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# Potlatch and Powwow: Dynamics of Culture through Lives Lived Dancing

TRACY J. ANDREWS AND JON OLNEY

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*Dance itself is a prayer. . . . The spiritual comes with you wherever you dance.*  
—Nez Perce powwow dancer

*If I did not sing or dance, I would not have a culture.*  
—Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch dancer

## LIVES LIVED DANCING

In collaboration with the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations' U'mista Cultural Centre and the Nez Perce Tribe's Cultural Resources Program, our research addresses aspects of the recent history and contemporary roles of dance in their societies from the dancers' perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The social science literature commonly documents the cultural history of dances and their performance within one or associated Canadian First Nations and Native American societies or considers broader issues of Native peoples' sociocultural identity and politics that event participants and attendees may be expressing.<sup>2</sup> We have focused on dance from the dancer's experiential level, while their bodies become the locus of complex levels of meanings. This study includes two groups from very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the contexts of Nez Perce powwow and Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch also are quite distinctive. However, addressing what is meaningful to the dancers reveals commonalities as well as variation in issues of Native peoples' cultural maintenance, adaptation,

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and innovation, while contributing insights on identity issues as the dancers' individual experiences are embedded in wider sociopolitical contexts.<sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Of course, human movement is the means of contact between human beings and their environment, the basis of human history . . . a manifestation of the interaction between human beings and the external world. But in such interaction, . . . dance is more than part of human movement. It is a part of human culture and human communication.<sup>4</sup>

Anthropology has a long history of considering cultural meanings of dance as part of religion and in ritual settings in societies around the world. Recently, anthropological analyses of dance in cross-cultural settings have begun to move in exciting new directions that emphasize the broader social and political contexts that impinge on and are responded to in dance, including global processes.<sup>5</sup> And dancers consciously act to influence these contexts. The work of ethnomusicologists, historians, and scholars of performance theory have begun to overlap with and enrich the analysis of dance, which rarely has been situated within the mainstream of anthropological studies.<sup>6</sup>

The recognition of embodied sociocultural knowledge reflected in movement builds, in part, on dance anthropologists' critiques, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, of the classically Western mind/body construct that artificially separates human experience and feeling from the arenas of thinking and knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Moving bodies, especially in non-Western cultures, often have been considered "simply" emotionally inspired and perhaps dangerously close to being out of control—certainly a concern for Canadian and US government and missionary interests as they sought to constrain and assimilate indigenous peoples. This dualistic perspective also seemed to limit the potential analytic contribution of a focus on the body to social and cultural theory, which contemporary dance anthropology often highlights.<sup>8</sup> A concurrent interest in culturally constructed meanings associated with the body gained prominence in cultural theory, often following on the work of Foucault and Bourdieu, and now encompasses a wide range of topics such as gender, sexuality, health and illness, labor, religious rituals, and sport.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on the body alone is not sufficient for revealing embodied knowledge reflected in movement, for, as Farnell wryly notes, this can pose a physical being that "often appears to have lost its mind."<sup>10</sup> Documenting dance steps and movements makes considerable contributions to historical records and ongoing choreographic efforts. Yet their explicit social and cultural contextualization, and attention to the dancers' lived experiences, links to otherwise inaccessible levels of meanings.

Often studies of Native American or Canadian First Nations dances have focused on culture histories of individual or closely related groups. The potlatch is an example of one of the most widely documented ceremonies among indigenous peoples of the North American Pacific Northwest. Much

research seeks to explain the variation among groups that exists in potlatch ceremonies and/or to trace possible diffusion to and from other nearby Native peoples over time. Potlatch practices among the Kwakwaka'wakw have received wide attention from anthropologists.<sup>11</sup> Boas documented the economic and family/village sociopolitical underpinnings of the potlatch ceremonies early on, and their importance is emphasized in Holm's recent overview of the Winter Ceremonies (*t'seka*) that often dominate potlatch performances.<sup>12</sup> The associated dances generally reflect powers given by supernaturals, and their spiritual elements are considered pervasive. The Canadian government's banning of the potlatch in 1884 and the continuation of the potlatch in secret and/or its reemergence in public after the ban ended in 1951 also influenced the contemporary status of the potlatch as a symbol of cultural survival among several West Coast Canadian First Nations communities and the Kwakwaka'wakw in particular.<sup>13</sup> It is most often viewed as a group event with families and villages, rather than individual dancers, being the focus of attention. Today, efforts to build on, and at times correct, impressions of outside researchers about the potlatch involve the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples in documenting their cultural knowledge—such as in the ongoing efforts of the U'mista Cultural Centre.<sup>14</sup> These efforts add new issues, as discussions develop over whose voices should be included in such documentation and who among the Kwakwaka'wakw have the authority to make such decisions.

In her valuable research on Northern-style powwow songs and dance, Tara Browner, an ethnomusicologist and Choctaw powwow dancer, reflects on the complexity of this ethnodocumentation process for many other indigenous peoples:

Ownership of non-material culture is crucial to Native American Indians, who perceive the gradual erosion of cultural knowledge as the latest in a series of threats to their survival as distinct peoples. . . . [T]roubling from a scholar's perspective is the trend toward political fragmentation and infighting within tribal groups (or even families) over control of musical knowledge and the right to present it publicly.<sup>15</sup>

Until recently, these issues have not been addressed often in social science analyses of powwow. Rather the role of powwow dancing in developing a "pan-Indian" or "intertribal" identity, in what is widely considered to be a "secular" context, has commonly been the analytic focus. The interplay between local tribal and a broader American Indian identity is sometimes assessed, yet Browner's work reflects new attempts to look below the surface of the general category of powwow as a dance context. For example, when Kracht described the extant literature's prevailing etic, or outsider's, view of powwow as a secular setting, in contrast to his analysis of its capacity to build community identity through shared sacred elements, Lassiter and Ellis offered several valuable critiques.<sup>16</sup> First, the sacred/secular distinction is not entirely relevant in many Native American cultures, and second, powwows do not necessarily enhance a sense of shared community or tribal identity. To

the contrary, very complex social dynamics related to powwow dance performances can enhance status differences and become the source of disputes within communities. These new perspectives have been incorporated in a few works that were published following the development and completion of much of our ethnographic research, and they provide important broader contexts for our Nez Perce powwow study.<sup>17</sup>

Historically, the Kwakwaka'wakw and numerous other indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast had social structures characterized by a ranking system, and comments about disputed ownership of dance prerogatives were not uncommon among our project participants. Nez Perce dancers also offered conflicting opinions about the cultural significance of the powwow dance context, the "right" of individuals to participate, and their associated obligations. An acculturation model highlighting the impact of Western contacts and contemporary histories does not offer sufficient explanation for such variation. Early on Fowler noted that such a model presents a picture of First Peoples as passive receptors, in which "change is viewed not as resulting from resourceful and creative acts or choices but as capitulation to pressures from the wider society."<sup>18</sup> We organized this project to include several generations of Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce dancers, whose learning histories span periods of considerable differences in the local, national, and global circumstances of indigenous peoples. This provides an important, yet infrequently assessed, context for considering changes in dance performance in these communities and others.<sup>19</sup> Further, within those categories, dancers' lives also include the potential for individuals to change their behavior and beliefs within their own lifetime. Among the Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce dancers, connections with traditional cultural values can be built on and incorporated into new contexts without reflecting social breakdown or disorganization and disruption on the road to cultural extinction.<sup>20</sup> This serves as an important reminder of the variation and complexity among First Peoples and of the extent to which shared cultural beliefs and identities often incorporate intra-group variation.

Considering powwow and potlatch together means addressing issues of cultural sustainability and change in dance contexts that non-Natives and many Native peoples would consider distinct. Moving across stereotypic boundaries of anthropological culture areas and arbitrary divisions of contemporary nation-states—to place them within one framework for this analysis—provides an opportunity to see the dancers' experiences in a different light. This approach allows for the identification of similar patterns in embodied cultural knowledge, as well as for new insights into distinctive features. In addition to looking across culture areas, we also move powwow analysis to a region from which little information has been previously incorporated. Focusing on the individual dancer's experiences helps elucidate complexity within the generalizations from analyses that consider dances mainly as representing community experiences.<sup>21</sup> Individual bodies become expressions of meanings that literally may begin with a potlatch dancer's unique hand gesture, or the heel and toe movement of a powwow dancer's foot, and radiate outward to interpretive levels that include global presumptions and imaginings about

Native peoples. A closer look at potlatch and powwow from contemporary dancers' points of view reveals dynamic relationships between individuals and social groups that likely were representative of the past and will continue into the future.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

We could not consider the contemporary and historical roles of Nez Perce powwow and Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch dance without including some links with associated songs. However, our main focus is on the views and experiences of the dancers—all of our project participants either are or were dancers. Information from the authors' recent ethnographic projects in these communities is combined with archival materials and the extant ethnographic and ethnohistorical literature.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce Nations—Geographical and Dance Contexts**

The perspectives of the dancers in this study are examined in the context of local histories and community experiences linked to their dance participation. We provide brief historical and cultural sketches that highlight issues of particular significance for each group of dancers and refer to works that will elucidate the complexities and details of specific potlatch and powwow dances.

*Kwakwaka'wakw.* While many indigenous societies with distinctive languages and cultures populate the coastal regions of the northwestern United States and western Canada, the Kwakwaka'wakw—still known generally by the Kwakiutl name conferred by outsiders—are one of the most intensively studied and widely recognized.<sup>23</sup> Within anthropology, Boas (initially) and many others have made this group the focus of their research. Our project was mainly conducted with the Kwakwaka'wakw residents of Alert Bay, which is currently the largest village of Kwak'wala speakers and home to the U'mista Cultural Centre. The Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations claim a geographical area that encompasses much of northeastern Vancouver Island and many islands adjacent to the mainland. Coniferous forests characterize this area, and, historically, the main winter villages were usually along coastal areas with canoes being the primary means of transportation. Today, one main two-lane highway reaches from the densely settled southern and middle Vancouver Island regions to the northern tip of Vancouver Island. However, it is often necessary to travel to Kwakwaka'wakw band villages using a ferry, as is the case for the Alert Bay community located on Cormorant Island.

Fishing, hunting, and collecting shellfish formed the basis of Kwakwaka'wakw subsistence in the past and remain important resources, although only a few families continue to be able to make a solid living from commercial fishing. Potlatches, with their prominent dance and song performances, were so central to Kwakwaka'wakw life that the Canadian government outlawed the practice in 1884. This reflected, in part, a concern

that involvement in these “heathen” practices inhibited the “Indians” from accepting the grace of Christianity. Equally important, Alert Bay was the site of a major cannery operation. Potlatches kept local people occupied for months at a time when the new regional commercial canned salmon industry was just taking off and experiencing major labor shortages.<sup>24</sup> The ‘Namgis Band was relocated to Alert Bay from their traditional use areas and residence sites nearby Cormorant Island and were joined by some members of other Kwakwaka’wakw bands. These peoples were moved in an effort to provide much needed labor for the cannery, which became the focal point of a new, permanent Alert Bay community along with several regional Canadian government offices.

The potlatch ban allowed for the legal confiscation of dancers’ outfits, masks, and other dance regalia. The dancers, other potlatch participants, and even attendees could be fined and/or jailed. Potlatches and dancing continued out of sight of Canadian officials and in remote locations. But the Kwakwaka’wakw living in Alert Bay, and on nearby islands or the adjacent mainland, were more easily monitored and constrained. Although the ban was never formally rescinded, it no longer appeared in the Canadian constitution after 1951, and potlatches soon began occurring in public again.<sup>25</sup> Several local residents played a key role in initiating the processes for repatriating potlatch paraphernalia, which had been disbursed across Canada and around the world in art markets, museums, and private collections. The U’mista Cultural Centre developed as a repository for these items; it continues these repatriation efforts today and is organizing as a center for research on regional culture history and the Kwak’wala language.

The word *potlatch* comes from a Chinook jargon term that means *to give*. The cultural contexts for potlatches among Northwest Coast Indians varied, but the Kwakwaka’wakw were known for particularly elaborate displays. Academic explanations for this practice include an emphasis on the psychological, with its elaboration and competitiveness among the Kwakwaka’wakw supposedly reflecting group personality characteristics; the potlatch as the basis of a credit-based economic system; and the potlatch as an essential method of environmental resource distribution.<sup>26</sup> Macnair succinctly captures how the Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch was enmeshed with every aspect of their culture.

The potlatch *was* society: it was all-inclusive, encompassing things economic, political, social, religious, ritualistic, and ceremonial. Simply stated, a potlatch involved a payment of goods and food to assembled guests gathered to witness a Host’s claim to ancestral rights or hereditary position. The transfer of rights from one generation to the next, the acquisition of privileges through arranged marriage, or the assumption of a new position could only be concluded through such public events. Thus, the guests, or witnesses, were the ultimate arbitrators; by accepting gifts, they validated the claims of their host and confirmed his status. . . . Certain jealously guarded privileges confirmed by potlatching were evident at all times; others were revealed only in ceremonial contexts.<sup>27</sup>

Dance dramas often are associated with the confirmation of special privileges at potlatches in ceremonial contexts that occur mainly during the winter months.<sup>28</sup>

Generally the Winter Ceremonies at potlatches, *t'seka*, are characterized by red cedar bark worn by some participants and attendees. During this series of dramatic dances, the contact of Kwakwaka'wakw ancestors with supernatural beings at the beginning of the world, the powers they acquired, and stories of how the world became as it is today are portrayed. The Hamat'sa, or Cannibal Dancer, approaches and represents the wild forces of nature that must be tamed in order for human social order to survive. Hamat'sa are considered the highest-ranking dances, commonly only danced by men, and are said to originate in various Kwakwaka'wakw villages. Several of our study participants were known for their ownership of rights to these dances and for their performance skills. A second series of dances, *tta'sala*, used to occur quite separately from the Winter Ceremonies and also represent a valuable privilege but of a lower ranking. Masked *tta'sala* performers represent numerous mythical beings, and hereditary chiefs are recognized and participate only at this time.<sup>29</sup> Today, both dance complexes can occur during the same potlatch, with the more formal and solemn *t'seka* dances preceding the *tta'sala*. Through them, potlatches establish and reinforce the system of laws and cultural values that support Kwakwaka'wakw traditions.

