence necessary for preservation of diversity and life on the planet.

Sunrise Ceremony

I arrived Saturday morning at 5:30 A.M. I could hear the sound of drumming and chanting. A Buddhist monk had started drumming at 4:30 as was his normal custom. However, here he served as the community alarm clock to help ensure everyone was up by sunrise. He was the only monk able to attend this year although last year there were three. They had joined us on the Longest Walk II, a multi-ethnic event led by members of the American Indian Movement and other Indians and supporters as an attempt to

generate awareness and respect for the planet, sacred sites and all peoples and creatures. These types of events draw a mosaic of people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However they all come together under a common cause or ideology. We'd made many new friends there and had helped support the walk. So when the Animal Spirit Dance came to Virginia, the monks returned the favor with their support. Early risers, a mix of non-Indians, mixed-bloods and reservation-born Indians were walking contemplatively around the grounds and greeting each new arrival. Several respected tribal elders had been invited but were still inside the farmhouse. "They must be on western Indian time²²," someone joked.

Just before dawn, a respected tribal elder who had been invited for the event led a prayer ceremony, greeting the day with a song and drum. This sunrise ritual varies depending on the person asked to lead it. On one chilly morning at another Animal Spirit Dance we "drummed up the sun," singing and drumming until the sun appeared over the horizon. However on that morning the leader said "I forgot about that mountain there. I wondered if that sun was ever gonna come up." Someone replied "I guess the sun is on Indian time today also. aaayyyy.²³" and everyone laughed. It was a serious ceremony, but there was a lot of joking and chiding throughout the day. This was a healing ceremony and "sometimes laughter is the best medicine."

²² Indians are said to be on "Indian Time" because they do things when it seems appropriate, which may or may not follow any set schedule. This may have varied meaning depending on the culture. Among the Navajo, "Indian Time" means any time the same day. If you arrive anytime the same day then you are still on time.

²³ "aaayyyy" is more of an expression than a word. It is used to let the people know that someone is making a corny joke.

Mixing and Mingling

There were a variety of other ceremonial events occurring throughout the day each drawing different groups of people. The reasons for not attending varied and included health issues, cultural background, or just simple personal preference. Although several tribal groups have adopted variations of the Lakota Inipi sweat lodge, and others may have historically performed variations on their own, there are some Indians whose tribal background does not include the usage of sweat lodges for any reason other than medicinal. Some tribal cultures including traditional Cherokees and Navajo frown on the co-ed attendance of some Lakota and Ojibwe versions that have become popular including the sweat lodge at the Animal Spirit Dance. They do not condemn the practice, they just choose not to participate because “it’s not my way, but I respect that it is yours.” Those not participating in ceremonial events spent their time talking and socializing with other attendees. These events are a strong source of networking with other Indians, a means of bringing people together.

Water Ceremony – Gathering of Nations and Community

The water ceremony was meant to help us focus on the importance of community and cooperation. Each person who attends is asked to bring a small vial of water from where they live. As they walk around the fire they are asked to pour their vial into a large bowl so that all the waters mingle into one body. Water may be understood through Victor Turner’s (2001) concept of a dominant symbol at the sensory pole; a symbol of life, critical for our survival. Sharing the water represents Turner’s concept of a symbol at

the ideological pole where sharing our resources as a community serves to aid survival and strengthen life.

There are different variations of this ceremony depending on the tribe. This ceremony was lead by a tribal leader from the Northwest Coast and ran things a little different than expected by those who have attended other types of traditional ceremony. The circle is common to most Indian ceremonies. A good number of Indians move around a ceremonial circle in a clockwise fashion, mimicking the movement of the sun. Other Indians including those from certain east coast tribes may move counter clockwise, depending on the ceremony. After the required smudging as each person entered the east door of the ceremonial circle, the leader of this ceremony requested that we enter and move to the right in a counterclockwise fashion before finding a seat. This movement was repeated when participants were asked to move around the circle to bring their vials. Given that a clockwise movement is more common in fire circles, the counterclockwise movement created some confusion. But all was taken in stride with typical Indian humor. As people started to move to the left instead, someone would joke in good natured jesting, “no your other left Jake” and everyone would laugh.

As each person would approach the leader, he would dip a fan into water, then touch each of the participants to cleanse them. The fan was made of blue feathers from what he described as a water bird. As I approached him, he dipped the fan and touched my head, chest and arms. I started to move on but he said “stop.” I froze, thinking that I must have broken protocol in some unknown manner. “Turn around” he instructed. I froze again, wondering if he was going to make me start over or leave the circle. As I did,

he repeated the motion on my back, hips and legs. "Turn around again" he instructed, and by this time I was really in a ponder. Then he turned to address the crowd. "Last year Kathleen was extremely ill. She's much better now but I just gave her a booster shot." Everyone in the circle including me started laughing. "Laughter is good medicine" he told me as I went back to my seat. I found myself smiling and less tense the remainder of the day. Later, several women I didn't know came up to joke about his gesture and inquire about my illness, comparing notes, as they also had recovered from an illness. I've become close friends with one of these women as our introduction opened a door for sharing information about alternative forms of medicine. Throughout the day I noticed many people making new friends and exchanging information. The sharing of the water is not simply a symbol of the Indian core value of sharing. The ceremony served a practical purpose; bringing people together to share their resources which may include various types of knowledge or simple friendship.

Sweat Lodge – Cleansing and Preparation

Sweat lodges were used in historical times by various tribes for various purposes including ceremonial and medicinal. In current times, the sweat lodge has become a common adopted ceremony for communal prayer, cleansing and healing. Enrolled Indians across tribal boundaries living in urban areas have adopted the practice as a means of maintaining cultural ties and practice of their tribal belief system without having to travel across country back to their home reservation. Unenrolled mixed-bloods have also adopted the ceremony as a means of practicing Indian ceremony despite exclusionary tribal policies. In the last five years, I've been made aware of ten different

lodges in remote rural settings on privately owned properties across Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia. I've attended ceremonies in four of those locations. The protocols and practice vary according to each tribal version of the ceremony. However, there are certain common protocols shared between cultures. The presence or lack of these common protocols can serve as the basis for instant judgments about the authenticity of the ceremony and the person leading it. There were several differences noted concerning the Animal Spirit Dance which led to a degree of controversy.

Similar to other Indian ceremonies, the Animal Spirit Dance dancers are required to undergo a pre-ceremony cleansing. The sweat lodge serves that purpose both symbolically and literally. A sweat lodge ceremony is not just a symbol of cleansing preparation. Within the ceremony there is a literal physical cleansing. Temperatures inside the lodge can match or exceed that of any health club sauna resulting in enormous volumes of secretions from the body's sweat glands. Most general health text books will tell you that the skin's sweat glands rival the kidneys as a means of cleaning impurities from the body. Indians have used sweats in both ritual and medicinal lodges as a means of healing for centuries. From a ceremonial standpoint, the sweat also symbolizes rebirth. Ceremonial leaders and others I've attended sweats with have described a sweat ceremony as a rebirth where the lodge represents a mother's womb and the steam represents the water within the womb. However the ceremony does not simply "represent" or "symbolize" a rebirth or transformation.²⁴ When you enter the lodge they

²⁴ See also Bucko (1998) for a discussion of this belief.

believe that you are literally reborn much in the same way that some Christians believe that you are literally reborn into Christ during a water baptism.

The lodge protocol for the Animal Spirit Dance follows a slightly different practice than most other traditional lodges. There must be one sweat for the dancers, but there may be separate sweats if other people wish to attend. Many traditional sweat lodges are built low and accommodate less than twelve people. However, to accommodate larger numbers of people attending ceremonies with open attendance policies, lodges are built larger and wider. The Animal Spirit Dance lodge is built taller to allow people to stand up and dance within the lodge if they feel so inclined. It was also noted that for most lodges, the door faces east toward the rising sun, as do most entrances to ceremonial arbors. In a few cultures they face west. This door faced north which caused some confusion for those who are used to following sweats with east facing doors. The reason given for the variance was that this lodge followed the practice of the dance originator's father.

The Animal Spirit Dance

The circle is the most natural form of life. Life is a circle spanning from life to death to afterlife; the earth and planets form circles, tree trunks and plant stalks form a cylindrical circle, and the life-giving sun moves in a circle. Most ceremonial structures including the sweat lodge form a circle. In a similar manner, the dance occurred within a circular arbor constructed from a woven wall of tree branches and evergreen. At the center of the circle there was a fire pit where a ceremonial fire would be lit the night before the ceremony and burn until the morning after. Fire serves as both a symbolic and

literal source of energy necessary for the function of ceremony. A specially designated fire-keeper must watch over the fire to ensure that it did not go out or create a breach in energy flow. People were invited to bring chairs, with the chairs arranged in a circle around six feet away from the outer edge of the arbor. When the dancers entered the arbor, they walked clockwise, following the movement of the sun in the space between the outer wall and the chairs before entering the center area of the circle. A drum was positioned near the fire with chairs for four singers.

The ceremony started several hours after sunset after all the attendees had been seated. The ceremony started with drumming and singing, followed by an introduction to the dance by the dance originator. “Over the years we have forgotten the animals. We have stopped respecting the animals” he told us as shadowy figures began entering the east door of the arbor. Two people carrying a buffalo hide over them entered first, followed by people wearing bear, wolf and cougar skins. The people carrying the buffalo walked upright, while the people wearing the other skins walked like “four leggeds²⁵,” crawling on hands and knees. In historical animal dances including the bear, buffalo and eagle dances, the dancers symbolize the animal and in some cases are believed to accept or allow the spirit of that animal to inhabit their body.