During the potlatch ban, a number of the most famous local Kwakwaka'wakw dancers passed away, and some cultural practices confirmed through potlatches changed. For many families today, the potlatch and its associated dances and songs remain an essential context for and are integral to their cultural beliefs and practices. A few of our study participants were old enough to remember participating in "banned" potlatches of the early 1900s, others learned to dance in their youth from elders as the potlatches became public events again in the early 1950s, and still other dancers—young adults today—are learning from their elders and archival documents. We drew on all these perspectives as significant to understanding the role of dance from the vantage point of the dancers.

*Nez Perce.* The traditional land-use territory of the Nez Perce, about thirteen million acres, straddles the eastern border of what anthropological research defines as the Plateau Culture Area, which covers an area stretching north to Kamloops, British Columbia (home of the Shushwap Nation) and south to Warm Springs Indian lands in Oregon.<sup>30</sup> The contemporary Nez Perce tribe has its reservation headquarters in Lapwai, Idaho. Plateau tribes traditionally used wild plant, fish, and animal resources throughout the Columbia River Plateau, but the Nez Perce territory partially overlapped, or at least afforded frequent contact with, Plains Indian groups to the east such as the Crow and Gros Ventre.<sup>31</sup> Nez Perce powwow dance shares some striking similarities to that of Plains and other Plateau area tribes yet is distinctive in certain features.<sup>32</sup>

Project participants often described the context of powwow as evolving from the Nez Perce *paaxum* (War Dances), during which a group of warriors commemorated battles, into larger-scale events at which different tribes come



together in celebration of their own unique tribal identities and shared pride in being “Indian.”<sup>33</sup> Although translations vary somewhat the term *powwow* is generally recognized as having derived from a Narragansett Algonquin word, *pau wau* or *pauau*, referring to meetings of individuals related to, or activities that occurred in association with, healing ceremonies.<sup>34</sup> Eventually, non-Indians began to associate the term *powwow* with Indian dancing, and by the 1880s Indians were organizing intertribal events under that label. Nez Perce dancers indicated that use of the term *powwow*, with associated intertribal participation, did not emerge locally until about the early 1950s and then became fairly widespread by the early to mid-1960s.

Historically, Nez Perce dances were primarily linked with prayer and ceremonial contexts, including the *paaxum* related to times of war; some of these continue to hold a significant place in contemporary powwow contexts.<sup>35</sup> Underlying the Nez Perce religious system was the central notion of supernatural power, which might be gained from ancestors in visions and dreams. Girls and boys in early adolescence sought the power of guardian spirits (*weyekan*) through vision quests, for they were crucial to avoiding bad luck and obtaining success in life. Winter Spirit Dances provided a context for demonstrating and legitimizing the powers and abilities individuals had obtained. Successes in activities, such as hunting, and the accumulation of economic wealth were the tangible outcomes, accompanied by the incalculable benefits of high prestige.<sup>36</sup> Olsen documented Nez Perce song and dance (powwow and non-powwow) in records available from the time of European/Euro-American contact in the 1800s and through his own research in the mid- and late 1900s. He recorded different examples of songs and instruments, descriptions of tribal dances, and the historical context of these dances from the Nez Perce perspective. These songs and dances are depicted as having religious, economic, political, and social importance to the Nez Perce and have historical significance in terms of contact with surrounding Native American groups (for example, Crow, Yakama, Spokane). Olsen concludes that dance “appears a persistent necessity in religious and secular Plateau Indian life,”<sup>37</sup> and this has held true for several Nez Perce dances that later were included in powwows.

Accompanying, and at times foreshadowing, the increasing physical presence of American settlers were disease epidemics that reduced the Nez Perce to fewer than two thousand people by the early 1900s—less than one-third their population size one hundred years earlier. Christian missionaries accompanied the early Euro-American settlers and had considerable and complex impact on the Nez Perce. Historical records include Nez Perce reports that their prophets had long predicted the arrival of such newcomers who were expected to introduce new ideas. Among the missionizing sects, the Protestants especially experienced a favorable reception, perhaps in part reflecting Nez Perce acknowledgment of their own prophets’ powers.<sup>38</sup> The section of the Clearwater River between Lapwai and Kamiah was the focus of Protestant proselytizing and eventually the location of several permanent missions. Nez Perce ceremonies, with their dances and songs, were forbidden, while Christian teaching materials were introduced in the Nez Perce language, and local leaders were recruited

and trained to help disseminate the information. Many traditional religious beliefs and practices continued and, as is common to the colonizing experience of indigenous peoples, strong differences developed between converts and those who did not accept the new teachings.

A treaty signed in 1855 provided a portion of the Nez Perce tribe with what at the time was considered a large reservation land base within their traditional land-use area. This was not to last, and continual government actions to reduce their reservation land base and encourage Euro-Americans to settle in areas still used by nontreaty Nez Perce culminated in the famous Nez Perce War of 1877 or, as it is also known, Chief Joseph's War. Nontreaty Nez Perce continued to refuse to resettle at the Lapwai reservation and, after the grace period ended for a military demand that they volunteer to do so, a three-month series of battles occurred along a torturous route through parts of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Chief Joseph took over leadership when other elder Nez Perce statesmen died at the hands of the US military, and he successfully led his group of approximately four hundred Nez Perce to within forty miles of the Canadian border. After being intercepted and suffering many casualties in intense warfare with the military, Chief Joseph chose life for his followers and surrendered. Most of them, including Chief Joseph, were sent to Oklahoma but were allowed to return some thirty years later and settle on the Colville Reservation.<sup>39</sup> These events, and one local 1877 battle in particular, were commemorated through *paaxum* and for some Nez Perce dancers carry great significance in contemporary powwow settings.

## THE DANCERS

For this article we draw primarily on our personal interviews with fourteen Kwakwaka'wakw and sixteen Nez Perce participants—all former or current dancers.<sup>40</sup> We also participated in and/or observed events related to potlatch and powwow song and dance at each field site and in some nearby communities. The Nez Perce Cultural Resources Program and the U'mista Cultural Centre staff were closely consulted during the development of this project and provided feedback during the field research.<sup>41</sup>

At each project site, we sought to include about fifteen participants from young adults to elders of both sexes in order to gain as broad a perspective as possible.<sup>42</sup> None of the study participants, Kwakwaka'wakw or Nez Perce, were full-time dancers. They often had part-time or full-time wage work jobs or other responsibilities for contributing to their own and their family's support. The final age and sex distribution reflected the individuals who were available to participate during our summer project seasons (see table 1). For the Nez Perce project, the dancers included five women and twelve men ranging from eighty to eighteen years old, which was the youngest age we included in this study.<sup>43</sup> The Kwakwaka'wakw dancers interviewed ranged in age from ninety-six to twenty-three years old and included eight women and six men.

Age groupings tend to reflect general differences in the dancers' learning experiences. Those in the youngest group (18–35 years) primarily learned dance skills and meanings after the potlatch ban ended or since powwow

**Table 1**  
**The Dancers: Demographic Profile of Project Participants**

Age Group	Kwakwaka'wakw Dancers		Nez Perce Dancers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
18–35 years	2	2	5	2
36–60 years	2	3	3	2
More than 60 years	2	3	3	1

became common among the Nez Perce. Dancers in the middle age group (36–60 years) experienced the impact of the potlatch ban, boarding or residential schools, and a time of strong efforts to diminish the value of being “Indian” by the dominant culture. However, dancers in this group also witnessed the beginning of movements to maintain and revitalize Native nations, and they often had the opportunity to learn mainly from elders who participated when the potlatch was still a widespread practice among the Kwakwaka'wakw or in Nez Perce dance before powwows were common events locally. Dancers in the oldest age group (over 60 years) learned as participants themselves in potlatches and Nez Perce “ceremonies” and “gatherings” and/or from elders who danced prior to the potlatch ban or the emergence of the powwow setting.

First Peoples of the United States and Canada hold unique, and often uniquely constrained, positions in the contemporary nation-states that developed and flourished at their expense.<sup>44</sup> While some are granted a measure of legal recognition, as quasi-independent self-governing entities and a holdover from their sovereign status at the time of European colonialism, the majority culture wavers dramatically regarding how to deal with their unanticipated survival into the twenty-first century: Are contemporary Native peoples “real”? Are they more “real/traditional” if they wear a certain type of clothing or hairstyle, or if they live on a reserve or reservation instead of in the city?<sup>45</sup> The dancers in our study move through several levels of meanings within a single dance event, as they choose if, when, and where to dance, and whether and how to express individual and innovative movements in performance contexts that carry community expectations and symbolization. Here we will consider three major themes that emerged as significant for Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch and Nez Perce powwow dancers.

#### THEME 1: THE BODY OF THE DANCE

As noted earlier, we sought to include multiple generations of dancers in our projects and their experiences span nearly one hundred years. The Nez Perce and Kwakwaka'wakw share some general similarities in their histories

of contact with the industrialized nation-states that enveloped them and, most particularly, the efforts to “civilize” and assimilate them. These efforts influenced the cultural, linguistic, and physical settings in which dance occurred. Contemporary dance experiences retain an intensity that begins to emerge as the dancers relive their earliest dance memories and the process of taking on that role. The focus is on the body and how even its mere presence, let alone the intricate movements of individual appendages, expresses complex meanings.

### **Learning Body Techniques—Destined to Dance?**

Whether in formal or informal settings, the learning processes associated with moving the body in dance are significant; although individually experienced on a physical level, they are socially mediated.<sup>46</sup> The oldest dancers often remembered family gatherings at which grandparents and other elders danced and/or practiced. When they were quite young, their learning occurred mainly through observation rather than direct instruction. Children had to reach a certain status, such as receiving “an Indian name” or being initiated into a dance society, prior to formal instruction and participation. The potlatch ban meant that even the oldest Kwakwaka’wakw dancers learned in a constrained and shrouded context. Mrs. Ethel Alfred, ninety-two at the time of our interview, remembers attending her father’s now infamous 1921 potlatch in their home community on Village Island, just a few miles from Alert Bay.<sup>47</sup> It was the last potlatch in the Alert Bay area until the 1950s, and many dancers and participants were fined or jailed. Mrs. Alfred explained,

Every time close relatives would give a potlatch, they would ask you to dance the ladies dance or some sort of dance that belongs to the family. Then those dances would just be passed down the line, but remained in the family.

By contrast, Wayne Alfred, Ethel’s grandnephew, was born around the time the potlatch ban was rescinded, and he watched and listened as family members discussed gatherings in the past:

grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles and aunties [would] come and visit from both [my] . . . mom and dad’s side, . . . all the elders . . . [would] . . . come and sing. . . . [T]hey would talk about the old days and about the dances that they were going to do and about the dances they used to see. They also talked about how they were danced. . . . [F]amily would tell . . . [me] . . . what faces to make, what steps to do and what hand movements to do.

Others remembered putting on a “play potlatch” with other young children, during which they re-created what they imagined occurred, wore play masks, and imitated dance moves. Even though the potlatch ban had been lifted, it still was a time nationally when being “Indian” was denigrated and assim-

lation was emphasized, so these young dancers were sometimes teased and taunted for practicing the “old ways.” Later the T’lisałagi’lakw School opened as a mechanism for infusing language and culture into the children’s regular education. William Cranmer, now in his sixties, sometimes found it a challenge to learn the potlatch dances when he was young, which was right after the potlatch ban ended. He observed that the T’lisałagi’lakw School “has made it easier to teach those dances because its program teaches the kids at a very young age how to dance. [My] . . . generation did not have such a program and it was a little more difficult to learn or find someone to teach the dances. Today that is not the case. A lot of the people during . . . [my] . . . generation were even embarrassed to dance.”

Several Kwakwaka’wakw and Nez Perce participants experienced a sense very early in their life of receiving the power and/or responsibility to dance, which for Wayne Alfred rests with his belief “that the creator sends gifts to a nation and a lot of people in a nation have a sense of destiny. . . . [I] . . . always had a sense of having to do what [I] . . . was meant to do.” This included having a spiritual tie to performing songs and dances, which was like a natural gift. All Kwakwaka’wakw participants emphasized that families own dances, and having the rights to many potlatch dances imparts considerable prestige, which can only be conferred through a family line or marriage. A suitable family recipient was not always available, and this was exacerbated as Euro-Canadian contact brought diseases with high death rates, forced relocations and residential school attendance, and introduced economic pressures that meant many who could be eligible were not in the communities. Assessing and negotiating these rights to dances caused dissension at times, as transfers in the past and contemporary decisions continued to hold great significance.