Historical dances have varying purposes, usually meant to honor the animal. From a western perspective using Victor Turner’s (2001) view, within the Animal Spirit Dance, the animals represent a dominant symbol at the sensory pole, and their presence within

²⁵ In various forms of Indian stories, during communication, the Indians and animals would refer to animals as “four leggeds” and humans as “two leggeds.”

the dance represents the ideological pole. The dance itself honors the animal and stresses the importance of the delicate balance of life demanding that humans learn to coexist with and respect other living creatures. I've been told that "they don't need us but we need them." There is a widely held belief among Indians that animals taught early man how to live. Humans learned what to eat, how to hunt and how to survive by watching animals. Thus, they are not only a food source, they are our teachers. They serve to help humans and deserve our respect. However, from a native perspective, the usage of the term symbol in relation to the animal seems misplaced. The animal is said to literally inhabit the body of the dancer and serves a literal healing and teaching function.

Within this dance, the animals function as both teachers and healers. Using their animal instinct, the animals would seek out people needing their help, emotional or physical. As the animals passed by, people would stroke the skins and reach out to the animal. An exchange took place where the animal would absorb whatever negative emotion or illness was troubling the person. A "wing man" would follow the animal with a smudge pot, continually fanning the animal with sage in order to cleanse it of the absorbed illness. The exchange had a literal and physical effect on some of the dancers. I noticed on more than one occasion where an animal would become shaky and weak. "Can you make it out?" I heard one wing man ask. The animal moved outside the arena and proceeded to vomit in order to purge himself of whatever negativity he had absorbed from the person he tried to help.

At one of the dances I attended, the bear chose me. It stood up and pulled me up with it. In an uncanny manner, the female bear began clawing near the location of a prior

cancer surgery. The bear then pulled me into a bear hug and drew me further into the arena where it danced with me in what one observer described as a “wrestle waltz” for several minutes. I was almost a foot taller than the small woman under the bear skin. After we stopped dancing I heard someone say “For a few minutes I wasn’t sure who was going to win that wrestling match” and everyone including me laughed.

At some point in the dance, the person conducting the dance asked everyone to stand and form a circle. We went through various motions of putting our right or left hand on the shoulder of the person in front of us. Then we started walking in spiral circles. At some point we reversed, using the other hand and moving in another direction. As the lines walked faster as faster or “whipped around,” it became difficult to keep up. Some people got separated, a few fell down, but everyone was laughing. While watching the expressions and body language of the people it was obvious that the dance served the important function of helping people shed emotional walls. One never ended up where one started. Many played a sort of “musical chairs” getting back to their places, sometimes meeting, talking and sitting with different groups of people. Often, when people choose sitting places, it can become a guarded place of personal space. The “whip dance” has a tendency to rupture the guarded boundaries so that people begin to interact with others. One attendee told me:

“I thought it was interesting that we did the whip dance. That loosened things up and kept it from getting too intense. It gave people a time to take a break and laugh. It was disoriented as to where I was in the circle. So I just found a chair and sat down. I didn’t know where I was before.”

4. Perceptions of the Dance and the Participants

Perceptions of Purpose

Some ceremonies may be private. However, many Indian ceremonies are community events with an intended purpose of strengthening community and extended family ties. Some ceremonies including sweat lodges, Native American Church (N.A.C.) ceremonies, funerary memorial ceremonies and the Ghost Dance also have a healing component. In sweat lodges and N.A.C. ceremonies prayers are offered for people mentioned by the participants, and in some cases, the participant may need healing and is given special attention by the ceremonial leader and other participants. I've been told by individuals who have observed or attended contemporary forms of the Ghost Dance that it served as a form of emotional and spiritual healing for those who lost ancestors during the 1800's, similar to the function of funerary memorial ceremonies.

The Animal Spirit Dance focuses both on community and healing. However, the animal presence is also meant to educate the participants concerning the relatedness of all beings and elements on the planet as well as a need to recognize animals for the manner in which they have aided human survival. Animals are a frequent subject of traditional story telling where they are described as teachers and healers. Within the context of the Animal Spirit Dance, the animal presence becomes a focal point for the common

functions of community, healing and education. A mixed-blood woman belonging to a local ceremonial circle told me:

“In an animal dance, with animals that are here or have come before. Animals were the first here on mother earth and have the knowledge of all things. Get in tune with the ancient ones the animals that came before, our spirit guides. Especially as a spirit guide. Not all but some people have animals or totems that guide them. Some have an animal in their spirit name. Sometimes we are like a reflection of that animal. The way the animal acts can be brought out in your personality. They teach us things, how to live, how to accept what is given to you. They don't ask for anything they just receive what is needed to survive. We can learn from them to not take things for granted to accept what is given to us. Animals are always teaching. To be part of an animal dance is to share knowledge with others. If I have knowledge of a deer and someone has the knowledge of a bear it is nice to share knowledge of their spirit ways, of their special force about you. Like being one with an animal, it can happen, you feel their essence or aura. In a dance situation you can share that essence with an animal which may be linked to another persona round you. That's one of those things that is hard to explain or put into words.”

Animal Symbology

The common usage of the terms symbol and symbology generally refers to an object that represents another by comparison. As I was reminded by the dance leader, the usage of the term in relation to the purpose or function of the animals within the Animal Spirit Dance, at least from an Indian perspective is misplaced. From a practical perspective, the human dancers come into the arbor wearing the skins, and mimicking the movements of the animals that they represent. However, from an Indian perspective, the dancers don't represent the animals. They are the animals. The human dancers host the spirits of the animals, and use the animal instinct and spirit power to seek out those who need healing. During one of the informal talking circles, one mixed-blood middle-aged woman described the animal behavior as similar to the way that service dogs are being

trained to sense blood sugar fluctuations with impending seizures and sniff out cancer cells. While talking with me about how the animals heal, another mixed-blood woman with waist length braided hair in traditional Cherokee tier dress stated” The bear always seems to know what area of my body needs attention, even without saying.... The animals take care of it. I feel renewed and to me that is a healing. And I have hope in the future.” However, based on my observations in addition to the claims of the dance originator, these animals not only sense negative energy, “they take it away.”

It is not uncommon in Indian ritual for a healer or object to serve as an intermediary to absorb negative energy or illness as a method of healing. For example, during a Navajo healing ceremony, an individual may be asked to sit within a sand painting which is later destroyed in order to carry away the illness. I’ve been told that traditional Lakota healers may suck out an illness through a straw or draw it into their bodies and then cast away the illness. In a similar manner, the animal dancers absorb the negative energy. Then the wing people that follow them with smudge bowls remove it so that the energy does not harm anyone. Smudging is a practice where sage or another botanical is burned within an abalone shell or other type of ceremonial bowl. The smoke is believed to have cleansing properties that carry away negativity as the smoke rises.

While this practice of healing may seem like smoke and mirrors to some, supporters of these types of events are quite quick to tell you otherwise. One female sweat-lodge leader told me that a serious heart problem diagnosed before attending a N.A.C. ceremony and a private ceremony from a western tribal elder totally disappeared

to the bafflement of her doctors. A mixed-blood Cherokee woman told me that a large tumor diagnosed via a CT scan also disappeared after a healing ceremony. A non-Indian breast cancer survivor with stage-4 metastases attributed her total recovery to the advice and ceremony from traditional native healers.

Informants use the terms “energy” and “spirit” almost interchangeably to describe the source of healing, depending on their perception. I’ve been told that illnesses may result from negative energy projected from people with negative attitudes. Others have stated that there are malevolent spirits expressing negative energy. From a western perspective, the concepts are difficult to comprehend. The distinguished anthropologist Edith Turner has performed a body of research on ritual healing and offers some insight from her own experience:

Energy was not the right word for the blob that I saw coming out of the back of a Ndembu woman; it was a miserable object, purely bad, without any energy at all, and much more akin to a restless ghost. One thinks of energy as formless, but when I ‘saw’ in the shamanic mode those internal organs, the organs were not ‘energy’. They had form and definition...The old-fashioned term, ‘spirit manifestation,’ is much closer. These manifestations are the deliberate visitations of discernable forms that have the conscious intent to communicate, to claim importance in our lives. As for ‘energy’ itself, I have indeed sensed something very much like electrical energy when submitting to the healing passes of women adept in a mass meeting of Spiritists in Brazil (Edith Turner:1997:4)

Turner’s description of the “blob” of energy is similar to the observation from a northern based tribal council member describing an event at a N.A.C. meeting. It is not unusual or frowned upon for someone to feel nauseous and vomit after partaking of the “medicine.” N.A.C. members believe that nausea is an indication of bad energy or illness, and vomiting cleanses the body. The tribal member told me that when one man vomited, he

saw a “black blob” of energy come out of him and believed that was negative energy being expelled.

The structure of the dance aids the animals in dissolution of negative energy during the whip dance, where all participants and animal dancers dance in long winding lines inside the arbor. People stand front to back in long lines, connected by placing their arms on the person’s shoulder in front of them. The person conducting the dance will have them move around in a winding circular movement. The lines move faster and faster until people have to hustle to keep up. By the time they stop most people are breathing hard and laughing and joking with the people next to them. This is believed to stir both good and bad energy by forcing people to let go of their fronts and shields.” As the Animal Dance leader stated:

“It stirs up energy and throws it off. The wing people clean it up. Everyone is doing their part. Everyone has to dance in the whip. Animals and people dance, sickness and negative things are thrown off. Bad thoughts are the other side of the positive. You can’t survive without negative. It holds things together and allows things to flow. [The dance] throws off the bad thoughts that cause sickness. Evil we throw off. Stir the pot. What rises we let go. When people do the dance they laugh. Laughter is the best medicine. We don’t laugh in front of strangers but we do with friends.”