Nez Perce dancers emphasized protocols for powwow participation, while acknowledging that variations exist in how and when they are followed. The primary requirement is to be given an “Indian name,” usually from either parent’s family. The name giving is witnessed formally and represents a spiritual connection with nature and the recipient’s ancestors throughout their life. For dancers, the name giving may be combined with “joining the circle” or being “introduced to the floor,” or this second step can occur separately. Levi Carson remembers learning to dance as a toddler in the living room of the old house where he was raised:

[My] uncles would come around and call the kids for “war dance” . . . [and] . . . male relatives would have to strip down to their underwear, which was common practice. The old ones all danced this way; it’s called slick style, meaning nothing on except maybe underwear. This is where . . . [I] . . . learned about dancing and about the “circle” that [I] live in and dance . . . in.

His uncles and grandfather were the overseers of his learning early on, and he also admires and considers as teachers some of the contemporary “big guns” (or pro dancers) in “the powwow world.” In Mr. Carson’s case, employment responsibilities and other challenges have meant that his “official” initiation

into the circle has been delayed for some time. His family has gathered a lot of goods now, and he anticipates that his initiation will be a grand event.

Many Nez Perce learned how to dance and the meaning of dances as part of their family traditions. Others followed another path; their “need” to dance led them to seek out well-known and respected dancers whose styles they admired. These mentors can teach the history of the dance and the protocol of being introduced to the floor. Andre Picard Jr., at twenty-five one of the youngest powwow dancers in this project, notes that such mentors are crucial for learning about where and how to obtain permission to start dancing. He observed that there are many dancers who start without that permission and do not know about the protocol for starting, yet they do win competitions. “This has thrown a lot of powwows out of whack. . . . The dancers need to know about powwow and the protocol behind it.” As mentioned in the following text, powwow and potlatch dance protocols or traditions resonate with significance in contemporary settings.

### **Preparing to Dance: The Body’s Mind**

Powwow and potlatch dancers often are valued because they help strengthen and maintain the balance between nature and humans. Here the Western mind/body dualism and lack of language to reference the integration becomes particularly dysfunctional and can obscure aspects of the sociocultural embeddedness of bodily movement. Powwow dance requires preparation in the physical and spiritual realms of daily life, and several Nez Perce interviewees described dancing as their preferred method for building stamina and maintaining physical health.<sup>48</sup> It takes considerable time to prepare the body for the exertion required to dance for many hours a day and often over several days in a row. But to “dance with heart” also involves a significant spiritual connection, which may include fasting, participation in sweat-lodge ceremonies, the Washat or Seven Drums religion, Medicine dancing, or the Native American Church.<sup>49</sup> Medicine dancing ties into a person’s *weyekan* or guardian spirit (often an animal, such as an eagle), and dancers who have received their *weyekan* are drawn to imitate its gestures and movements during powwow performances. Only one powwow dancer visualized an absolute and concrete divide between the dance experiences in a primarily ceremonial context such as the longhouse as contrasted to the dance experience at a powwow. This dancer used to participate in powwows regularly but more recently has begun to view them as purely “social” events from which culture and spirituality have been eliminated by a focus on competition and prize money. The other project participants noted that some powwow dancers may participate and compete primarily in hopes of winning prize money, but they did not know of many who do so, and for them this is not the case. Their experiences while dancing at powwows can include significant connections with cultural traditions and/or spirituality, regardless of who else may recognize these individually meaningful events.

Further, powwow outfits require great skill and labor to create and are sometimes made by dancers or family members and friends. It takes hours

of dedication to crystallize the process that makes a “completed” dancer, and significant expenses are involved. Few dancers can make sufficient money regularly at powwows for it to become their sole source of income. Like this project’s participants, most maintain wage jobs and powwow regionally on weekends or sometimes take longer trips to Canada or other areas of the United States. In general, the prospect of receiving prize money is important to help maintain their ability to participate in powwows. But the strongest motivations for the Nez Perce dancers lie elsewhere—such as in maintaining family traditions from the past and creating new ones for their own children,<sup>50</sup> renewing inner strength and spiritual health after the work week, being among friends who value and support Indian cultural practices, and because they “must dance.”

Physical strength, endurance, and training are key for potlatch dancer preparation. Many potlatch dances involve wearing masks that represent animals or supernaturals and/or heavy garments and other dance regalia. Masked dancers, in particular, must manage their own movements throughout what is now often a large communal structure for ceremonies and meetings (“big house”) while balancing masks—sometimes so bulky and heavy that they require an assistant to operate long beaks or other moveable parts. The time and expense required to gather sufficient goods to put on a potlatch are considerable; it requires intensive and extensive family support to host one successfully.

In the past, commonplace cultural practices connected dancers with the spiritually infused natural world through fasting, bathing in ice water to purify and release pain, and being secluded in forested areas away from the villages. Here dancers would be in touch with spirit beings, and many Kwakwaka’wakw interviewees emphasized the importance of reasserting such practices more broadly among contemporary dancers. As Andrea Cranmer noted, “this will mean the spirit of the dances will be stronger, and without that, all dances will be . . . without meaning.” Dancers and attendees are expected to leave hard feelings at the door when entering the big house and problems should be resolved before leaving. Mental, as well as physical, preparation is critical as dancers work to develop the proper state of mind and focus—in essence, getting “psyched up” for the dances to come. Individuals spend years learning the dances they own and often seek to develop their own individual movement styles. Because of their reputation, or if the family hosting a potlatch does not own a dance they want performed, dancers are sometimes specifically invited to participate and are paid in honor and acknowledgment of their skills, which provides the dancers important financial support. However, most significantly they and the potlatch hosts receive prestige, which is priceless. They have helped reestablish the spiritual well-being of the community and reasserted social imperatives within the community.

### **The “Good Dancer”—The Body and Beyond**

We sought to understand what the dancers “looked for” and “saw” as components of “good” dancers. Individual Nez Perce participants emphasized



somewhat different aspects of movement; however, there are clear patterns in their descriptions. A good dancer is able to incorporate movements from animals, elements of nature, and other dancers while making those movements his or hers. Whether arm movements are intended to represent those of birds or looking over your shoulder for “shadow people”—the spirits who are present with humans all the time—an attention to detail is essential. Good dancers also are able to recognize dances and/or sections of dances where protocol emphasizes the appropriateness of specific dance moves and then incorporate them at the proper time. Other elements of “good” dancing include “dancing with heart” and “dancing hard all of the time.” This refers to a dancer’s connection with a meaningful experience beyond just the physical performance context. The more one knows and incorporates, from other dancers or their own innovations, the better the dancer. One participant had professional ballet and tap-dance training, and this was admired and recognized as having introduced him to different realms of movement from which to draw.

Within these general elements of good dancing, movements of individual body parts such as the head, torso, and feet are recognized as important. More specifically, good head-rocking movement, maintaining movement low to the floor, and having good foot movement are key. Leroy Seth describes a good Round Bustle dancer as someone who “can do a thousand moves in one small area.” While widely recognized for his own skill, Mr. Seth admitted that some of his teachers had moves even he could not do, as they “move[d] all different parts of their body at the same time.”

Good powwow dancers also are knowledgeable about the different songs. Jackie Wapato, one of the oldest interviewees, said, “Learn the music and then the dancing will just come. Each song is unique; a lot of people do not realize that. Each song carries with it different sound, and can move a dancer a different way.” Commonly, Nez Perce powwow songs do not contain movement directions and often no words at all. However, another elder, raised by grandparents as a speaker of the Nez Perce language, offered additional insight into the relationship among language, song, and dance.

[I don’t remember the Nez Perce name] . . . for prairie chicken dance. The words do not translate into “prairie chicken” but mean “grouse dusting off its feathers.” This . . . explains the song and dance. That is why the drum is beaten fast because that is dusting off the feathers and the dancers . . . imitate that action when the fast beat is played. This song is a Nez Perce dance, . . . and . . . this dance comes from the birds.

At the individual level, a dancer will sometimes incorporate the movements of their *weyekan*, thus the importance of particular body movements will vary for a given song. This points to a distinction between potlatch and powwow dance and song connections. Often there is an intimate relationship between specific songs in potlatches and the Kwakwaka’wakw individuals who dance them, and many songs include specific directions for bodily movements.



The significance of knowing the Kwak'wala language, and thus being able to understand directions in songs and their personal relationship to dancers, was a common theme when Alert Bay interviewees assessed "good" dancers. For example, in considering what contributed to the reputation of a highly regarded dancer who is now deceased, one participant noted that "everyone loved him. He was a real hero and not everyone had his dance. He had a very good song and he knew the moves really well. He had much pride in his dancing." William Wasden Jr., a young dancer who heads a local dance group and has conducted research on dance histories, described these aspects of another former dancer's skills:

[He was known] . . . for hamat'sa. He was very athletic and his dance was very powerful. He had a great song which brought out his dancing. He had thirty different hand movements and he knew them all very well. He was able to dance anything and people knew he had the spirit for whatever he danced. . . . People need to know the meaning of the songs to be a good dancer.

While hand movements, including the arm trembling of the Hamat'sa, were often emphasized, Mr. Wasden noted that "head movement is also important; you can be a fat person with little body movement but if that person has good head movement it makes all the difference." Head movements reflect those of animals such as birds or bird-like beings and must be transmitted through the weight and size of masks. In addition, it is essential to understand how the head leads into turns to the left during the *t'sek'a*, or Red Cedar Bark Dances, because it "follows your heart."

Other Kwakwaka'wakw dancers also emphasized head movement, such as when one young woman described how she "was taught to make people fall in love with you when they watch you dance." She noted that the key to accomplishing this is through graceful movements and "lots of head movement"; gracefulness was the most common characteristic associated with women's dances. In teaching dances to young people, Mrs. Sandie Willie again emphasizes the importance of knowing the language so that songs can be understood. "There is so much work in putting songs together and researching songs, that it is a shame to see a dancer not know the songs or the hand movements to a particular song." For example, sometimes in women's dances, she sees participants out on the floor who are "just swinging their arms around."

Wayne Alfred emphasized that generally:

A good dancer is someone who dances with their heart, and who isn't dancing to impress, but rather dances for the enjoyment of dancing, . . . being in a certain state, thinking about ancestors, and having a sense of belonging, makes a good dancer. . . . [I] danced the way [I] did because [I] felt something in the song, that was a song for me in that potlatch. [I] felt electricity in my body, like [I] could dance all night long without getting tired.

Dancers, whether in potlatch or powwow contexts, recognize when someone is dancing authentically or “from the heart,” and this cannot be taught or learned through instruction or practice. Visible body movements alone, if disconnected from the “heart,” can be recognized as skillful yet incomplete.

## THEME 2: DANCING IN CONTEXT— PUBLIC SETTINGS AND SACRED EXPERIENCES

With few written records remaining, along with mostly fragmentary collections of material culture, it is challenging to envision how Native American and Aboriginal Canadian societies regularly changed in the past and how new ideas were incorporated. The “snapshots” created through the earliest writings by explorers, missionaries, and non-Native government officials, and then eventually photos, created images now adhered to by outsiders and many Native peoples as representing “traditional,” and perhaps the only “real,” indigenous cultures. Although the images are the outcome of changes over hundreds of preceding years, they seemed to get stuck in time—too much change often challenges an individual’s very identity as “Indian,” sometimes by Native peoples and non-Natives. Many potlatch and powwow dancers gave greater value to song and dance as they understood them to have existed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, for example in the period prior to the Canadian government’s potlatch ban and before powwows became broadly intertribal events. Yet their perspectives almost always are interwoven with the joy of dancing in the present and a belief that their dance is valuable even as it occurs in, and has been based on learning in, some very different contexts than in the past. As they reflected on their own dance participation and recognized how others are assessing them, the dancers expressed metaphorically, and sometimes literally, moving among complex levels of meaning.

Kwakwaka'wakw interviewees noted that within the past fifty years there have been some significant changes in the context of song and dance performances. Particular songs and dances are at times taken from individual homes or the big house and performed in public, non-potlatch-related settings. After the 1950s, when the Canadian government removed the potlatch ban, dancers and singers performed for tourists and non-Natives and, most famous locally, for groups from the Princess Patricia cruise ship. This has provoked some controversy over the years and continues to do so at times. Yet during the 1950s and 1960s, several overlapping circumstances limited the opportunities for giving potlatches and learning to dance. Nationally, Canadian assimilation policies resulted in many children being sent away from their home communities for schooling, which usually included Christian doctrinal teachings against potlatch dances and songs. At the time, young children had not seen many potlatches growing up, and they were often away at residential schools when potlatches began to reemerge in public. Even as children began to be kept in their home communities for schooling, it was not a time when “being Indian” was valued. Yet a core group of adult dancers were determined that dance traditions would not be lost, and they “taught dancing anywhere they could.” Ethel Alfred was among these teachers and described their experiences:

There were no blankets, and [we] had nothing. [We] had to use bath towels when they started learning and teaching . . . [we] . . . never asked to be paid when they started dancing. We just wanted [our] culture back.

For example, they would go up to the local gym in St. Michael's school to perform. She knew all the dances that went on in the potlatch, and she "taught the girls how to dance, how to do the motions, and how to go by what the song says. . . . [I] even taught the little boys the Hamat'sa." Mrs. Alfred traveled internationally to New Zealand with a local dance group, and she also has been to New York three times to dance.

As a young dance student and troupe member at the time, Wayne Alfred describes the experiences among his peer group and the broader community.

They used to send the people [from the Princess Patricia] to the big house. The dance troupe members were sent out of school early to go perform. They were paid but [I] was a part of the dance troupe because [I] wanted to learn how to dance. Some of the other kids would hide around the corner when . . . the group and [I] were practicing dancing, and the kids would peek around and tease and say "Innnnddddiiiiianssss." These teasers were caught up in the "white world". . . . A lot of the kids dropped off the group because of outside pressure from the white world.