The person conducting the dance and the animals may lead several sections of the lines and assist people in keeping up. Within the Whip Dance, the animals become as teachers and leaders as they lead people into an activity that removes them from their comfort zone where they must interact and dance with others. Dancing in these lines positions people together with people they may not know. And when they return to their seats they

may end up sitting in a different place among strangers. I have seen many new friendships form during the dance and after new seating arrangements. So by the time the dance is finished, the “strangers” they were laughing in front of have become “friends.”

Perceptions of Function and Outcome

Community and Cultural Continuity

Among Indians, community and ceremony are inseparable components. A ceremony is meant to strengthen the community, and the validation of purpose and practice is demonstrated by the support of the community. All participants in the study stated that they view community strength as a valid and functioning purpose of the Animal Spirit Dance. However, the manner in which it should serve that function was a matter of controversy between enrolled Indians and others.

There is a common perception that all early forms of religion were valid and similar. One respected elder and teacher stated that there were many ways for doing things, but they were all the same on the surface. He compared viewing ritual practice to viewing an onion. When you “peel back the skin, it’s all the same underneath, just like the skin colors of man. When you peel back the skin you have a human underneath.” Despite the common origins, there is the common belief that westernized forms of religion have gotten off track by diminishing the importance of environmental respect, holistic approaches to healing and animal communication. It may be that the evangelical outreach of Christianity has become so engrained in American ideology to the point that whenever groups promote a religious practice or belief system, observers expect an invitation to join. However, the phrase “Indians don’t proselytize or recruit” is becoming

so common that I expect to see it on a bumper sticker in the near future. In their attempts to share their culture, Indians are seeking to educate, break down stereotypes and enhance tolerance, not recruit new members. They expect people to take the knowledge back to their own people and promote knowledge within their own cultural setting. In doing so, they help to identify common constructive values that all groups could share. This would ultimately serve to strengthen a global community. However this approach promotes a certain degree of separatism in cultural practice. The global unity they seek to produce results from tolerance and understanding rather than turning everyone into an Indian.

My questionnaire asked for feedback on the effectiveness or validity of numerous other forms of religion and spiritual belief systems. All expressed a belief that most other belief systems were beneficial for the specific group that they served. There were very few negative statements. Two enrolled but mixed-blood Indians who had acclimated to Indian culture late in life stated that they had also searched out other forms of religion in an attempt to gain new insight and understanding into others' belief systems. However, it was also stated that there were valid reasons why there were differences. One sweat lodge leader stated:

“I was always taught that God gave each set of people specific instructions, language, religion, cultural and he made these unique to the various people. I've always respected traditional religions and cultures, not these new age cults but religions and traditions practiced for thousands of years.”

Several enrolled Indians discussed the tendency among Christians when someone disagreed with a preacher or doctrine, to “jump ship” and either create a new religion, or join a different one “regardless of whether their friends and family are still there....” One

male ceremonial elder made the observation that they would then “go here and go there” in an endless search for truth and meaning that they never seemed to find. In earlier times, Indians depended on the community for survival as well as an understanding of right and wrong. However, as another traditionally oriented enrolled female western tribal member illustrated, breaking away from tradition creates havoc both for the community and the individual. It was stated that even if there are problems, or a member or leader did something wrong, rather than jumping ship they should stay and help resolve the problem.

“Religion is only the means by which you are speaking to the creator. It’s their means as a community to pray to the creator. Whether we pray in a circle or church, it is still a community coming together of a shared faith to ask for forgiveness. How can the request, or why should the request stop because someone else did something outrageous. I would say that in times of grief and illness and need and financial struggle, or hardship, that is the time to turn to your faith. Because the only way you are going to get that healing is from the creator.”

Several ceremonial elders indicated that one of the common elements demonstrated while seeking cultural truth or attempts to restore ceremony is that the resulting practice may be eclectic. Some tribal groups attempting to gain state or federal recognition or cultural identity will mix and match elements from various tribes like the Lakota sweat lodge or sun dance creating a pan-Indian culture that they represent as their tribal culture. Among enrolled Indians this generates the same perception as hobbyist Indians who attempt to build dance regalia using multiple tribal identity markers. For example, one may see a woman wearing a Lakota Indian style buckskin dress adorned by a Navajo squash blossom necklace and purses, or knife shields with Ojibwe bead designs. To an enrolled Indian the outfit looks more like a patchwork quilt than regalia. It was

stated: “Mixing and matching elements from different tribes and ceremonies is frowned upon by many traditional enrolled Indians. While some are more tolerant of cultural adoption and don’t care which you choose, “they just want you to be true to a specific culture.”

Unfortunately, this expectation can create a complicated picture with mixed-bloods with multiple blood lines that include a mix of Indian and mixed European ancestry. Most non-Indians and unenrolled mixed-bloods seeking knowledge of Indian culture were raised in households that did not embrace Indian religious belief systems. Those interested in revival forms of ceremony are attempting to jump a historical and cultural gap in order to connect their system of orientation with an Indian cultural system that existed in earlier times. Indians believe that if individuals want to reconnect with distant culture, they should reconnect with the culture of their ancestors. Maintaining ancestral connections are central to Indian culture. Many rituals include a “calling of the ancestors” to summon spirits of ancestral spirits for honoring and guidance. To ignore any part of their ancestry is akin to turning their back on their ancestors and is believed to compromise the strength of their ancestral community. Thus, in order to accommodate the expectation, a mixed-blood is expected to carry and honor all elements of their ancestral past. However, they must be careful to segregate them during specific cultural practice.

5. Authentication and Acceptance of New Ceremony

This study illustrates that the acceptance of new or unfamiliar forms of ceremony is a process that occurs over time in response to the needs and feedback of the people who come in contact with it. The process and elements used by non-native people to validate ceremony vary widely from those used by Indians. Those less culturally acclimated tend to rely on more western ideologies and have little understanding of the traditional ceremonial protocols. This leads to some of the friction when non-natives or less acclimated mixed-bloods attempt to find common ground in the definition of what is traditional and acceptable. As a result, feedback from respected Indian elders and other members of the Indian community may reshape and redefine the elements and practice of new forms of ritual over time.

Prophecy, Hermeneutics and Oral Traditions

The creator of the Animal Spirit Dance acknowledges that this new form of dance varies from prior forms and is not meant to copy or match any prior form. The elements of most traditional ceremonies practiced in current times are replicated based on oral instruction passed down over several generations. Prior to colonial contact, there was little if any formal recording of ceremonial practice. Rituals were set to memory and in some cases took years to learn. Unlike various forms of scripture used by Judeo-Christian

and Muslim religions to document a cultural platform, prior to colonial contact there was no formal written documentation of ceremony. Those observing new or unfamiliar forms of Indian ritual and ceremony generally validate their observations against traditional forms of practice. As a result when ceremonies form with a claim of being a restoration of an “original” or “historical” form, observers are presented with a breach in the cultural continuity of practice that challenges the process of validation.

The bulk of anthropological and historical documentation by non-Indians began in the 1800’s. However, the documentation created by non-Indians is perceived by Indians as questionable at best due to the interpretation from a western perspective. Within the last few decades, many Indian writers have offered formal literature to the commercial public. When the subject is ceremonial, even literature provided by Indians comes under fire since the literature rarely provides complete ritual detail.²⁶ Despite these reservations, it is not uncommon for cultural “latecomers” and non-Indians to use written sources as a basis for understanding. Publications from Indian writers including Vine Deloria, Lame Deer, Black Elk and Sun Bear have become increasingly popular. For those more culturally acclimated, books containing more prophetic and ceremonial content like those by Rainbow Eagle²⁷, Dhyani YWahoo²⁸ and J.T. Garrett²⁹ are referenced and are

²⁶ In more recent times, some researchers, especially those with native heritage counter that some ceremonial research provides too much detail. Some detail is inappropriate to divulge, especially when interpreted incorrectly.

²⁷ See Rainbow Eagle. *The Universal Shield of Truth*

²⁸ See Ywahoo, Dhyani. *Voices of Our Ancestors. Cherokee Teachings From The Wisdom Fire.*

beginning to form a platform of hermeneutics that were historically absent in Indian culture. These works are controversial within the Indian community, partially due to the fact that the writers are mixed-blood natives. I've been told that tribal elders do not feel that ceremonial subjects should be published in books, especially without direct authorization from their tribes.

As noted earlier by Smith's (1991:74-75) statements concerning the usage of a "how to book" to learn ceremony, this form of knowledge seeking has become a grave matter of concern among some traditional Indians. I noted a controversial discussion between members of one group during a teaching circle. While discussing the tendency for cultural newcomers to read books about Indian culture he cautioned, "forget about the books, put down the books, ignore the books, and oh, did I mention, forget about the books." The books do not have complete information, and in cases the information may be in error. A tribal leader told me that he knew some of the Indians that had written books about culture and ceremony, and he found them amusing. Some authors had written the books with a specific audience in mind, or in some cases just for money. An Ojibwe sweat lodge leader added that even when Indian elders share knowledge through books or public offerings of ceremony, they never reveal all the details of sacred parts of the ceremony. They always hold certain things back, making it impossible to learn everything needed to conduct ceremony unless the knowledge comes through a

²⁹ See the following publications: *Medicine of the Cherokee. The Way of Right Relationship. The Cherokee Full Circle. A Practical Guide to Ceremonies and Traditions. Meditations With The Cherokee. Prayers, Songs and Stories of Healing and Harmony.*

traditional teaching process. However, others that attended the teaching circle challenged the notion of all books being useless. I was told that some books are “spirit books” with information inspired by the creator. In a subsequent teaching, the leader of the teaching circle conceded that there may be some relevant information in published material. However, those not sufficiently acclimated will not know how to tell the difference, making the usage of published material as a primary source of knowledge a dangerous practice. While discussing the issue during a powwow, a traditional female Cherokee story-teller told me that there can be both good and bad elements of written material and one must look for a balance.

“Books can be the bread crumbs that leave a trail for you to follow home as long as you don’t try to use it as an exact road map. I believe that all of our nations have a right to keep certain ceremonies sacred and not share them with anyone except who they choose. Unscrupulous people can be taught these things and use them to their advance by writing books based on half truths and that leads to trouble. When the book is about their ego or becoming a published author, the book should not have been written. If the author has the good of the people in mind there may be some merit. Ultimately everyone decides for themselves.”

The originator of the Animal Spirit Dance told me that elements of the Dance were received by spiritual vision during a Sun Dance. The dance is not based on any known published material. However references to books made during multiple interviews suggest that the perceptions and interpretations of the Animal Spirit Dance by unenrolled mixed-bloods and non-Indians appear to be influenced at least in part by these writings. Five unenrolled mixed-bloods told me that they believe that the vision and practice is incomplete because there were expectations of various elements and spiritual visitations that did not occur. While two of these critics claimed that their expectations were based

on their own vision of an animal dance, all five discussions included references to various pieces of literature to legitimize their conclusion.

The Process of Validation

As illustrated, Indian people generally validate ceremony based on how it fits with long standing cultural protocol. More than one person asked “how can one validate a cultural practice against a form that no longer exists?” However, as will be discussed, the Native American Church ceremony illustrates a parallel example where a new form of practice may undergo controversial growth and variations in acceptance.

Understanding the manner in which new forms of ceremony are accepted within the Indian community requires understanding the following.

- 1) The impetus for creation of new ceremony generally originates from a spiritual vision during a traditional ceremony like the sun dance, or personal period of fasting and prayer. It must generally be validated by a spiritual leader or medicine person acknowledged as such by the respective Indian community to weed out fantasies or motives of personal power and gain,
- 2) Within the Indian community, the creation as well as the authentication and acceptance of new forms of ceremony is an ongoing process rather than a static event.
- 3) Authentication and acceptance of Indian ceremony does not follow the western construct of certification received from an educational body. It is dependent on and demonstrated by the people who participate.
- 4) Effective understanding and analysis of the process of acceptance and change must be approached with the knowledge that a ceremony is not an isolated element, but an event that is comprised of multiple rituals.
- 5) Each ritual has a specific purpose, and each ritual purpose contributes to the overall purpose and theme of the ceremony in which it occurs. The function of each ritual must serve a positive purpose to meet the needs of the individual participants as well as the Indian community overall

- 6) The motives of the originator as well as the function of the ritual are a particular source of scrutiny. The motive must be for the good of the people versus economic, political or personal gain.
- 7) Most ritual follows a specific set of protocols for preparation before the event as well as the practice of ritual. Each protocol serves its own function and purpose, and generally represents a form of respect for the ceremony as well as the practitioners. The amount of preparation varies according to the ritual. And those leading or participating in specific roles are generally expected to undergo greater preparation than those who simply attend.
- 8) In order to understand the ceremony overall, one must understand the meaning, function and purpose of each component ritual and how it fits within the ceremony.

Using these concepts the following will illustrate how the Animal Spirit Dance fits within the perception of authenticity of members of the Indian community.

From Vision to Implementation

A Pine Ridge reservation-raised ceremonial elder told me that among the Lakota, there is a specific protocol for implementing a vision.

“In the old days when a man or woman would get a vision, no human would act upon it. They would have gone to their leaders and medicine people and spoke to them about it. Those leaders would go into prayer themselves to have an understanding of the message. They would go and fast and pray. They would enter the Inipi³⁰ ceremony to start the ceremony. They may ask them to work for a period of time to get a better understanding. Nobody would just act.”

Indian ritual and ceremony must serve a purpose for the people. The practice is in itself a community event, thus its implementation cannot be in isolation. Validation occurs within the cultural structure of the respective Indian community. Any other attempt would be interpreted as motivated by personal desire and gain.

³⁰ The Inipi is a sacred sweat lodge ceremony among the Lakota Sioux Indians. It is used as a means of collective prayer for the participants as well as other members of the community.

“There are three forces working. People are motivated by their own human mind and desires and arrogance. There’s the true will of the creator. Then there is the influence of the side working against the creator. For somebody to just act upon what they feel is a vision a dream without having it checked out or worked thru, it would put the whole community in jeopardy. Nowadays they have moved away from community living. We are interdependent units. That is thinking we need to move away from. It could affect you, family and community whether you know them or not. So I think that those values from the old times are just as important today as back then.”

There is a common belief that prayer, songs and usage of sacred objects including pipes, drums and prayer bundles are living and can generate power. The effects of that power can be constructive or harmful. It is believed that if used improperly and without proper knowledge, as a spiritual consequence, the practitioner as well as relatives of the practitioners’ family may be harmed. I have attended more than one teaching circle that have been formed for the specific purpose of pressing this point home to cultural newcomers wishing to adopt native culture. I’ve heard countless stories describing illnesses that were perceived to have been related to improper or ignorant use of ritual prayer and ritual objects. For example, an Ojibwa healer told me of a man who developed a severe mental disorder within weeks after attending a sweat lodge. The healer attributed the illness to negative energy resulting from a ceremony led by a practitioner who had inadequate knowledge of how to deal with energies that arise during such ceremonies. Another individual told me that from a western viewpoint, this type of occurrence could be compared to a biblical reference to a early Christians and Jews who attempted to copy the acts of Jesus while casting out devils, but without proper knowledge or authority. The man attempted exorcisms using the name of Christ using the phrase “by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” (Acts 19:13) According to the scripture, the

exorcism failed and the demon turned and attacked the exorcist. In a similar manner, if you attempt to execute Indian ritual without proper knowledge, someone may get hurt.

The popular American term “patience is a virtue” takes new meaning in this setting. A zealot with a compulsive desire to “go do” would be immediately rejected. Authorization for implementation may take a period of years, and is based on something earned versus learned. As a Lakota elder and pipe carrier stated:

“The teaching circle I did was simple. It took three years for that to happen from the 1st vision. It didn’t happen without going through spiritual leaders first, checking me out, fasting, making offerings. Earning. That’s one of the key things, must earn the right not take it because that’s what you want.”

One must go through a process of personal reflection and prayer with the help of a respected elder before any action is taken. Within most Indian communities spiritual leaders provide checks and balances to validate visions and claims of spiritual power. It’s not unusual for an individual practicing ceremony to be asked “who were your elders?” There is a perception that some copy-cat forms of Indian ceremony seek to sidestep this protocol. When ceremonial groups are formed outside of tribal membership and practice outside of tribal lands, there is concern that the proper validation is absent. The members of the group may be validating each other in order to advance their own motives and definition of Indianness. A Lakota elder provided cautions similar to the statements of Smith (1991:74-75) cited earlier concerning lack of accountability to Indian communities.

“We as humans have an obligation to check those things out first. Unfortunately in many of these up and coming circles and new age, they want everything right now. They don’t want to spend time with leaders which could take years. They want it now. They don’t want to pause and get approval because they are afraid they are going to say no they are

wrong or misinterpreted the vision or dream. Afraid that feedback won't be what they want to hear.”

The course of the Animal Spirit Dance seems to follow within this outlined path from vision to implementation. The originator told me that he had been to the Sun Dance for twelve years. In the eighth year he attended to dance “for somebody’s life,” and during that time received a vision detailing a thunderbird and animals in a circle that seemed to tell a story. He went to an elder who had brought the Sun Dance to Fort Peck and the Cree, and was told that the vision indicated that he was supposed to perform a dance associated with the animals that he saw. The elder called the dance an “animal dance”. At the time there were tribes who performed dances specific to certain animals like the bear and deer. But there were no “animal dances” that included multiple animals similar to his vision. The newness of this particular form of dance was verified by several informants including the Lakota elder who stated the following concerning his perceptions of the Animal Spirit Dance:

“As far as that dance, there have been dances done by our people, the buffalo dance, the rabbit and prairie chicken dance. The Animal Spirit Dance has a different meaning. The chicken dance emulates male chicken and courtship. They are social dances. The buffalo dance was used to pray for buffalo to give of themselves. Those honor the spirit of the animal.

It [Animal Spirit Dance] seems to be a new movement coming about where people are bringing about all the animals into a ceremony, buffalo, cougar, deer, bear. They are saying that it is to honor the animal and apologize what we did to the animals. They [animals] have existed for a long time. The Animal spirit dance bringing them all together is new. You go and talk to Cherokee people, they would put on animal masks and be the spirit of that animal. People would allow the spirit to go through them. They would go through purification first. They would let their intention be known and ask for permission for the dance to take

place. Then when they put on the masks, god would allow the spirit of the grandmother or grandfather to enter in. For that time they would represent them. Not all nations had these ceremonies where all the animals were at one time.

I was told that it was over ten years between the time that the Animal Spirit Dance originator received the vision and implemented the dance. And it is my observation as well as the observation of other participants that the description of how the other dances are performed is similar to that of the Animal Spirit Dance. However, these protocols alone do not guarantee acceptance, nor does the claim of a Sun Dance vision associated with the guidance of a respected elder. Acceptance of the dance includes a multitude of elements including following protocol and the behavior of the participants. When asked if the claim of a Sun Dance vision affected their perception I received the following answers:

“Visions do come to the people. In my lifetime, in the past 20 years, too many people want to be seen as a leader, take their own dreams and thoughts and act upon them. That’s dangerous.”

“No. I’m glad that he got that vision. I just think. Some of the things that I saw happen at that ceremony were hard for me to accept or were different. The basic idea of the dance the healing of the animals was awesome. Maybe he let some of the people that he had work with him, maybe he gave them too much leeway. The basic concept was good.”