Back when he started dancing, Mr. Alfred noted that they were just lucky to get people out on the floor to dance. People would hide so they wouldn't have to participate or cringed when they were asked to dance. When he danced in the 1960s and early 1970s, it was only he and a few others from his generation because then "dancing was not cool, and being Indian was bad."

After the potlatch ban was rescinded, Raven Arts and Crafts was the initial local group to organize informal dances for outsiders and at community events, such as a fundraiser for the local hospital that inspired some families to bring their long-hidden, or recently returned, potlatch dance masks to share with students and other community members. With the establishment of the U'mista Cultural Centre in 1980, new opportunities developed to repatriate confiscated Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch paraphernalia, gather and catalogue information about dances and songs, and draw additional visitors to the village. The performances for tourists were described as a major tool for teaching a younger generation who did not grow up in a potlatch system permeating their everyday activities. These performances were also seen as creating an opportunity for outsiders to better understand traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. They have continued in the community big house for travelers on various cruise lines that stop at Alert Bay because of the U'mista Cultural Centre.

The T'sasala Cultural Group formed in the 1980s, as Andrea Cranmer describes, because there were "too many displaced teens around . . . and some

kids were learning the dances and songs but were not learning the other part of the potlatch, which was the respect that came along with it. . . . [T]his includes listening and helping others during potlatch . . . not just putting on a blanket and [dancing] . . . then not helping.” T’sasala has grown to include several generations and regularly meets tour boat groups during the summer months for performances in the big house. The group wants to follow protocols and not change anything. The goal is not to make it seem like a theater performance but rather to give the audience a taste of what it is like to be a part of the *t’seka* and *tha’sala* dances and songs at a potlatch. Formal events, such as weddings, funerals, and transfers of rights to songs and dances occur as part of private family potlatches where attendees are specifically invited and become “witnesses” to the occurrence of these events. Also, T’sasala avoids special dances that only certain families own, unless they have an initiate in the group that has the right to show the dance. Although any children or young adults who want to learn to dance can join the dance troupe, Cranmer says that “there is a discipline plan that they follow.”

Reflecting the growing interest in dance and song, a second dance society—Gwa’wina or Raven Dancers—formed in 1996, and William Wasden Jr. is its current coordinator. The Gwa’wina Dance Group also emphasizes the importance of members taking their commitment very seriously—the rule being that you cannot drink or use drugs if you are a dancer. In his early thirties, Mr. Wasden is becoming increasingly proficient in the Kwak’wala language and works to document the histories of potlatch songs and dances through archival research and his own interviews with elders. He also is quite realistic about the connection between cultural sustainability, and the adaptation to and use of new environments:

There are many reasons for starting the group. There are cultural reasons as well as economic ones. . . . [T]his group is a way to survive in a capitalist society . . . [and to] . . . promote money making for young people. . . . The dances . . . [we] . . . perform are done so in a dignified way and have the permission of the Elders to perform them. No one is allowed to take photos and . . . [we] . . . are the only ones who will make any money on [our] culture, no one else.

With little besides the declining commercial fishing opportunities to provide a dependable local economic resource base, Mr. Wasden believes the Gwa’wina dancers offer opportunities essential for young members of the community to gain experiences and learn skills that will assist them in managing challenges in their lives. They learn about the cultural traditions linked with dance and song so they can give a “good representation of their dances” and share the “spirituality of their people.” Traveling to other communities and the United States for performances is seen as an educational opportunity for the dancers and the event attendees—who may never have known about Kwakwaka’wakw peoples and culture, or who only have witnessed performances that Mr. Wasden termed “mockeries.” However, efforts to reach out to visitors and educate audiences beyond the region, let alone worldwide, are not without

critics in the community. There are those who have accepted Christianity as their sole religious affiliation, and the continuation and elaboration of potlatch dance performances carry little or negative significance. Others feel strongly that this cultural knowledge should stay within the community, if not only with the families who are rightful owners of the dances, and occur only at potlatches or Winter Ceremonies. But having a potlatch in the big house setting alone does not guarantee a significant cultural and spiritual experience. According to one dancer, “There are too many of us that content ourselves in going out there and getting it over with.”

Gwa’wina members not only face challenges finding economic options that will allow them to participate regularly in group dance events, but Mr. Wasden thinks that more support and respect for dancers’ efforts within the community are essential. In his opinion, expert local singers and dancers are sometimes overlooked and protocols are broken. Because Kwak’wala is no longer the first language of many community members, traditional songs have been lost or their structures have changed. At times, self-serving people will twist histories of ownership to suit their own interests. These types of issues certainly are not unique to Kwakwaka’wakw songs and dances, as exemplified by Browner’s concerns that divisions created within Plains Indian groups regarding powwow song histories and authenticity will present significant challenges to educating young dancers for carrying on these traditions.<sup>51</sup>

The emergence of powwows as a regular feature of Plateau area cultural practices, and specifically among the Nez Perce, also evokes debate about the validity and authenticity of dance in that context. There does not seem to be a single point in time when use of the Nez Perce term *paaxum* (War Dances) ends and the term *powwow* begins, although this is commonly said to occur during the early 1950s. Just over half of the interviewees, representing all three age categories, still prefer the terms *paaxum* (now an individual Nez Perce War Dance that may or may not be included in a powwow), *celebration*, or *gathering* to describe Nez Perce dance events. One of the oldest study participants noted that the term *celebration* has closer cultural meaning because the term *powwow* is a “word placed on Nez Perce dance by ‘Whites.’”

This same dancer provided another example, in reference to the Grand Entry that begins a powwow. It is a procession of dancers holding flags representing several countries or Native American nations and includes the US flag. This elder was raised by family members with immediate experiences in the Nez Perce War of 1877 and believes that the US flag would never have been so respected by prior generations because of the atrocities they witnessed committed against the Nez Perce at the hands of the US government. For other dancers, their own or their relatives’ military service in World War II, Vietnam, or the Middle East contributed to an increasing sense of connection with the United States as a whole. Such experiences provide a different perspective on the Grand Entry and related veterans’ memorials at powwows even in the face of a broader history of domination and discrimination.

The majority of Nez Perce dancers viewed powwow as simply representing a broader dance context—one that continues to resonate with significant group and personal cultural meanings and spiritual experiences.<sup>52</sup> Older

dancers remember the first use of the term *powwow* occurring at times of feasts and nationally recognized holidays. During the 1940s and 1950s, US government assimilation policies and the teachings of local Christian sects combined to create a negative, if not hostile, environment for Medicine Dances or other traditional gatherings where War Dances would occur. As one participant explained, the newly emerging events called powwows allowed the participants to keep the culture alive. While the excuse for the events was a celebration of the “white-peoples” holidays, in actuality the organizers found a less acrimonious context in which traditional dances also could occur. One of the oldest interviewees remembers a transition in dance settings from the longhouse (closely watched and strongly criticized) to Fenderson Hall when it was made available for dancing. After that, the local Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agency eventually allowed dancing in its large gym/auditorium. Several miles away, the Spaulding grounds also became a place where dancing happened, and “people enjoyed it. People get cabin fever. Most of them enjoyed it.” Gradually, *powwow* replaced the word *celebration* on posters for *paaxum*.

There were a few main individuals who organized the early “powwows” and although their houses were fairly small,

they had a lot of guests stay . . . during the powwows. [They] . . . would feed them and take care of them during the extent of the pow wow. They would then go either to the agency or longhouse to dance. If people needed a place to stay then locals would open up their house for the visitors. Announcements were made at the pow wows for availability of room and board. . . . [My] grandmother told [me] . . . no matter how small of a house [I] had that [I] . . . should still invite visitors to come and stay.

Increasing awareness of powwows was fostered through intermarriage and new connections made at boarding schools where tribes from around the country were brought together. Many fellow students were from the Plains and Oklahoma where powwows had already grown into significant intertribal events. By the end of the 1950s, local families commonly owned trucks and cars, which allowed firsthand attendance at and participation in powwows across the United States and in Canada. One Nez Perce dancer noted that in the earliest days of powwows at Lapwai, “everybody would come which includes Yakamas, Umatillas, and the local dancers never did dance then.”

By the 1960s, there were some new successes in ending US federal termination processes, and legislation began to emerge that emphasized areas of Indian sovereignty and self-determination. In an ironic twist of national sentiment, Native Americans became revered by some segments of the population as bearers of valuable philosophies and cultures. Mr. Carson describes the 1960s as

“Powwow mania.” This “phenomena” was . . . a result of the 1960s and the “hippy movements.” It was in the 1960s when it was “cool” to be

Indian or [to] have an Indian friend to be “spiritual” with. So having a large group of tribes come together for a public event, such as a powwow, was accepted and even desired by non-Natives.

This rather abrupt turnabout was not as quickly internalized among Native peoples themselves, and some never held an interest in staying connected, or reconnecting, with traditional cultural practices. Several dancers noted that early on the inclusion of contests at powwows, and particularly of prizes, sometimes were conscious attempts by organizers to create an incentive for renewed participation in dancing. Mr. Carson noted that “a long time ago it was not fashionable to be Indian, so getting dance participants was difficult.”

Along with the increasing numbers of powwows regionally, dancers gave demonstrations at professional rodeos, and Indian clubs (through which children traveled extensively) formed in local grade schools and high schools. Participating made one dancer “a little money,” but he now holds a full-time wage job and continues to participate when possible because “these performances and ‘shows’ are done to educate non-Indians, to show who [the Nez Perce] are, and to gain respect for [Indian] ways.” Several dancers noted that early on winnings often only provided enough to buy gas to travel to the next powwow, and few of our interviewees currently make much extra beyond the costs of maintaining outfits and travel expenses such as lodging, food, and gas. As Nakia Williamson-Cloud explained,

[Powwow] maintained parts of the culture while many things were lost in the past. The reason for cultural loss is because of cultural change and there are not adequate contexts for the survival of many of these songs and dances. Powwow is now an outlet allowing a portion of those songs and dances to remain alive. It may not be a large portion, but without the context of singing and dancing at powwows, more songs and dances would be lost, and then the Nez Perce will have very little.

Leroy Seth also emphasized the importance of powwow and gatherings in preventing the loss of the Nez Perce language, song, and dance—all vital elements of contemporary life. Nearly seventy at the time of our project, Mr. Seth is a dancer to whom we were often directed when we asked for recommendations about interviewees for our project. His history of powwow participation is among the longest of our study participants, and he continues to be a teacher to many younger dancers. He has actively recruited young dancers over the years since the 1950s and notes that some dances have made major comebacks because of the growing popularity of powwows. For example, the annual Chief Joseph Warriors Pow Wow occurred early in the summer of our field research at Lapwai. It is the single annual local powwow, held in recognition of the Chief Joseph warriors’ bravery in the War of 1877, and it draws mainly Nez Perce attendees and dancers or those from nearby areas. An old dance derived from the War of 1877, the *k’ums k’ums*, was brought out and danced for the first time in about forty years. The last time Otis Halfmoon remembers seeing it was



at Fenderson Hall where . . . some of those old men . . . were told to dress really poor, no war bonnet, hair loose, no bells and they would dance to one of the old time warrior songs. The crier [someone like contemporary announcers] would talk the whole time about why they were doing this. Everyone was told to stand up and the women would start crying . . . and the men would put their heads down because those old time Nez Perce were remembering what happened in the war of 1877.

In this respect, the local powwow continues to provide a context for maintaining cultural traditions, which for nearly half the Nez Perce interviewees include significant spiritual connections as well. At these local and regional powwows, announcers often spend considerable time describing the history and meaning of particular dances as they introduce a dance event category. Differences in dance derivations may influence contemporary perspectives; for example, in some cases powwow dances evolved out of aspects of healing ceremonies and War Dances. While there are Nez Perce Medicine Dances that only occur in longhouses during ceremonies, several dancers who participate in these ceremonies also spoke of spiritual experiences in the powwow settings. Gary Greene considers himself a member of the Washat religion and feels that “religion and powwow go hand in hand.” He doesn’t always get to attend longhouse services, and through his powwow participation he regularly sees and sings with others who share his beliefs. He noted that in the Plateau area “a lot of powwows . . . are run by longhouse people . . . they were the strength that kept the powwow system going.” In his experience, powwow provides a renewal of his spirit after the workweek.

Similarly, nearly half of the Nez Perce participants emphasized that religion and spirituality were important aspects of their dancing. The relationship between Christianity and powwow is complex. For example, Leroy Seth described the reasons why people go to powwows as being similar to the reasons why people go to church—for an experience infused with spirituality. However, local Christian sects encouraged the Nez Perce to distance themselves, at least, from traditional cultural practices and preferably to cut all ties—especially to the religious underpinnings. Some Nez Perce were caught in the middle because aspects of Christianity were useful and appealing, but they also felt a strong spiritual connection to Nez Perce dance. An elder caught in this position about forty years ago was described by Otis Halfmoon as having “power, a *Weyekan* . . . [and acting] . . . like his vision or his guardian spirit. . . . But . . . he would be the main one at the church.” At that time, “it [took] two ring[s] of the bell to bring people to church, but it only [took] one beat of the drum to bring people to *paaxum*.”

Some Nez Perce Christians continue to avoid cultural events, including powwows, while others, such as Jeffrey Scott, have found that they easily integrate. For him, powwow dancing is more spiritual than for show, and he also described dancing “like being in church.” Dance allows him to “cleanse” himself, as he used to do through taking sweat baths as a young boy with his grandfather, and it helps to make him a better man and thus a better husband



and father. If he doesn't feel like he will pray hard when he dances, because of anger or hard feelings toward others, he won't even go because

dance is prayer. There is a lot of power on the dance floor. . . . [I] learned about Christianity and . . . that within the Bible (book of Psalms) [it] talks about dancing before the Lord with all your might. When [I] dance, I think about this verse.