Another stated:

“No. I don’t care if someone is inspired on the toilet. Where it happens has no significance. Or how or who receives it. As long as the vision is for the good of the people. It takes time and hindsight to prove that the people that stood for the good of the new ceremony were correct. They were all outcasts at first. And those that support this are either the ones that are inclusive and been around long

enough to understand movements like this, Otherwise you are just basing opinions about what you read in a book. This is why elder's council is so needed."

One Canadian Elder and sweat lodge leader provided an insightful clue to the problems encountered when perceptions vary by stating that the credibility lies in the perceptions of the attendees. However, with new forms there may be some growing pains along the process of acceptance. And like anything new that comes under fire, it takes a great deal of courage to stick out your neck for a process of change.

"The proof is in the pudding. I don't think that it [claim of the Sun Dance vision] does [affect my interpretation]. I would like to think that where he received his vision that maybe it had more credibility. But it doesn't matter what I think. When the full ceremony and rituals are put out there, it's the people that will decide whether it's right or wrong. That's a scary burden on that person. He's doing something that he thinks is right but putting himself out there for ridicule. That's scary for some people."

The Process of Change

Suspicion and Protection

All reservation-born Indians who were raised with their culture, and all mixed-bloods who carry authorized ceremonial alters stated that they are generally suspicious of changes to traditional ceremonial practice. The Christian-oriented censorship during the boarding school era resulted in corruption, or in some cases, the complete loss of certain forms of Indian culture. Forms that survived did so because they went underground with many risking their lives to preserve them. The historical impact affects both the perceptions about sharing culture as well as change to culture. As one sweat lodge leader told me:

“When you have come to the brink of being culturally as a biological group almost destroyed, you tend to really hold on to what you have left. And a very big source of pride and cultural identity is your language and your ceremonies i.e. religion. So to that end, it makes you less open to sharing it because that is your special thing for you, your family and tribe. It’s also the way that you choose to relate to your God or creator. And you want to make sure that that stays a very sacred relationship.”

Thus, suspicions are especially rampant when the promoter or practitioner is not viewed as culturally acclimated, slanted by Christian ideology, or their knowledge comes primarily from books rather than direct experience with Indian culture. In particular, those of Christian faith have a long history of abandoning one form of Christian belief in order to start something new. When someone with any degree of Christian orientation becomes the originator of an Indian ceremony, this arouses suspicions. A Lakota pipe carrier told me the following:

“Remember at the ceremony³¹ when I talked about the Grey Eagle Society. They are hard core traditional and very respected among plains tribes. Their job is to ensure that Lakota ceremonies are not being altered. We have that belief because when the teachings were passed, for changes to be brought forth you have to be very careful. Man’s ego can be at the root of those changes. I’m not trying to pick on Christianity but I’m using it as an example because I have a Christian background and I can speak in an informed way. In Christian circles, when people disagree with the overall doctrine, rules etc. or even when they disagree with the preacher. They break away and go create an

³¹ The informant was referring to a teaching and talking circle not related to the Animal Spirit Dance. The teaching was given to an audience of mostly distant heritage natives who had undergone a journey of immersion into Indian culture. Along with their immersion many had copied the practice of other natives at other ceremonies including carrying prayer bundles and pipes. Many Indian groups believe that certain objects are sacred and alive. This Lakota elder had put together this teaching due to concerns that some of the people may not fully understand the meaning of the sacred items they carried, the associated dangers of misuse, or the responsibilities of ownership of sacred objects. My interview with this individual occurred in two parts with the first part being after the ceremony mentioned.

independent church. Regardless of whether their friends and family are still there, or even if they grew up with it. Why does that happen? Sometimes because you have a leader who has moved away from spirituality and become arrogant because he is a leader. Back further in time when the English left Europe because they were escaping persecution, then came here and started doing it to their own people then even native people. That is why I'm of the mind-set that you have to be careful with change."

There's an equal suspicion of people who "jump ship" between Christian and native religions. Even if there are problems within their faith, there is the expectation that they should stay and help solve the problem to maintain community. The community serves as the source of strength for the individual and breaks with tradition can hurt both the individual and the community. As one reservation-born Comanche told me:

"People from other beliefs check out what we do. In all honesty, people don't recognize that worm, they just want to jump ship when the outcome is bad. Their religion didn't work for them. It was their expectations that were incorrect..... You can't just jump ship when it doesn't happen the way you want it to happen that day. When they come to our ceremonies, it may not happen the way they expect either."

"Those times of despair and hopelessness, people rely on each other. Enter the old ways where we depended on the community as a whole for survival. Community dances, ceremonies, were all an integral part of our survival and maintaining our existence and our contentment as human beings. Our understanding of right and wrong, what was moral and what worked. When we break away from tradition we then notice after a period of time that things are not working anymore. It can be any type of change that will do that."

The Function of Change

Whether describing the process of change under the genre of "revitalization," "renewal" or "invented tradition," there is a body of research from Wallace(1956),

Hobsbawm(1983) and Ranger(1983) among others suggesting that cultural change and new forms of ceremony result from political pressures. Ranger’s research on “invented tradition” during the African colonial period illustrates that these pressures may create both inclusive and exclusive cultural practice based on racial separatism. European workers deliberately choose European union craft rituals to legitimize exclusion of African workers from membership and participation in craft guilds while drawing on “neo-traditions” to strengthen dispersed white communities. White workers in Africa also drew on the “invented traditions” of nineteenth century Britain in order to gain power to institute modernistic change (ibid: 211, 219-220).

Local Virginia-based mixed-blood ceremonial circles as well as the Animal Spirit Dance provide a sense of social and racial inclusiveness, as well as an entrance to Indian ceremony normally confined to tribal lands and members. This form of change is the subject of controversy among tribal members. But the controversy is not confined to the subject of racial mixture. Before a change can be accepted, there must be demonstration of a valid constructive function that serves the people and community, rather than a change motivated by a desire to break away from a prior form due to disagreement with leaders of their current religion.

There are examples where new forms of ceremony formed in response to disagreements with practice. However, as illustrated by Native American Church (N.A.C.) ceremonial attendance, racial diversification was not part of the original issue or intension. It was an unintended outcome. Specific elements of ritual defined during the

formation of the (N.A.C.) ceremony have been the focus of controversy since its inception. I interviewed several N.A.C. members concerning these controversies and found that this ceremony provides a parallel example to the process of change and acceptance in the native community of a new and controversial ceremonial form..

A tribal card carrying N.A.C. member told me that the ceremony formed as a means to bridge Indian and Christian religion. The native community had been “ripped from their traditional culture and forced into another religion,” resulting in a practice so alien that it was difficult to relate to. The initial N.A.C. ceremony included rituals with strong Christian elements including reading of the bible. However, in order to blend the Christian practice with traditional Indian cultural practice, other ritual parts of the ceremony followed traditional practices including cleansing ceremonies, fire circles and communal prayer. Combining Christian and native elements served to make the Christian faith more palatable to those less acclimated to the Christian faith. This resulted in some degree of success as indicated by the statement “It wasn’t so hard for native people to accept the concepts of the new religion.” Even with the hybrid practice, some practitioners found the Christian elements hard to accept. As a result, over time there has been some degree of change in the choice and practice of ceremony. There are now two ceremonies in common practice, in addition to a newer third form. The new forms evolved in response to the particular needs and perceptions of the practitioners, some that include Christian elements and some that don’t.

N.A.C. has been nicknamed the “peyote road” due to the usage of the peyote mushroom within certain rituals. While usage of peyote and other botanicals was included in many traditional native prayer ceremonies, this particular drug generates controversy for two reasons. Both state and federal laws define it as a controlled and illegal substance. And due to the stigma and association with hallucinogenic drugs used in the 1960’s, usage of peyote within ritual is perceived by some as simply an excuse to “get high.” However, members of N.A.C. staunchly defend the practice as having legitimate function and refrain from the usage of the term peyote. I’ve been told on numerous occasions, “This [peyote] is our medicine.” It is considered to have great healing powers. I’ve heard numerous testimonies to back up that claim.

The perception of N.A.C. as an authentic Indian ceremony varies widely within the native community. However, it generates a large attendance from Indians from tribes all over the country; so large in fact that some members have taken the ceremony off the reservation to private settings to make it more accessible to urban Indians. Contrary to popular perceptions about N.A.C., ceremonies practiced by trained and authorized members of N.A.C. are not loose social events with a “bunch of hippy types sitting around getting high.” All parts of the ritual are well structured and focused on prayer and sharing with well-defined functions for each participant. “Getting high,” tripping and any form of irresponsible or disrespectful behavior is frowned upon and likely to result in dismissal from the ceremony. One of the rituals includes serving breakfast and lunch the day following an all-night ceremony. In some areas, these meals are considered community meals and open to participation by friends and family who did not attend the

ceremony or are members of N.A.C. I have been invited to many of these community meals and have observed the behavior of participants before and after the ceremony. I can personally attest that, aside from some fatigue resulting from an all night ceremony, and a certain degree of mellowness, there is little difference in behavior before and after partaking the “medicine.” At least at these ceremonies there was no indication of drugged behavior.

In addition to the usage of the “medicine,” another element of controversy comes into play for ceremonies practiced outside of reservation boundaries, where it is not unusual for non-Indian friends to be invited. In some cases, non-natives who have sufficiently acclimated to the ceremony and show respect for the rituals have been given service tasks within the ceremony, a station considered a great honor even among natives. However, there have been incidents where non-natives who are less acclimated have demonstrated disrespectful behavior by not following protocols, or abusing usage of the “medicine.” There have also been numerous incidents where individuals that are not trained or authorized by N.A.C. have taken it upon themselves to conduct copy-cat ceremonies that do not follow acceptable protocols. These incidents are isolated and generally put to an end. However, despite these problems, N.A.C. is still widely practiced in many localities across the United States and draws a large attendance by enrolled Indians, unenrolled Indians and non-Indians.