Mr. Scott is well aware that others shun the Bible, but he finds its teachings are similar to those of his grandfathers in important ways.

Important events such as receiving Indian names, introduction to the floor, ceremonies to recognize first kill or first catch, getting married, and funerals occur in the longhouse. Lee Whiteplume noted that all these ceremonies come from this way of the longhouse, or Wa' shaat, and some, like namings and introduction to the floor, also occur at local powwows. The "floor" is very sacred, in his opinion, whether in the powwow context or the longhouse, and it is the foundation of the Plateau people. In Mr. Carson's experience, "strength and spiritualism are found when the songs are being sung and the [powwow] dancers are pounding the ground." More specifically, Mr. Seth noted that spiritual beliefs are a part of "preparation for everything." For example, some dancers keep a token in a bundle that represents an important event in his or her life. The bundle is kept close by putting it on his or her outfit. Mirrors also are put on outfits or kept near dancers to ward off bad feelings or jealousies, and sage is placed in dance moccasins to protect the feet. For Mr. Seth and many others, individual powwow dance moves are at times inspired by the dancers' *weyekan*.

There are critics of powwow, Native and non-Native, who question whether this context is meaningful on a spiritual or cultural level for dancers or attendees. They find the emphasis on prize money to be at best distracting, and at worst, as in one Nez Perce dancer's opinion, it always disconnects dance performance from any cultural or spiritual meaning. The context and monetary prize competition represent too drastic of a change. Yet the historical documentation of competitions and pursuit of material wealth in Nez Perce cultural events adds a layer of complexity to observations that this aspect of powwows bears no connection to the past.<sup>53</sup> One interviewee described local powwows as being like a "double-edged sword"; they are important cultural activities but are not, despite some current opinions to the contrary, the only cultural activity that is available to Nez Perce tribal members. Several other interviewees described powwow as part of a much larger Nez Perce reality and said it acts as a gateway for Nez Perce who have not been exposed to the broader context of cultural activities.

At the dancer's level of experience and action, Jeffrey Scott describes how he "takes the audience into consideration" when he dances at a powwow. In front of an older person he "toes and heels," an old-style Nez Perce step, "to put a smile on their faces" as they recognize and appreciate the moves. In other powwow dancers' experiences the spiritual moves into and within them, so the issue is whether they make that connection—not where their

body happens to be when dancing. Within a potlatch or powwow setting such individual cultural and spiritual connections may not be “visible” to any others, or to only a few, yet they reveal the rich, multiple layers of meaning that can coexist based on a single move during a dance, within a dance type or category, and in various settings. Thus, a movement of a dancer’s hand or foot can challenge assumptions about meanings of what is experienced and communicated in contexts generally described as “sacred,” as contrasted to public or “secular”—if the observer knows how to see it. However, these movements, like the settings they occur in, do not necessarily carry meaning disconnected from the individual dancer.

### THEME 3: TRADITION—HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

Attention to protocol and valuation of innovation, from the individual dancers’ perspectives, underlies opportunities for cultural maintenance and the capacity for sociocultural innovation and adaptation that has characterized most human groups—including North American and Canadian Indians. Valuing “traditions” has allowed indigenous peoples globally to maintain key features of their cultural beliefs and practices, while many aspects of their environments—physical, social, economic, political—have been altered. Change regularly occurred prior to Western European contact, although the recent breadth, pace, and destructiveness of that change has been unprecedented. The footings for survival also are found in the ability to adjust to new environments and learning wherever possible how to manage, contain, and use changes to serve cultural traditions that sustain a group. We find that the experiences of individual dancers speak to how social groups manage, at their most basic levels, the tensions between cultural protocol and individual innovation and how traditions can retain deep significance though practiced in new places.<sup>54</sup>

#### **Cultural Protocol, Individual Innovation, and “Stolen” Moves**

Potlatch dances may seem an unlikely context for dancers to develop much, if anything, in the way of individual dance styles. During a potlatch, specific protocols guide the order in which the dances are performed, who has the right to dance, as well as the general format of particular dances, such as the Hamat’sa or the Salmon Dance. But interviewees indicated that there still remains coveted room for individual innovation in dance-step style and specific movements. The more a dancer is familiar with the general form of hand movements directed by a certain song, the more the dancer can add his or her own interpretation of movement “style” within the performance.

Earlier generations of famous Kwakwaka’wakw dancers, who had extensive knowledge of dance and song as integral parts of daily life, were described as often developing very elaborate individual styles. Because the context for dancing in everyday life is now not as widespread, several potlatch dancers described the extent and level of individual style innovation as being more limited. As in the past, individual styles continue to be developed through practicing, listening to songs, participating in potlatches and other performances,

and imitating the dancers that one enjoys watching. Dancers can take what they like about the moves of their favorite dancers and incorporate them into their own style. This could include those of a visiting powwow dancer, as Olney learned when a potlatch dancer described wanting to “steal” one of his moves. While watching videos of himself and others, Mr. Alfred “critiques [myself] . . . and takes from others what . . . [I] . . . like,” but he incorporates his own styles with the borrowed moves. At the end of the video, he “looks to the crowd to see their reaction.” Most Kwakwaka'wakw dancers indicated that being well known because of one's style or unique interpretation was desirable, as long as the person demonstrates that they “know the basics.” This involves understanding the words in the songs, what particular hand moves go with the songs and specific dances, and keeping to the beat of the music.

Simultaneously, there occurs a context for reinforcing, or occasionally altering, protocols and challenging designations of chiefly or higher ranked families. If the family who owns a particular dance does not have a member skilled to perform it, they may hire someone to do so, or the dance may not be included. If dance rights are contested, the family sponsoring the potlatch can reestablish its claim or assert what it considers to be its rights to the dance. Potlatches continue to be held mainly during the season of the Winter Ceremonies, as this defines the appropriate time to be performing dances closely linked to the spirit world. Also, to do otherwise is likely unrealistic given that many families participate in fishing, collecting shellfish, and other resource-harvesting opportunities in late spring, summer, and early fall. The widespread reliance on at least part-time wage work means potlatches now are usually encompassed within one to two days of activities, with adjustments that allow the essential events to occur in a more condensed time frame.

Often, however, gestures within a dance are not strictly defined, so their variation may reflect individual or village-specific styles. One of the youngest potlatch dancers described an “old style” that existed in “the late 70s/early 80s” and noted that “there was more variation back then, and today everyone pretty much dances the same. The younger guys all look the same . . . because they all copy each other.” Movement styles often revealed the home village of a dancer, at least prior to and during the potlatch ban. People from Alert Bay who were determined, and had the opportunity, to learn dances would visit villages on islands nearby as inclement weather often kept Canadian officials from closely monitoring dancing or potlatches. In these more isolated villages there were “many good dancers [who] never stopped dancing.” Learning from the limited number of remaining elders meant having a smaller pool of styles to observe, but even they encouraged borrowing moves and style innovation among the novices. Ironically, two of the oldest potlatch dancers (one more than 90 years old) in our study even suggested that dancers used to dance only one way in the past, but now dancers are more freestyle in their movements—within a certain protocol. When Mrs. Alfred was asked if dancing had changed, she observed that “some people seem to have added more things to it. They make it better than it was.”

Regardless of age or sex the potlatch dancers agreed that everyone has his or her own style and echoed Mrs. Alfred's description of how she would

watch her aunt's dancing movements, then take them and add them into her own style. One's style may change during their lifetime, but having unique interpretations and movements is encouraged and valued as long as a dance's basic pattern or protocol is followed. "That is the way it has always been for the Kwakwaka'wakw." Contemporary dance groups share concern for and knowledge of the historical accuracy of their performances. At times, they also encourage young people to take from the past in order to learn skills for coping with the future by moving certain dances not only out of the local potlatch context but also into broader regional and international settings. With a careful regard for protocol, and a keen eye on the realities of living within a capitalist global economy, William Wasden Jr. believes Native peoples can and should take control over economic benefits from their own cultures, while using new dance contexts as learning opportunities for the Kwakwaka'wakw, other Native peoples, and non-Natives. The U'mista Cultural Centre encourages similar educational opportunities, even with some intra-group debate regarding the value of such contemporary traditions.

As for the future, the teaching and composing of songs is coming back. Wasden believes that every new dancer should have his or her own song because that is the way it used to be, with each new song telling an original story about the person who owns it. Here the uniqueness of the individual is celebrated within the very structured potlatch protocol that sustains and reinforces more broadly defined community and band cultural values.

Nez Perce powwow dancers described their moves as being influenced by sources including television, Michael Jackson, powwow videos, animal movements, the natural elements, other dancers, and various human experiences. These influences were drawn into a dancer's own individual style at different times in their lives and depending on the context of his or her dance participation. Common times for innovation are during competitions within specific dance categories, when the individual style of the dancer will sometimes be aimed at catching the eye of dance judges. However, there are also times in competitive powwow and other dance settings to recognize the protocol of "traditional" Nez Perce dances, such as movements in the Duck and Dive or in Round Bustle Dances. Some individuals prefer to dance the more prescribed straight traditional or "straight up" moves, while others thrive on the freedom of creating their own movements, as well as performing the traditional-style movements.

Age and personal temperament come into play as dancers learn and make decisions about how they will focus their dancing. When Leroy Seth first started dancing, all that was available was the "old-style" warrior dances, or Straight Traditional, and then the Round Bustle emerged among the Nez Perce. Clothing was kept to a minimum, and bustles were worn on the legs, back, head, and hands, sometimes made of horsetails, although a strong preference for feathers has developed over time. From Mr. Seth's perspective, "In the old days, the dancers were so straight up; it was almost boring to [me]. It looked very majestic and royal . . . but there is not enough action." As discrimination against Indian religions and gatherings began to subside and powwows emerged from the smaller-scale tribal celebrations of the past,

he relished opportunities to become more energetic and flamboyant through the development of Fancy Dance categories. He retains a reputation for skill in all kinds of dance and holds knowledge of many dances no longer commonly practiced. Now he describes himself as a “Traditional Dancer”; his body simply won’t make some of the moves that so many over the years have tried to imitate. Yet his innovative style continues to inspire; here is one move he sees other traditional-style powwow dancers try to use:

This starts with . . . [my] . . . standing up tall and then . . . [I] . . . go down and try to run-walk with [my] shoulders moving; and all of this in a zigzag motion along the floor . . . to make this even fancier . . . [I] . . . make a complete circle or even a figure eight with this move. But . . . [those] . . . two [moves] . . . take a dancer in pretty good shape.

He always retained a respectful connection with and returned to traditional dance styles, while being supported in his personal journey of managing dramatic life changes in part through dance creativity and innovation.

Gary Greene recounts how he began as a straight traditional dancer because its basic “one-two” step was one he could master fairly quickly, and the minimal outfit was accessible. He next mastered the Round Bustle Dance, which he considers a part of Nez Perce culture, with its specific songs, movements, and rules. As he became more confident in his skills, he began incorporating movements from other types of dances, which is allowed in categories such as “Contemporary Traditional.” While somewhat younger than Mr. Seth, he too is finding it more difficult to continue some moves. He is looking for new steps to incorporate and borrow from all kinds of dances, including women’s Fancy Dance, and for ways to accentuate them through his outfit accessories. With a strong sense of connection to Nez Perce culture, he recounted “reading an article that . . . said that [dancers] should not be doing all of these things, but . . . no one can stop it. Dancers are going to [add changes] anyway.”

Yet all Nez Perce participants do not necessarily value change, although its inevitability is acknowledged along with the role of powwow participation in keeping connections with cultural traditions alive. Levi Carson noted that in Round Bustle and contest dancing one is a bit freer to add moves—often to catch a judge’s eye. However, he “dances mostly traditional dance, . . . [and] . . . dances in different ceremonies that surround this style like honor dances, coming out dances, and Veterans functions. This is how the old ones always wanted it to be; they wanted it a certain way and did not want change.” Mr. Carson’s goal is to uphold this in his style of dancing; his outfit “isn’t too fancy or too loud; it’s just pretty much a straight traditional look.” Another dancer noted,

“[I] prefer to stay with the old style because it is more graceful and that is the way [I] was taught. Remember you are out there representing an animal like an eagle. That is how the old people look at you. . . . [I] compete but just to dance, you hear the drum and you can’t sit

there. . . . Everything changes, [I] tell [my] kids that . . . [we] live in two different societies, theirs is not complete. They live the white men way and the Indian way, if you go to powwows, medicine dances, stick games, seven drums, that's how they would be more complete."

Here, powwow participation provides one important opportunity for lived experiences directly linked with cultural traditions of the past, while reinforcing their significance in the present and for the future.

Andre Picard noted that "Michael Jackson always had some type of move that you could pick off from him. A lot of times it was the hip movements that he did. Some people would compliment [me] on those hip movements and asked if they could borrow it." Yet he also describes "watching a crow and its movements. [I] liked the way the alpha male . . . carried himself, and that's the way you have to be when you dance. You can take something from everything around you; all you have to do is watch." Realizing how and when innovation is appropriate, and when it is not, reflects knowledge about Nez Perce culture and history, according to another young dancer. "[Dancers] . . . should also understand what's accepted and what's not, and therefore add your own interpretation to ancient tradition, while at the same time promoting that tradition." Nez Perce religious beliefs continue to play a role in influencing innovation in dance styles. Dancing has occurred in ceremonial contexts associated with Nez Perce medicine songs and particularly when one gets his or her *weyekan*. The *weyekan* was described as usually being an animal spirit, and nearly half of the participants described it as influencing the way they dance at powwows.

Although it is possible to "borrow" moves from other dancers, it is more common for dancers to rephrase those moves, making them "my own." Because dancers become well known regionally and even nationally for their unique styles, no one would want to be perceived as simply imitating another individual. Further, an individual's family dance traditions and life experiences commonly enrich the expression of meanings through dance movements, thus unique elements are almost guaranteed. These may not be apparent to an outsider, who often perceives powwow dancing and dancers as sharing more similarities than is actually the case, particularly within dance categories. While powwows may be the most consistently accessible Native American dance performance context, public access to the dancers' personal level of meanings remains limited.

Round Bustle was often referred to as a "traditional" Nez Perce dance style; however, *paaxum* has an older role in Nez Perce dance. Mr. Seth described changes over the years in powwow dance categories. Early on, there tended to be categories representing "traditional" or "old-style" dances, and, with the development of the Fancy Dance and other innovations, a "Contemporary" dance category emerged. Within the last decade or so, he noted that a Contemporary Traditional category has joined the scene, particularly in large, casino-sponsored powwows that attract participants from diverse Native American cultural backgrounds. This new category recognizes that what was contemporary or innovative in the 1950s, now has some "traditional"



components compared to other common dance styles. Further, in the Contemporary Traditional category a broader range of movement styles may be incorporated with the “old style,” which according to one of the youngest interviewees began somewhat prior to the 1970s.

Learning contexts also have broadened, as both potlatch and powwow participants indicated that video and audio recording technology now play important roles. Video recording is often fairly unrestricted at powwows, and Lolita Henry noted that video recordings helped her create her own style of Jingle Dress dancing and allowed her to improve for the sake of competition.<sup>55</sup> Gary Greene added that through watching videotapes and recordings made with personal camcorders, one could learn what it is that makes some individuals the “top” powwow dancers. He noted that many of the professional dancers, “do [my] heart good because they are not only teachers, but helpers as well.” While a number of potlatch dancers also described benefiting from having video and audio recordings available as they learned and practiced, videotaping is limited at many family potlatches and often more restricted in public dance settings. Audio recordings began to be made early in the 1900s and play a particularly significant role in contemporary dance instruction. William Cranmer considers audiotapes crucial teaching devices, as “young people are learning the songs . . . and are learning the meaning of the songs and dances . . . and . . . learning these words in the songs . . . [B]ecause of all the recordings[,] the songs have gained the popularity they have today.” Since the 1980s, more dancers have been able to view videotapes made with personally owned equipment and use them in learning about dance protocols and in developing innovative dance moves.<sup>56</sup>

### Gender and Protocol

Discussions about dance, protocol, and innovation elicited comments from Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce participants regarding women's roles with respect to specific dances, although it was not a major focus of our research design. In particular, debates about the role of female Hamat'sa dancers as part of Kwakwaka'wakw history and cultural traditions often reflected broader issues about contemporary gender roles. It was generally acknowledged that in the early 1900s there was one female Hamat'sa, although one dancer thinks that this woman was actually a Hamshamst'sas, which looks very similar to the Hamat'sa but is not the same dance. Since the 1950s and the end of the Canadian government's ban on potlatching, all agreed that the number of female Hamat'sa dancers has increased. This was described as marking a change in gender roles, and interviewees held varying opinions about the increasing involvement of women in potlatch dance and decision-making roles.

One dancer raised concerns about female Hamat'sa because some of the physical activities required in this dance would be inappropriate for women and added that, because a few Hamat'sa moves are done specifically toward women attendees at potlatches, it “would be degrading to them” if a woman was in the Hamat'sa role. Further, because songs and dances are known to have originated in specific Kwakawaka'wakw villages or were acquired from

surrounding bands, this participant asked, “Where would a woman wanting to become a Hamat’sa ever come from?” In this case, female Hamat’sa were considered a serious breach of protocol, reflecting in part an inappropriate influence from a “women’s liberation” movement.

Other dancers explained that the woman in the early 1900s took on the Hamat’sa role because there were no worthy men available to do so, and a family’s right to the dance can be challenged if it is not regularly performed. When an appropriate male relative was initiated, the dance was returned to him as the legitimate male heir—as all had expected it would be. In more recent times, women have continued to dance the Hamat’sa when no male family member was available or no one is willing to take on the responsibility. In general, Andrea Cranmer observed that there are a number of potlatch roles and statuses formerly held by men that have been taken on by women. In her experience, women are taking on these roles to assure needed work is accomplished, and, in some cases, women have to carry a heavier burden than in the past. Cranmer indicated that “it is time to give them back to men [if] . . . the men [will] step up and take these responsibilities.”

Several dances that commonly occurred at potlatches are recognized as women’s dances. Pauline Alfred (mother of Wayne Alfred) described their especially complex and “tricky” beat, which is intended to show off the skill of the woman dancer. She also is an escort of the Hamat’sa, which is a very important dance, as is the now more rare medicine woman’s dance, owned by another woman in the community. As a dancer and teacher, Sadie Willie is particularly concerned that women dancers continue to pay careful attention to learning the songs or the hand movements to particular songs associated with their potlatch dances.

By the early 1960s, as gender roles in US society began to be reassessed, many Nez Perce (as well as other Native groups) had been attending boarding schools outside of their home areas for some time. Young people from many tribes lived at school for a major portion of the academic year, and change in the participation of some Native women as dancers, the appearance of Fancy Bustle dancing, and the role of dance competitions were favored within such an environment. For the Nez Perce, women’s participation began to increase with the change of emphasis from *paaxum*, where men were the War dancers, to broader community events with similarities to contemporary powwows.

As dancers, women used to participate in *paaxum* only by dancing in one place around the outside of the men’s area. While *paaxum* did not include specific women’s dances, Nez Perce women played other important roles in *qillowawya* ceremonies that occurred when men were preparing for warfare.<sup>57</sup> The women’s role was to gather up extra moccasins for the men and traveling foods, which consisted of dried meats, fish, roots, and berries. During the *qillowawya* ceremony, women would come up behind their men (sons, fathers, spouses, and brothers) and tie the extra moccasins and traveling food to the waist of their departing loved one.<sup>58</sup>

Levi Carson described a period in the 1960s when several women veterans took on another specific role that is commonly reserved for dancers who were male veterans—use of the whistles in the ceremony to summon their *weyekan*



to show up and protect them in battle, crisis, and sickness. Only veterans were allowed to use the whistle, and this had been a male role because men had been the ones participating in warfare. At one point, women veterans began to demand the right to use a whistle, and Mr. Carson thinks “women’s liberation” influenced their actions. Women veterans have not continued this practice, and Mr. Carson believes this reflects that the “intent of dancing” is not to change such traditions from the past. He described instances in “Aboriginal times” when women would go into battle, and thus they also earned the right to use the whistle. He emphasizes the important contributions of women as decision makers in many areas of Nez Perce society and finds support from one of the female Nez Perce dancers in suggesting gender roles should not vary too far from past tradition and protocol.

It was generally acknowledged that only men danced on the floor in the past, and Otis Halfmoon remembers the first Nez Perce women who moved off the side area, “put on a bustle and danced on the floor.” He indicated that more women started dancing as pan-Indian connections increased, and their inclusion “adds more beauty” to the dance floor. Andre Picard noted that women dancers “liven the powwow up . . . [and] . . . make the men dancers want to dance harder.” Women also had their own complementary and unique areas of dance, for example the Owl Dance, Rabbit Dance, and Swan Dance, as well as other dances related to medicine ceremonies.<sup>59</sup> The Round Dance was one in which women have participated for some time, and the Welcome Dance is another women’s dance that was more common and is making a comeback. However, a number of women’s dances are rarely performed, due in part to the loss of several important elders who carried the knowledge of these dances.<sup>60</sup> An effort is being made to maintain and revitalize the performance of women’s dances through a local Nez Perce organization, Daughters of Tradition. While some women’s songs were recorded in the late 1980s and early 1990s,<sup>61</sup> the specific dance movements were not well documented and our project indicates that gender, culture, and dance is a topic that can benefit from further attention in potlatch and powwow studies.<sup>62</sup>

#### EPILOGUE—DANCE AND NATIVE IDENTITY: A SINGLE MOVE, MANY MESSAGES

*In the old days people danced because they had to. . . . [T]he same thing applies to today and if the culture is played with or if. . . . [I don't] . . . dance or sing, bad things will happen.*

—Kwakwaka'wakw dancer

*There is a lot of power on the dance floor . . . the white man believes that our power is gone, but if one goes on the [powwow] dance floor one can feel that power on that floor.*

—Jeffrey Scott, Nez Perce dancer

Issues relevant to Native peoples’ identity and dance are affected by the histories of specific groups, as well as the shared experience of colonization

and incorporation within a nation-state dominated by non-Natives. Also, levels of identity can extend from the individual dancers, through the family, to a village, tribal or band affiliation, as well as nation-based or pan-Indian groupings, and potentially connect with global indigenous peoples. While potlatch and powwow dancers are sometimes widely recognized and identifiable by their unique dance styles, Kwakwaka'wakw dancers in particular emphasized the importance of knowing which dances are held by their families and, thus, are appropriate to learn and perform.<sup>63</sup>

Potlatch dances are one context within a social system characterized by ranked statuses where rights are contested and reestablished. Often dances are described as originating in villages, and their history of transfer through marriage, or ownership changes through warfare, have been closely monitored. Other tribal groups may even have taken dances through warfare, thus emphasizing the significance of their return to Kwakwaka'wakw villages or families. The Alert Bay Kwakwaka'wakw community has been recognized for its particular successes in continuing dances and potlatch ceremonies following the removal of the potlatch ban despite its history as a government administrative center with the associated intense Euro-Canadian presence. Whether or not Alert Bay is "less traditional" in some respects,<sup>64</sup> local dance groups are often asked to visit other Kwakwaka'wakw villages to teach dance traditions not retained locally as the villages have lost elders who carried this knowledge.

None of the potlatch dancers we interviewed had attended a powwow, although they are not uncommon in Canada's more central and eastern regions. Most did not identify with the powwow setting as a meaningful place where their dances could be performed. Many interviewees did not accept the powwow-linked pan-Indian identity, but rather the primary focus of their cultural and social identity was as a family line, a band member, Kwakwaka'wakw, Canadian First Nations communities, and finally as Aboriginal Canadians. However, many potlatch dancers we interviewed have traveled to the United States and internationally for dance demonstrations, and one of the endorsers of the proposed Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations Centre for Language Culture at the U'mista Cultural Centre is the Maori Institutions of New Zealand.<sup>65</sup> We found more interest in powwow expressed by younger Kwakwaka'wakw interviewees, and a number of Northwest Coast tribes have begun to powwow, including the Lummi, Coast Salish, Sto:lo, Saanich, Comox, Tulalip, and Quinault. There already are Vancouver Island Web sites that provide information on powwows in the southern and central areas of the island, and they may begin to occur closer to the Kwakwaka'wakw in the future.<sup>66</sup> Many potlatch dancers connected specifically with Olney's obvious dance skills, particularly for a young man, and generally to his commitment to dance and Native cultural issues. Other Kwakwaka'wakw community members were not shy in expressing reservations about powwow settings.<sup>67</sup>

Among the Nez Perce dancers, the origin of the "Duck and Dive" song and dance moves was probably the most controversial topic. This reinforces the importance of current research that highlights a continuing strong emphasis on tribal identity within larger powwow settings that exemplify a broader

pan-Indian context.<sup>68</sup> Horace Axtell described the “duck and dive” as having been “paid for by the blood of our Nez Perce people,” and numerous other participants made similar comments. Most specifically, the “duck and dive” is described as having strong historical ties with the Nez Perce War of 1877, as dancers reenact the moves of warriors successfully avoiding being struck by US military assaults. However, a number of other tribes (e.g., the Crow of Montana and the Umatilla of Oregon) are said to claim the “duck and dive” as a dance originating from their groups. These claims are an ongoing source of sometimes-heated debate, and participants in our study noted that when they asked members of the other tribes for descriptions of the specific origins of the “duck and dive” moves, no details were provided. Here a strong sense of tribal identity is reinforced through and connected to dance.

The role of local powwows also was described as being very different than that of the large-scale powwows. Smaller, local powwows often involve conducting more community-specific business, and they address important tribal political issues through numerous ceremonies that precede the dance performances. For example, veterans of the Nez Perce War of 1877 were commemorated as part of a series of ceremonies at the beginning of the Chief Joseph Warriors Pow Wow (Lapwai, Idaho) in June 2003.<sup>69</sup> Attendance at local powwows is lower and dominated by members of nearby communities, in contrast to the large powwows that are hosted by casinos or large corporations. These large-scale powwows involve only minimal community business; rather they incorporate more intertribal, “contest-oriented” themes because of time constraints created by the large number of participants and dance categories. They also attract indigenous groups from across the United States and Canada, and increasingly from around the world, as well as more non-Natives. Many of the Nez Perce dancers expressed a preference for the local and regional powwows, in part because they have the opportunity for more actual dance time. “Intertribals” are dances that allow for Native and non-Native spectators to dance freestyle with dressed Native dancers. They are limited in number at the large-scale powwows, whereas smaller local powwows allow for many Intertribals. Thus, smaller powwows usually do not have as many separate dance categories, and dancers spend more time on the floor, rather than as spectators. However, several participants noted that they also value the large-scale powwows in part because they often draw the well-known “champion” dancers who provide inspiration and support to other dancers.