There are some clear differences between N.A.C. and the Animal Spirit Dance that prevent a totally equal comparison. First, the originator of N.A.C. was a full blood

enrolled Indian while the originator of the Animal Spirit Dance is a mixed-blood enrolled Indian. Second, while both ceremonies started with a vision within the confines of a reservation, the N.A.C. ceremony was originally formed within reservation boundaries while the practices that define the current form of the Animal Spirit Dance stretched across many boundaries. However, this example illustrates that the creation of new forms of Indian ceremony is not without controversy. Both the formation and validation of ceremony is a process that happens over time, validation is defined by those who attend, and practice outside a reservation setting does not uniquely define authenticity, even when non-Indians attend. The N.A.C. ceremony provides an example where a new ceremony formed that serves as a cross-cultural bridge between Indians of different tribes as well as between natives and non-natives. Despite change and controversy, Indians may demonstrate an open mind and a certain degree of tolerance to unfamiliar forms of ceremony under certain circumstances.

The majority of Animal Spirit Dance attendees stated that despite any problems with protocol or vision, they attended because they were “hopeful” that some good would result. Dances in general including the Animal Spirit Dance serve a valid purpose that includes preservation of culture and bringing unity among people. One enrolled Comanche woman stated the following”

“But history must be our guide when we do or ask for anything for our future. Hearken back to the days of the ghost dance. ...One then needs to be very careful and look at how successful was any dance in the past in requesting spiritual assistance to the validity of a dance now doing any better. I may sound cynical yet I attended because I was hopeful. It is important to remember that even though some of us felt the dances in

the past were a mistake, the ones that we perform now are for unity. And the mere exercise of any dance had both good and bad perceptions and outcomes and yet we as native people are still here and continue to preserve the right to practice a culture that is uniquely our own. I find that it is most important to resist our history and any activity and practice and observe these actions today. And we must continue to teach our children so that they will practice and hopefully observe our same traditions in the future. A dance is a means to do that. It is also a vital way of bringing our people together. So any person's vision that is meant to be positive to heal our people can be observed and brought forth whether you call it a resurgence or a renewal or a brand new idea. It only serves to help our people."

Defining Ceremonial Protocol

A former Haskell Indian Boarding School student told me that one positive outcome of the boarding school days was that Indians of different tribes, who in former times had been geographically and culturally isolated, were suddenly put in a position where they could learn about other Indian cultures and practices, and in some cases, share them. As a result, even though each separate tribe may have separate language and culture, Indians have learned that there are certain traditional practices that were common.

In the current pan-Indian environment of sharing, fire circles and powwows have been adopted across tribal boundaries. Within each tribal culture there will be variations in the specifics of practice. For example, within the construction of a sweat lodge, the number of poles used and meaning of each pole lodge may vary. When entering a fire circle some move clockwise while others move counter clockwise. But generally speaking, a common group of practices have developed. The inclusion or lack of

inclusion as well as the manner in which these practices are performed has a large impact on the perception of validity among Indians. The practices include the following:

- Prior to attendance to any ceremony, a certain amount of preparation is expected. This could include fasting, abstinence from alcohol and drugs for four or more days before the ceremony, and daily prayers to the creator.
- Preparation includes focusing on the ceremony and ridding the mind of negative thoughts. Preparation begins the day the decision is made to attend the ceremony, not the day the ceremony begins.
- There may be one or more forms of cleansing rituals prior to the ceremony including purging and the sweat lodge ritual.
- Usage of various botanicals before and during a ceremony to cleanse the land and people before entering a sacred circle. In many circles this is called smudging and is generally performed using sage.
- Ceremonies always begin and end with prayers, with various other forms of prayer during the event.
- Prayers are accompanied by offerings of various botanicals to the fire during prayer. Botanicals vary with the tribe and include sage, cedar, tobacco, pollen and lavender.
- At some point there is a lighting of a sacred fire that must be tended around the clock by someone appointed as a fire keeper. The arrangement of the wood and ritual steps taken to light the fire may vary according to the ceremony. There is a general expectation that only natural implements will be used. Matches are generally used as a lighting instrument.
- Participants are expected to come in a respectable form of dress. For women this is usually a long skirt and long sleeve top, or long dress with long sleeves. Men generally wear long pants and ribbon shirts. Cut off shorts, tank tops and other revealing clothing are considered disrespectful.
- Many ceremonies include a pipe ceremony. The person conducting the ceremony must be a respected elder. In some circles the person must have authorization to carry a pipe by healer or respected ceremonial leader of their culture.
- Specific rituals including sweat lodges within the ceremony may include construction of an altar. The altar may hold one or more objects considered sacred. The handling of these objects follows a specific protocol. Before use in ritual they are generally dedicated to use only within ceremony. And they are generally handled only by the person leading the ceremony.

- Each ritual has specific steps and functions that are executed by specific people appointed by the person conducted the ceremony. For example there may be a fire keeper, water carrier, or person who gives an opening prayer and a gate keeper that ensures that people are properly smudged before entering a sacred circle or lodge.
- The function and meaning of each ritual determine when and in what setting the ritual should be performed. They are generally not performed outside a ceremonial setting.

Defining Respect

The key component shared among all tribes and protocols is the concept of respect. When used related to religion and ceremonial practice, the term “respect” to a native has different meaning than the simple English definition of the term. It stretches beyond respect for the Creator to include land, animals and other living creatures, sacred objects as well as respect for other ceremonial participants. While Judeo-Christian religion focuses on the benefit to the individual, Indians acknowledge the importance and equality of rights to animals, plants, stones and virtually all objects on the earth. During all traditional animal dances including the buffalo and bear dance, the focus of the dance rests on respect for the animal that is the focus of the dance. Indians may become offended if this focus is lacking. As one Lakota Ceremonial elder stated:

“At the core of everything is God and respecting god. Without him there is nothing. At those ceremonies, at the height was honoring god and begging for mercy but also to honor buffalo. We have an obligation to honor that spirit. To do otherwise is arrogant.”

Respect in this sense relates to being thankful for the sacrifice of the animal, plant or object that allows human survival. Before any tree or branch is cut for the lodge, tobacco and prayer is offered for the spirit of the tree. When an animal is killed for food, Indians

ask the creator to bless the spirit of the animal. As quoted earlier by a tribal leader: “We have ceremonies for everything. We pray for and to our food, including Spam³². We take nothing for granted. My mother prays to that she is cooking in. We have to pray at restaurants.” These concepts are alien to those raised in urban settings where consumerism is almost required behavior.

Respect must also be displayed for the ritual itself by following protocol. In some cases the concept includes taking steps for proper preparation which may include a decision of which parts of the ritual to participate in.

“I’ve been to four sun dances. I consider myself fortunate to help out. I’ve never sun danced. And I think that’s because of respect for the ceremony. I didn’t understand all the aspects. I wasn’t raised in the culture. I take the steps that I’m allowed to take in order to learn without knowing exactly what it is that I’m doing, not just to say that I did it.

Ceremony and the rituals that define them are practiced with a specific purpose and all people who attend should be focused on that purpose. There are some who attend out of simple curiosity, or in order to build an “Indian cultural résumé” which includes a long list of attributes of Indian behaviors used to define their Indianness.

Regardless of enrollment status or blood quantum, all informants carrying authorized ceremonial alters, and mixed-bloods who consider ceremony important stated that a main concern about allowing non-natives to attend native ceremonies is that “the ceremony

³² The reference to Spam was made in a lighthearted manner. Starting around the late 1800’s, the government began issuing food rations to reservations. The foods included sugar, flour, coffee, and dried meat. In more modern times it included Spam and commodity cheese. They serve as the brunt of numerous Indian jokes concerning the government’s idea of nutrition.

will be disrespected.” Following protocol provides an indication that all rituals are exercised in a respectful manner. Deviations raise concerns both about the ceremony and the people who perform it, resulting in questions concerning whether the practitioners lack the proper training. The lack of training could indicate simple inexperience and ignorance, or that a ceremony that was made up by a new-age copycat. The former is likely to be tolerated if the offender is willing to learn. The latter is not. I was told that open ceremonies like the Animal Spirit Dance may be attractive to some because they perceive that the requirements of preparation and practice are less demanding. When excessive latitude in protocol is allowed it raises warning flags. One description was particularly graphic:

“It worries me. One of the prophecies is that in these latter years there will be a lot of people to claim to have answers and be experts, false medicine men and women. Watch the ceremony. How does that ceremony flow? Does it flow like the breeze moving on the grass on the plains, like a gentle stream rolling, or is it choppy, start and stop, hectic. Things that are easy and simple, do they become hard and difficult. I recently heard at that teaching circle something I’d never heard before. They tried to light a sacred fire and it wouldn’t like so they put gas on it. True people brought up in ceremony would not still be there. They would question and leave. Something is not right. But there is a process. Ceremony is four stages planning, setup, ceremony and cleanup. All four steps need to be met and followed through with upmost respect and dignity, reverence. How can somebody do that if they have never been taught? Ego enters in and they make it up as they go.”

There are some differences in the Animal Spirit Dance that challenge conventional analysis related to group acceptance. Ceremonies and cultural practice vary between tribes due to differences in geographical and historical pressures. For example, rain dances among the pueblo in arid southwest areas may not be found among the East

Coast Cherokee or Seminole. Within tribal communities, there is generally some degree of cultural, racial and geographical boundaries to the classification of the attending group. For example, most sun dances are hosted on reservation land. Participation is limited to tribal members, or those invited by tribal member after a period of cultural apprenticeship for ceremonial preparation. The cultural protocols and requirements of preparation tend to be consistent and understood by the practitioners. As a result, after a period of time the acceptance by the specific tribal group stretched beyond the tribal borders to include Indians of other tribes. In other words, if the Apache view the Kanalda as a valid ceremony, members of other tribes will also accept and respect its authenticity and relevance even if they don't practice it within their tribe.

In contrast, the Animal Spirit Dance has no set geographical location. It is hosted on private property and tribal lands where invited. The attendance generally is non-restrictive, and those who are newly seeking access to Indian culture and practice may have limited understanding of ceremonial protocols. Their only introduction may include work of mouth descriptions or information passed along in information packets that advertise the dance. One may find similar elements in the controversies surrounding perceptions of the authenticity of N.A.C. In the eyes of some members of the Indian community, the mixture of non-native practitioners diminishes the concept of group acceptance as a factor for authenticity. This is especially true when some attendees lack proper preparation and knowledge, leading to violations of common protocols.

I found it interesting that the most culturally acclimated Indians and those who had either held onto or had restored major parts of culture were more likely to take some specific protocol violations in stride. One tribal and ceremonial leader told me “I guarantee you that those that those who have become separated from their culture, or are trying to find it, are going to be the most critical. They have to be rigid in order to define boundaries that they must personally maintain in order to redefine their lifestyle.” Another sweat lodge leader stated “... full bloods are usually much more accepting than half bloods or those who were raised off the reservation. They are more secure in their belief system.” Another nationally respected elder stated: “The very first sweat that I attended all I was told was to bring a towel and a shift and there were going to be woman down there. That was all that I was told. I don’t know that there is any pre-training or pre-ceremony training needed.” However, each tribe varies. Some tribes have been almost decimated to the point where they won’t share anything. They are very protective of what they have left.

The Animal Spirit Dance is open to the public and may attract attendees with little or no knowledge of ritual protocol. This openness and latitude appears to be part of the intended purpose. A respected Cherokee elder stated:

“The purpose of the dance as I understand is to bring people together in a good way without having to observe strict protocol and without previous knowledge of cultural mores. The nature of it is so encompassing that it allows for anyone to participate [and] to experience ceremony but it’s on a different level. This is a healing ceremony and healing is for everyone. Some individual ceremonies there is a lot of preparation. This ceremony is not like that. The preparation is done by the participants that are the animal spirits. They offer for others to understand that

not everything in a native cultural ceremony has to be deep dark mysterious and closed. They are offering this to the general public. There is a problem with some of the people who come there.”

Even when there are protocol violations by newcomers, those comfortable in their culture view the violation as ignorance. The behavior may serve as an indication that the person needs teaching versus an indication that the ceremony lacks authenticity, or the leader of the ceremony lacks training and authority. They will not ignore the violator or the violation. However, rather than condemn the person or the ceremony, they will attempt to teach the offender the proper protocol. I’ve heard a multitude of times that people who seem to be the most ignorant may be the people who need the ceremony the most. Periodic violations are expected and should be tolerated to a degree, if there can be an outcome of helping the individual learn and heal. For example, one Canadian Indian carrying a sweat lodge alter told me of an incident where a man attempted to attend a teepee meeting and came carrying a beer. Alcohol is generally considered taboo at most native events including powwows. But he was not turned away. He was told to leave his beer outside, then allowed to come in. The person conducting the ceremony then assigned another attendee familiar with the ceremony to sit next to him and help him understand and practice each protocol within the ritual.

Perceptions related to cultural acclimation were illustrated during discussions about protocol violations of the Animal Spirit Dance. With the exception of a sweat lodge incident that occurred at the May 2010 event, almost all discussion of protocol violations came from unenrolled mixed-bloods not raised on a reservation. Those within this group

had undergone great steps to become culturally acclimated and were members of a ceremonial circle that met and performed ceremony on private lands. A violation of sweat lodge protocol during the April 2009 Animal Spirit Dance was a frequent topic of discussion. Instead of the required long dress or skirt, a woman came out in a bikini bathing suit and proceeded to walk around the grounds in that attire. Some of the people who mentioned these incidents demonstrated total disgust to the point of invalidating the validity of the ceremony. However there were others that, while noting it as a problem, suggested that it might indicate logistical problems and lack of support staff, more than the qualifications of the practitioners. Members with the latter group were generally older, regarded as elders and leaders within their communities. A ceremonial elder provided the following insight.

“There were several problems with that lodge. There were more people than could be accommodated. They had a problem getting the fire started and poured kerosene on the fire. There were people who wanted to go in that couldn’t. That’s a planning issue. When you do that on a large scale there will be bugs to work out. There must be teaching on woman’s attire and what people bring and not bring. They should not use an accelerant on the fire. When you don’t have a strong network of supporters that you can trust, then it can happen. “

“When you hold ceremony you have a leader and the designated support staff. If they delegate they are responsible to ensure that they do the duties. The fire keeper is responsible for what goes in the fire or not. If he goes away he must be sure that someone guards the fire. He is responsible to be sure that the wood is blessed and sacred. Eyes must be on the fire. What if someone brought in a prayer tie and didn’t ask for permission. What if they throw the gum wrapper in the fire? Woman responsible for food preparation, same thing with a lodge. Have that person who is the leader’s right hand man or woman. Know what is going mentally without words being spoken. If somebody comes to a different area without the support group it can be a real challenge.”

I was also told that the ignorance of a few cannot necessarily invalidate a ceremony.

“People who had come to the first time who were not Indian asked me questions about it. That is a reflection on the leader but that can be a unfair analysis. It was the first time. The number of people that came was like the teaching circle. But it was more than expected. You don’t know where it is going to wind up. People come who have no idea of what is taking place. In a perfect environment people would be there the day before having a meeting. But even if that happens you have people who just show up.”

“People are changing because of the computer and the internet. Traditional people are having a hard time keeping up with it. When I send out something I send out the protocol. But I hope that they will read the protocol. Even with that there were things that had to be addressed. There were people who did not know what a prayer tie was. You don’t always know what will happen. It is not fair to judge the leader by the actions of a few. Leaders didn’t know everything [going on] and couldn’t be in all places at one time.”

As discussed earlier, there are specific violations that may be taken in stride with a casual correction. However, at the May 2010 Animal Spirit Dance, there were two issues that caught the attention of culturally acclimated elders. There were several confrontational conversations concerning the issues. However, the conversations were held in private and did not result in the elders turning against the ceremony. The details of the violations are included within this discussion in order to further illustrate the process of change and validation. One violation was related to handling of sacred objects, the other to safety of the participants.

Objects used in ceremony are considered sacred and living. They are generally stored and handled in a careful and respectful manner. Respectful handling includes careful selection and dedication of the objects that store them. For example, special boxes are used to store eagle feathers. Ceremonial pipes are carried in special casings like pipe

bags. Animal skins worn in ceremonial dances must also be stored in a special manner. A pipe carrier told me the following concerning the May 2010 Animal Spirit Dance.

“The dancers had the animal hides on that they were representing and asking the spirit of that animal to come down, inhabit the hide and work through them to provide healing to the people. That hide is a sacred item. You are asking the spirit to inhabit that. It should be treated with the utmost respect. The hide should be wrapped, in my tradition, red cloth, maybe some sage bundles or cedar to keep it clean and safe. And it should be smudged when you are done using it when the ceremony is over, and rewrapped in the cloth with the sage and cedar. Not wadded and stuffed in a black plastic trash bad. That was Sunday morning. One lady came back Sunday, took her hide out, smudged it. Another woman walked down with an armful of hides, stuffed them in a trash bag and stuffed them in the back of a truck. That is extremely disrespectful.”

One might make a quick assumption that the reason for the offense was usage of a modern implement i.e. a trash bag versus cloth, but there were other issues at play. For example, no objections have been raised when large sheets of black plastic or tarps are used to cover a sweat lodge. And it has become common to use small squares of carpet to cover a sweat lodge floor versus woven grass mats, blankets used during more traditional time. The issues were related to handling and function. First, the object should have been carefully folded versus “wadded” and “stuffed” into a bag. The other issue relates to the function of the storage implement. Ceremonial objects are dedicated to a ceremonial function. The items used to store are also dedicated. Storage within a trash bag conjures an association with the trash bag’s function of storing trash to the function of the object stored as being trash.

Critiques voiced during the May 2010 dance focused on the structure and practice of the sweat lodge ceremony. It was also clear by numerous mentions of the recent Sedona Sweat lodge deaths that “new-age” copy-cats as well as Indians who peddle Indian ceremony for money have created a negative impression within the collective consciousness of the Indian community nationwide. Thus any resemblance to “new-age” incidents raises concerns.

Two issues were raised. First, for many sweat lodge rituals, the number and the placement of poles carries meaning and dictates the structure, diameter and height the lodge. Large intertribal group gatherings may result in building larger lodges to accommodate the number of people wanting to participate in the sweat. These “super-dome” lodges have become popular among new age copy-cats. While the Animal Spirit Dance lodge was not built for tourism or money, it is rather well known within the Indian community that some reservation Indians have built “super-dome” structures as a tourist attraction, specifically for the purpose of generating money. The practitioners don’t provide a traditional ceremony following traditional protocols. I’ve been told that they legitimize the practice by donating the money toward supporting of valid tribal ceremony. However, in the minds of many traditional natives, this practice severs the true function of a sweat lodge which can never be related to money or personal gain.

The second issue was the height of the lodge. The sweat lodge built for the 2010 Animal Spirit Dance was structured to allow people to stand. At various points within the ceremony the attendees were invited to stand and dance within the lodge. All who raised

an objection to this structure voiced concern for the safety of those attending due to the higher degree of heat at higher levels. I was told that the issue was resolved after, several private discussions between the Indian elders raising objections, those hosting the event, and the sweat lodge leaders.