### **Creative Contemporary Dance Contexts**

Consideration of the potlatch and powwow dancers within a single analytic lens and focus on individual lives lived dancing informs overlapping research interests in a critical anthropology of dance, cultural theory, and Native peoples of the United States and Canada. Anthropology of movement studies has included dance traditions from around the world, and indigenous peoples of North America are beginning to be incorporated into this approach. Young’s 1981 seminal work encouraging new perspectives on powwow was under direction of Anna Royce, an early voice in dance

anthropology and a continuing influence in moving analyses “from the body as artifact to embodied knowledge.”<sup>70</sup> Also, Glass’s recent research on aspects of the potlatch and a focus on human rights brings Kwakwaka’wakw dance into this contemporary arena. Powwow and potlatch include symbolization of resistance and cultural survival, and dancers then take on political agency. Yet individual dancers’ lives and their personal decisions reveal how too singular an analytic focus on cultural resistance can “obscure more complex dialectics of cultural transmission and contextual specificity of meanings.”<sup>71</sup>

There are many opportunities for continuing to move First Peoples dance studies beyond the documentation of culture histories and assessments of links to “authentic” traditions. Including potlatch and powwow together, along with expanding powwow studies outside the more common Plains regional focus, challenges assumptions about relevant analytic categories while raising and guiding questions for both that otherwise might not be considered. Contemporary traditions embrace, and at times celebrate, the innovation and creativity in dance that have always been part of “real” and “authentic” indigenous cultures. This recognizes what too often is not allowed for First Peoples—at some level, cultural beliefs of all human societies change and adapt to new environments and circumstances, or they don’t survive. Such adaptability, as well as the respect for and commitment to their cultural histories and core values, has contributed to the survival and maintenance of indigenous societies in North America. For both potlatch and powwow dancers, balancing creativity and innovation with respect for protocol is more complex than identifying a dancer’s stage in life or even the type of dance setting. Within the same setting, and perhaps even within the same dance, an individual can express both—while only a few others may recognize such “events.”

Dance occurs in dynamic social and cultural contexts and creates opportunities for cultural values to be expressed and translated into new environments. The complexity of this adjustment process is reflected in the variation of the dancers’ experiences and perspectives—and provides a cautionary note regarding generalizations. The diversity of perspectives among the dancers—particularly within their own communities—should not be surprising. Although there is still a tendency to assume more of a homogeneous mind-set in small-scale societies, in part a legacy of early anthropological accounts of Native peoples, sharing cultural beliefs does not preclude intra-group variation.

Embodied knowledge in dance is elemental to dynamics of cultural processes. Focusing on individual dancers’ experiences over their lifetimes and across generations highlights how moving bodies can reflect multiple meaning levels, the “visible and invisible,” both across dance contexts and within a single performance. This not only relates to differences in meanings for “informed” community members and Native peoples as contrasted to less knowledgeable event attendees,<sup>72</sup> but to an individual’s experience of dancing in the midst of such group contexts. Further, a focus on lives lived dancing broadens the analysis outside of actual performance events, thus highlighting the relevance of embodied knowledge prior to and beyond, not just within,

the events of dance performances.<sup>73</sup> Potlatch and powwow dancers recognized protocols and situations where these take precedence over individual innovation. Both also emphasized the joy in and valuation of opportunities for creativity—reflecting a classic tension between pressures for group cohesion and individual expression. Among these individuals, dance provides a means for coping among old and young alike. It is an essential link to the past and a resource for managing and negotiating the challenges of the present—in old as well as new environments.

### Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the participation of the Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce dancers who agreed to be interviewed for this project. We hope that we have effectively helped to document their experiences and perspectives. The Nez Perce Tribe reviewed and granted permission (Resolution #03-350, Nez Perce Executive Council, June 2003) for our research project, as did the staff of the U'mista Cultural Centre. The Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC), Central Washington University (CWU), also granted approvals for both projects. As research associate, Jon Olney's participation was partially supported by the CWU McNair Scholars Program (2002–2004), two CWU Office of Undergraduate Research travel grants, and a partial tuition scholarship for summer internships through the CWU Cooperative Education program. As principal investigator, Andrews's participation was partially supported by a Faculty Research Appointment (Summer 2004), and additional project support came through a Faculty Seed Grant; the CWU Office of Graduate Research and Programs funded both. The CWU International Studies and Program Committee provided support for travel to Alert Bay, British Columbia. Also, Andrews was partially supported in the preparation of this manuscript by a CWU Professional Leave award. We are grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for their many thoughtful comments and helpful suggestions.

### NOTES

1. Nez Perce Cultural Resource Program staff members, Vera Sonnick (director), Josiah Blackeagle Pinkham, and Nakia Williamson-Cloud, and Andrea Sanborn (director) and Juanita Pasco (former collections manager) of the U'mista Cultural Centre all provided invaluable direction and support at various stages of this project.

Andrews's research has focused on the political ecology of socioeconomic, health, and natural resource management issues, as well as the ethnography of material culture and sacred symbolism as they contribute to Native American cultural sustainability. Over the last ten years she also has addressed migration and health issues among Latino immigrants and farm workers in central Washington State. Jon Olney (Shellenberger) is a member of the Yakama Nation, and his Indian name is Tsi'ks'mi Paxumla. In English this name means Grass Dancer. An aunt, through a traditional naming ceremony, conferred the name on him. He has been involved in Grass Dancing for more than a decade and has won many awards at regional and national powwows.

2. The designation of “appropriate” terms for referring to indigenous peoples of North America has been at times a hotly contested issue and one of great significance for them because until recently the dominant voice was that of outsiders. Further, as colonial legacies of the separate development of the US and Canadian nation-states, terminology used within each country vary. E.g., use of the term *Indian* in Canada may now be considered inappropriate; while in the United States the term *Aboriginal* is uncommon. The goal of this article is to think “across” these artificial political boundaries, while being sensitive to commonly used terms in the local communities that participated in our project. Knowing our choices will seem unsatisfactory to some, we use the following conventions: Dancers speak for themselves, using their own terms. When referring to all indigenous peoples of North America (including the Inuit, Aleut, Métis, American Indians, and Canadian First Nations), we use *indigenous peoples* (uncommon in either country), *First Peoples*, *Native peoples*, and *Native nations* interchangeably. In discussions focused on the Kwakwaka’wakw and the potlatch, we use local Alert Bay terminology such as *First Nations*, *bands*, *big house*, and *residential schools*. In this community, the use of the term *Aboriginal* is generally reserved for settings related to national politics where issues make the additional inclusion of Inuit and Métis peoples essential. In discussions focused on the Nez Perce and powwow, we use terms such as *American Indians*, *Native Americans*, *tribes*, *longhouse*, and *boarding schools*. Capitalization reflects the *AICRJ* editorial conventions and may not coincide with local practices.

3. Shellenberger (Olney) and Andrews, *Potlatch and Pow Wow: Culture, Dance and Song*, poster presented at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting, New Orleans, November 2002; Shellenberger and Andrews, *Project Report: The Contemporary and Historical Role of Song and Dance in Kwakwaka’wakw Culture* (manuscript on file at U’mista Cultural Centre, 2003); Shellenberger and Andrews, *Native American Dance: A Window on the Past, Present and Future*, poster presented at the Northwest Anthropology Conference, Eugene, OR, April 2004a; Andrews and Shellenberger, *Culture, Dance and Song: Perspectives from Nez Perce Pow Wow*, Final Report to Nez Perce Tribe (manuscript on file, Cultural Resources Program, NPT, Lapwai, Idaho, 2004b).

4. P. Brinson, “Epilogue: Anthropology and the Study of Dance,” in *Society and the Dance*, ed. P. Spencer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 213–14.

5. B. Farnell, “Moving Bodies, Acting Selves,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 341–73; S. Reed, “The Politics and Poetics of Dance,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 503–32; D. Williams, ed., *Anthropology and Human Movement: The Study of Dances*. Readings in Anthropology of Movement, no. 1 (Lanham, MD and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1997); B. Farnell, ed., *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context: The Visible and the Invisible in Movement and Dance* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1995); A. Kaeppler, “Visible and Invisible in Hawaiian Dance,” in *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context* (Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 31–43; and Spencer, *Society and the Dance*.

6. Cf. A. Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); L. Lengel, *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice: Music, Dance and Women’s Cultural Identity* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2005); A. Lepecki, ed., *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); N. Dyck and E. Archetti, eds.,



*Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003); A. Dils and A. C. Albright, eds., *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); and J. Desmond, ed., *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

7. For historical overviews that include critical early works of Drid Williams, Gertrude Kurath, and Joann Keali'inohomoku, see J. Hanna, *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (1979; repr. with new preface, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); A. Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); and Farnell, *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context*. See also, A. Kaeppler, "Dance in Anthropological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978), 31–49; D. Williams, *Ten Lectures on Theories of the Dance* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991).

8. Cf. n. 2; J. Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); S. Ness, *Body, Movement, and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Y. Daniel, *Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); C. Varela, "Cartesianism Revisited: The Ghost in the Moving Machine or the Lived Body," in Farnell, *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context*, 216–93; E. Archetti, *Masculinities, Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999); H. Wulff, "The Irish Body in Motion: Moral Politics, National Identity and Dance," in Dyck and Archetti, *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*, 179–96.

9. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); M. Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vantage, 1979); M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Cf. J. Blacking, "Towards an Anthropology of the Body," in *The Anthropology of the Body*, ed. J. Blacking, A.S.A. Monograph 15 (London: Academic Press, 1977), 1–28; B. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1984); N. Scheper-Hughes and M. Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1987): 6–41; S. Scott and D. Morgan, *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body* (London and Washington, DC: The Falmer Press, 1993); T. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge and New York: University of Cambridge, 1994); B. Farnell; "Getting Out of the Habitus: An Alternative Model of Dynamically Embodied Social Action," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (September 2000): 397–418; H. Thomas and J. Ahmed, eds., *Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Lepecki, *Of the Presence of the Body*; and Dyck and Archetti, *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*.

10. Farnell, introduction to *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context*, 8.

11. H. G. Barnett, "The Nature of the Potlatch," *American Anthropologist* 40 (1938): 349–58; F. Boas, "The Social Organization of the Kwakiutl Indians," *American Anthropologist* 22 (1920): 111–26 (repr. in *Race, Language and Culture*, ed. F. Boas [New York: Macmillan, 1940], 356–69); F. Boas, "The Religion of the Kwakiutl Indians," 2 vols., *Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology* 10 (1930; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1969); F. Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, ed. Helen Codere (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); H. Codere, *Fighting with Property: A Study of Kwakiutl Potlatching*

and Warfare, 1792–1930 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); S. Kan, *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); S. Piddocke, “The Potlatch System of the Southern Kwakiutl: A New Perspective,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21 (1965): 244–64; W. Suttles, “Affinal Ties, Subsistence, and Prestige among the Coast Salish,” *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960): 296–395; A. Vayda, “Economic Systems in Ecological Perspective: The Case of the Northwest Coast,” in *Readings in Anthropology*, M. H. Fried, ed. (1961; repr., New York: Crowell, 1968), 172–78; cf. W. Suttles, ed., vol. 7 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990) for comprehensive overview of prehistory, languages, cultures, histories, and research bibliographies of selected Northwest Coast tribes; for Kwakwaka’wakw-specific research in the same volume, cf. H. Codere, “Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture,” 359–77; B. Holm, “Kwakiutl: Winter Ceremonies,” 378–87; G. Cranmer Webster, “Kwakiutl since 1980,” 387–91.

12. Holm, “Winter Ceremonies,” 378–79. Also, Holm notes that historically Kwakwaka’wakw dances and dramatic presentations “cannot be separated from the potlatch. They were, like names, ranks, and other prerogatives, part of the body of inherited privilege around which the potlatch institution was built.” However, the broader context of what motivated a potlatch and Winter Ceremonies was social, such as a marriage between high-ranking persons or a memorial for a high-ranking chief.

13. D. Cole and I. Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990); S. L. Harring, *White Man’s Law: Native People in the Nineteenth-Century Canadian Jurisprudence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Holm, “Winter Ceremonies,” 378–87; Cranmer Webster, “Kwakiutl since 1980,” 387–91. Holm and Webster note the resistance and resilience of the Kwakwaka’wakw in maintaining potlatch ceremonies in the face Canadian legal constraints, and Webster draws attention to Alert Bay’s place in this process since 1980. Most recently this theme has been taken up as part of a PhD dissertation research project by Aaron Glass, sections of which are included in “The Thin Edge of the Wedge: Dancing around the Potlatch Ban, 1921–1951,” in ed. N. M. Jackson, *Right to Dance/Dancing for Rights* (Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press, 2004). Although we did not overlap with Glass during his research, in the article referenced here, Glass moves assessment of Kwakwaka’wakw dance into the global human-rights arena through a focus on potlatch performance history during the 1921 to 1951 time period.

14. U’mista Cultural Centre has created Internet access to its collections and provides educational material about various aspects of Kwakwaka’wakw language and culture through its Web site <http://www.umista.ca/> (accessed 4 December 2006). In the Summer 2005 edition of U’mista’s *T’sit’sak’alam* (News) quarterly publication, the organization’s efforts to include an internal Centre for Language and Culture were described. Guy Buchholtzer, an anthropologist consulting on this project, noted that “the anthropological discourse had too often become a long monologue, in which the Kwakwaka’wakw had nothing to say. The Kwakwaka’wakw will re-appropriate the material on their terms. This perhaps is the beginning of a new anthropology.”