The perception of the Animal Spirit Dance within the native community ranges from lax to critical. However, some with reservations will attend by invitation, or to observe with a critical eye. I was shocked during one interview with a tribal leader asked to lead one of the rituals, by the lists of criticisms that he offered.

“This version is not as much ceremony as it is theatre. People attracted to it for a show, a happening. The intent is good, honoring the animals and beings is good. I’m hesitant about bringing ceremonies to other places than home because it makes me out to be a like an actor. I don’t like people telling other tribes how to behave. I don’t bring ceremonies outside the rez. I don’t give them the ceremony. It should not be taken to other parts of country. It needs to be born where you are at. Back home we say that our Indian doctors talk to the animals and understand them. It’s the language born of the area. Not sure if the animals would understand our gibberish or we theirs.

I’ve been taught to believe that you can’t have native ceremony without language. Only language can address metaphysical or bridges that past to the present. Language bridges our Indian people, brings culture land, environment and people together. How do you talk about culture if it’s only in English?”

He was not comfortable with bringing traditional ceremony outside the reservation. As he and many others stated, it is difficult to fully comprehend the function of ritual without understanding the language. That leads to the perception that for those attending without cultural acclimation, the event is more theatrical than meaningful. Because of his negative perception I asked why he participated and was told “Because there is more good to be found than negative. It takes what it takes. It may be a

convoluted way we achieve things. Accidents turn into fortunes.” I was later told that this individual had called one of the sponsors five months later to request that the dance be repeated the following year. The reason given was that “it is all about community and coming to together. We are still learning and it can only get better.” Another stated:

“I may sound cynical yet I attended because I was hopeful. It is important to remember that even though some of us felt the dances in the past were a mistake, the ones that we perform now are for unity. And the mere exercise of any dance had both good and bad perceptions and outcomes, and yet we as native people are still here and continue to preserve the right to practice a culture that is uniquely our own.”

The right to believe and practice ceremony was expressed in several comments, despite variations in expectations over the purpose and practice of the dance. While some stated that they had a different idea about how an animal spirit dance should be practiced, they followed by stating “I respect his vision.” One elder commented that if people didn’t like the way it was practiced that they could “go create their own.” The elder that confronted the dance originator concerning the sweat lodge protocol made a public statement to this effect during a talking circle the day after the May 2010 dance. He said that if you are going to have the Animal Spirit Dance, then you have to remember the people that stood the gap in the beginning, and who stood there when Indians had no freedom to practice their culture or religious beliefs. “We stood the gap.” Indians could not hide in dominant society. There were friends and family who stood with them. If you are going to perpetuate the dance you have to be willing to put yourself on the line like they did and not blend in to the dominant society culture when things get hot.”

Despite the problems, the majority of critics stated that they saw something positive in the event and there was hope that problems will be resolved. And even while some may attend with the wrong motive or lack of proper training, I've been told countless times that there may be people there that you would prefer not to be around. But one cannot attend Indian ceremony without undergoing some form of positive change. There is hope that the change will propagate in a manner that will eventually lead a person towards a more respectful practice and lifestyle. Ceremonies are meant to heal. The people who need the ceremony most are the ones that may show the most disrespectful behavior. Thus it's important to provide exposure so that healing and spiritual growth can occur.

6. Conclusions

The Animal Spirit Dance, as well as other newer forms of Indian ceremony, illustrate that validation and acceptance of new ceremonies are group-specific, even when crossing tribal boundaries. Validation is specific to the people that attend and participate in the ceremony, regardless of whether other Indians groups approve or participate. Both the creation and validation of ceremony is not immediate. It is a process that can lead to changes in form to accommodate the specific needs and perceptions of those that attend.

The majority of culturally acclimated tribal card carrying Indians I have come in contact with do not object to non-Indians or people with distant heritage seeking knowledge about Indian culture as long as they show respect for the ceremony and the Indian hosts by following ceremonial protocols. There is a common belief that culture and knowledge is meant to be shared, and should be shared as long as it is constructive and for the good of all. Conflicts, however, emerge because of three reasons: 1) When non-Indians or culturally and historically separated mixed-bloods without shared history try to wear the title Indian; 2) When anyone, Indian or not, attempts to change ritual or create new ritual with practices perceived as disrespectful or harmful to Indians, people, sacred objects, land or ancestors; and 3) When ritual and ceremony are practiced for the motive of personal, political or economic gain.

Where ceremony is concerned, the focus of the tug-of-war over the title of Indian seems to involve practical acquisition of cultural understanding and knowledge rather than racial elements. While some cultural knowledge can be learned, the title Indian must be earned rather than learned. It is based on long association with land-based areas as well as a shared collective memory of conflict with non-Indians. The reaction from Indian communities to the recent and well publicized October 2009 deaths during a sweat lodge at the Angel Valley Retreat Center just outside of Sedona Arizona³³ provides a clear example of why Indians are cautious about new or modified forms of ritual. While the colonial concept of race has crept into the definition of Indianness, exclusionary ceremonial practice cannot be viewed as a simple matter of racial prejudice, nor is it limited to a perception of cultural theft and corruption. While these are concerns, so also is the safety of participants when ceremonies are run by untrained people who are attempting to harness spiritual powers and execute practices they do not fully understand. Comments on numerous internet blog spots including Don't Pay To Pray³⁴ and the Arizona Republic³⁵ assert that a many of events where people have been harmed have been during sweat lodges run by people with financial motives. A medicine person or spiritual leader who leads traditional Indian ceremony is bound by an oath to put people

³³ See MSNBC article http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33243288/ns/us_news-life/ and <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/04/nation/la-na-sweatlodge4-2010feb04>

³⁴ See <http://dontpaytopray.blogspot.com/2008/06/will-someone-die-in-new-age-sweat-lodge.html> article that provides a chronology of sweat lodge related deaths:

³⁵ See Arizona Republic Commentary article "Making money off Indian Culture" Oct 13, 2009: <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2009/10/13/20091013tuelets135.html>

before personal and family needs. As a result, the concern about safety and cultural continuity increases greatly when there is any hint of desire for personal gain and power. Similar to the American ideal of separation of church and state, most natives believe that those with a spiritual function should not be involved in political functions.

Unfortunately, outside observers may view the leader and the dance through a lens painted by the actions and motives of the attendees or new-age copycats similar to the Sedona sweat lodge event where several people died due to an improper and unsafe execution of the ceremony. In other words, the perception of the Animal Spirit Dance and its leader becomes obscured by people and events outside the event, rather than the execution and leader of the event.

The healing properties of the Animal Spirit Dance are controversial, both within and outside of the Indian community. While some may chalk up the results to being more “psychological,” than spiritual, others state that healing results from the drum, spiritual energy or assistance from ancestral spirits. It appears that a participant’s degree of receptiveness may play a part in the degree of success, as one elderly reservation-born Indian who lived in urban areas since early adulthood stated:

“I’m too dependent on white medicine. I believe that healing can happen in traditional ceremonies depending on psychological receptiveness of people. But there are people that are non-believers that would not be healed because they don’t believe.”

Receptivity can also affect the degree of effectiveness of western medicine techniques. This is why current medical practice attempts to promote a positive doctor-patient relationship. In a similar manner, a participant’s receptivity to the healing properties of native ceremony may be dependent on their acclimation to traditional Indian

culture, as well as their perception of the person or persons conducting various rituals within the ceremony. The majority of informants interviewed believe that the Animal Spirit Dance and similar new forms of ceremony can serve a constructive purpose through promotion of certain Indian core values as well as through the construction of a cultural bridge between Indian and non-Indians. However the history of “wannabee” cultural enthusiasts, “new-age” ceremonial encroachments and “gonnabee” enrollment seekers promotes negative perceptions that become injected into perceptions of the Animal Spirit Dance overall.

Conflict Analysis research (Clements:2003:11) indicates that when conflicts are negotiated within mutually “agreed rules and frameworks”, the results can generate creative and positive forms of change. Despite the conflicts that surround the Animal Spirit Dance, it has gained a certain degree of acceptance from Indians all across the county. Despite some concerns, they provide guidance in the hopes that the event will promote constructive values and outcomes instead of being just another “new-age” copycat or “gonnabee” springboard. If, during the course of discussion and involvement, the concerns are addressed and become cleared in their minds, it appears that Indians become willing to accept, or in some cases, even promote the dance. Research by Coser (1956:121-137) on other forms of group conflict may provide some insight as to why when he states that “conflict” is not just a situation. Conflict can serve a constructive function by creating situations where formally isolated parties must come into contact. This contact may lead to communication, resulting in a better understanding of each

party's views and position. Links may be formed that promote a reassessment of relative power and modify existing norms.

Statements from various people illustrate a desire for a positive outcome. For example, as previously quoted by a tribal leader concerning his reason for involvement despite problems that he found, I was told: "Because there is more good to be found than negative. It takes what it takes. It may be a convoluted way we achieve things. Accidents turn into fortunes." All those interviewed demonstrated some degree of hope and faith that whatever problems existed would be resolved. There were many attempts to discuss problems in order understand multiple points of view. As one elder stated, the ultimate "healing that the dance could achieve would be to bring people together in a manner that would help to heal the wounds that give rise to the politics of who is Indian and who is not." It is the hope of those who contributed to this study that the dance, as well as this study of the dance will lead to further discussions that serve as a catalyst for communication, understanding and respect between positions. Aho.³⁶

³⁶ The term "Aho" is a common native word used across tribal boundaries in talking ceremonies at the end of a person's turn speaking. It is said to mean "Amen" or "So be it".

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