15. T. Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 11–12.

16. L. Lassiter and C. Ellis, “Applying Communitas to Kiowa Powwows,” *American Indian Quarterly* 22 (1998): 485–91; B. Kracht, “Kiowa Powwows: Continuity in Ritual



Practice,” *American Indian Quarterly* 18 (1994): 321–34. Cf. L. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998); L. Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778–1985* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); T. Kavanagh, “Southern Plains Dance: Tradition and Dynamism,” in ed. C. Heth, *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions* (Washington, DC: Starwood Publishing, 1992) 105–23; M. Mattern, “The Powwow as a Public Arena for Negotiating Unity and Diversity in American Life,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 20 (1996): 183–201. Fowler was an early voice in considering Native American dance as an avenue for adaptive responses to changing sociopolitical environments (e.g., in noting generational differences in priorities for organizing ceremonial events, including powwows [see esp. 3, 166–78]). Prior to Lassiter and Ellis’s critique, Kavanagh and Mattern offered more generalized powwow overviews that reflected a growing sensitivity to the unifying and divisive potential of powwows in negotiating tribal identity.

17. Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*; C. Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003); C. Ellis, L. Lassiter, and G. Dunham, eds., *Powwow* (Lawrence: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); see esp. J. B. Jackson, “East Meets West: On Stomp Dance and Powwow Worlds in Oklahoma,” 172–97.

18. Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings*, 6.

19. C. Ellis and L. Lassiter, introduction to Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham, *Powwow*, xii. This 2005 volume presents a range of related contemporary topics through experiences of and research by Native and non-Native authors. Ellis and Lassiter note several areas of powwow research that have been given limited attention, including generational differences.

20. Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings*, 6, 244–45; cf. L. Fowler, “Local Contexts of Pow Wow Ritual,” in Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham, *Powwow*, 70–72. Note that Fowler now goes so far as to suggest that “the powwow is probably the most important vehicle for individual’s attempts to motivate others to accept new ideas and to validate new social arrangements.” Fowler, “Local Contexts of Pow Wow Ritual,” 80.

21. Cf. R. Jones, “Modern Native Dance: Beyond Tribe and Tradition,” in *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*, 179. Rosalie Jones (Blackfeet/Pembina Chippewa) describes herself as moving within contemporary American dance arenas and encourages a broader perspective on Native dance beyond just connection to tradition and group identity. Even in her experience, she notes that “the native person is usually raised in an atmosphere of group solidarity, with the orientation primarily on communal interests rather than individual pursuits. Individual expression usually finds its outlet in the more solitary visual arts: pottery, drawing, painting, or sculpture.” Further, Jones considers the recent “reconnection of native peoples with their own cultures” combined with what is “modern” or “what is new and different outside the tribal context” as “bear[ing] the most creative potential for the Native American performing artist.” Here we suggest that important areas of individual expression also exist within a variety of Native peoples’ dance contexts and that the creative potential has been a long-standing component.

22. Olney approached Andrews in Fall 2001 about the possibility of conducting ethnographic research on song and dance with a few powwow dancers who resided off-reservation. Subsequently, Andrews designed a project that would focus on dance and

song in two very different cultural contexts, with the goal of gleaning new perspectives on the relationship between dance and First Peoples cultural maintenance, innovation, and aspects of identity. In cooperation with the U'mista Cultural Centre, fieldwork for the first part of our project was conducted in Alert Bay during the summer of 2002.

For the second part of our project, we focused on the Plateau Culture Area, where powwow "culture" thrives outside of the more commonly emphasized Indian tribes of the Great Plains and southeastern United States. Specifically, we were interested in Nez Perce powwow dance because it represents connections with Native groups to the north and east, as well as distinctive histories and innovations common to Plateau area tribes.

23. Peter Macnair, "From Kwakiutl to *Kwakwaka'wakw*," in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, 2nd ed., eds. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1995), 586–87. Macnair describes how the name of "the Fort Rupert tribe," Kwakiutl (*kwaguʔ*), was extended to about twenty groups of linguistically related Kwak'wala speakers. Members of each distinctly named village identified most strongly with their own village, and only recently have the Kwak'wala speakers developed a term to rectify the early labeling error. The word *Kwakwaka'wakw* generally indicates *those who speak Kwak'wala* and refers to all twenty of the groups. Wherever appropriate, the U'mista Cultural Centre encourages replacing the village-specific *Kwakiutl* with the more inclusive term *Kwakwaka'wakw*, which it uses in all U'mista published language and culture studies. A debate often occurs over which term to use in other academic research and popular culture publications, often due to the difficulty of spelling or pronouncing *Kwakwaka'wakw* and the challenge of linking it to the huge amount of extant literature that uses the term *Kwakiutl*. Cf. A. Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (New York, Seattle, and London: University of Washington Press, 1991) and J. Masco, "Competitive Displays: Negotiating Genealogical Rights to the Potlatch at the American Museum of Natural History," *American Anthropologist* 98 (1996): 837–52.

24. Cf. Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People*; Haring, *White Man's Law*; C. Haig-Brown and D. Nock, eds., *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); C. Blackhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Earlier a small saltery operation was established in Alert Bay, and it also had faced challenges meeting labor needs.

25. For works that include Aboriginal issues after 1950 such as the emergence of the Aboriginal rights movement, the 1982 Constitution Act, land claims debates, and current legal rights issues, cf. A. Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); M. Asch, ed., *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); S. Smart and M. Coyle, eds., *Aboriginal Issues Today*, Legal Series (North Vancouver: Self-Counsel Press, 1997); M. Kew, "History of Coastal British Columbia since 1849," in Suttles, vol. 7 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast*, 159–68; M. L. Ross, *First Nations Sacred Sites in Canada's Courts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); C. Hanselmann, *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies* (Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2001); M. Boldt and J. A. Long, *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985); the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Web site, [www.aptn.ca](http://www.aptn.ca) (accessed 4 December 2006).

26. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934; repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Boas, "The Social Organization of the Kwakiutl Indians"; H. Barnett, "The Nature of the Potlatch," 349–58; Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*; H. Codere, *Fighting with Property*; P. Drucker and R. Heizer, *To Make My Name Good: A Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Piddocke, "The Potlatch System of the Southern Kwakiutl"; Suttles, "Affinal Ties, Subsistence, and Prestige among the Coast Salish"; A. Vayda, "A Re-examination of Northwest Coast Economic Systems," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, ser. 2, no. 23 (1961): 618–24.

27. Macnair, "From Kwakiutl to *Kwakwaka'wakw*," 596.

28. Holm, "Kwakiutl: Winter Ceremonies," 378, reviews the various perspectives from early historical records about the timing of Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies and the meanings of their Kwak'wala names.

29. Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*; Holm, "Kwakiutl: Winter Ceremonies"; www.umista.org.

30. For discussions about the boundaries of the Plateau Culture Area, cf. A. Kroeber, "Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 38 (1939): 1–242 (repr., Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1976); D. Walker, ed., vol. 12 in *Handbook of North American Indians: Plateau*, introduction by D. Walker (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 1–3; G. Murdock, *Ethnographic Bibliography of North America*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, 1972).

31. C. Trafzer, *The Nez Perce* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992); Walker, "Nez Perce," in Walker, vol. 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Plateau*, 420–38; Horace P. Axtell and Margaret Aragon, *A Little Bit of Wisdom: Conversations with a Nez Perce Elder* (Lewiston, ID: Confluence Press, 1997); V. Ray et al., "Tribal Distribution in Eastern Oregon and Adjacent Regions," *American Anthropologist* 40 (1938): 384–415.

32. For concise general overviews of powwow settings and activities, see G. A. Young, "Celebrations and Giveaways," in ed. R. DeMallie, vol. 13, pt. 2 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Plains* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2001); Mattern, "The Powwow as a Public Arena."

33. Connections between dances of warrior societies and contemporary powwow dances are common in the Plains; cf. Jackson "East Meets West"; Kavanagh, "Southern Plains Dance"; Ellis, *A Dancing People*, 21–25, 40–44; G. A. Young, "Powwow as Power: Perspectives on Historic and Contemporary Tribalism" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1981); G. A. Young, "Celebrations and Giveaways," 1020.

34. Cf. T. Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*, 27, notes term glosses as "he/she dreams." Other discussions of the derivation of the word can be found in G. A. Young, "Powwow as Power"; G. A. Young, "Celebrations and Giveaways," 1012; Kavanagh, "Southern Plains Dance," 105; Mattern, "The Powwow as a Public Arena," n. 1. From the Canadian powwow dance literature perspective, Doolittle and Elton indicate the Algonquin word meant "rekindle," L. Doolittle and H. Elton, "Medicine of the Brave: A Look at the Changing Role of Dance in Native Culture from the Buffalo Days to the Modern Powwow," in eds. A. Dils and A. C. Albright, *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*.

35. Loran Olsen, "Music and Dance," in Walker, vol. 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Plateau*, 546–61.

36. Walker, "Nez Perce," 423, 425–26.

37. Olsen, "Music and Dance," 549.

38. Walker, "Nez Perce," 429, 433.

39. *Ibid.*, 434–35 (cf. *ibid.*, 435 for further references on the Nez Perce War).

40. Standardized consent forms presented participants with the options of being taped-recorded (to assure accuracy in documenting their information and contribute to a shorter interview time) and possibly video recorded while dancing, and to be personally identified with their statements or have us keep their identity confidential. At Alert Bay, participants often were eager to be tape-recorded—and the U'mista Cultural Centre has been conducting language and culture research among the Kwakwaka'wakw villages for several decades, with tape recording as a standard procedure. However, they did not want any photographs taken or videotaping done. For the Nez Perce participants, taking photos or videotaping was rarely a concern, although we did not have time to pursue that option during this study. Although none of the Nez Perce participants refused to be tape-recorded, the process seemed a bit more unsettling for several individuals, and some did not want copies of the tape recordings donated to the Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Center. A total of six participants (two Kwakwaka'wakw and four Nez Perce) did not wish to have their names recorded in any research records, while the remaining twenty-four gave verbal or written consent for their names to be used in manuscripts, publications, or presentations based on data from the project.

41. We included topics in our interview schedule that were of interest to them, and they offered suggestions and support as the project carried on. Our initial list of potential interviewees was based on the staff recommendations and then was slightly revised due to our fieldwork time constraints and the travel schedules of potential participants. Also, new names were added through referrals made by other study participants.

42. During the interviews we used a semistructured list of qualitative, open-ended questions that was formally developed to guide the interview topics. Similar questions were asked of each interviewee, with flexibility allowed for particular emphasis on the topics each participant stressed as personally important, and/or to include unanticipated topics. The standard protocol for research involving humans supported wholly or partially by US federal funding is to require a written signature from each participant before an interview can begin. In consultation with the U'mista and Nez Perce program staff, we decided that requiring a written signature on the consent form could be intimidating, at best, and insulting, at worst, to some community members—and to elders in particular. For example, the oral transmission of information and knowledge is traditional to Kwakwaka'wakw and Nez Perce cultures, although the legitimacy and veracity of this method has often been criticized and ignored by outsiders. Further, we thought that without the oral consent option that key individuals may not participate, and this might result in the loss of the valuable historical and contemporary cultural information that this project could document. The waiver of written consent was ultimately approved by CWU's HSRC; ironically, we had to provide written documentation that the Native groups wanted the oral consent option to be available for the study participants.

43. Study participants under age eighteen come under a special category of protection for HSRC review. At Nez Perce, we also interviewed a former powwow dancer who was very involved with film and specialized in powwow dance research and

film documentation. However, he had been a dancer only when he was a young child and often could not answer dance-related questions from his personal experience; his responses are not reported here.

44. Boldt and Long, *The Quest for Justice*; G. P. Castile and R. L. Bee, eds., *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); J. H. Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); J. G. Jorgensen, "A Century of Political Economic Effects on American Indian Society," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6 (1978): 1–82; M. C. Snipp, ed., *American Indians and Economic Dependency* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); J. G. Jorgensen, "Commentary: Gaming and Recent American Indian Economic Development," *The American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22 (1998): 157–72; Cairns, *Citizens Plus*; Haig-Brown and Nock, *With Good Intentions*.

45. There is considerable recent literature exploring this issue. Cf. D. Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995); B. Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); C. J. Meyer and D. Royer, eds. *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001); A. Jolivet, ed., *Cultural Representation in Native America* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2006).

46. Dyck and Archetti, *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*, 9–11.

47. Mrs. Alfred's death in 2005 was a great loss to her family and the community.

48. Cf. R. D. Theisz, "Putting Things in Order," in *Pow wow* (2005), 86, notes a similar perspective from Ben Black Bear Sr. (Rosebud Lakota), who also emphasizes the importance of dancing as a form of healthy exercise and a method for providing relief from stress and conflict. Physical conditioning "techniques of the body" in dance and sport usually have been seen as disconnected from, and mundane precursors to, the cultural context. Further, Dyck and Archetti analyze the "traditional reluctance within anthropology to give serious and sustained attention to the study of games and sports," as associated with assumptions that their competitive components were primarily "products of modernity" (Dyck and Archetti, *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities*, 6).

49. All are aspects or forms of "Indian religions." Washat (*wáašat* Indian "dance"—Columbia River Sahaptin; *wa láhsat* "jumping up"—Nez Perce) was popularly called the Seven Drums or Longhouse religion across the Plateau region. Probably derived from the older Prophet Dance, Washat prayers were sung accompanied by small drums in communal longhouses that became the focal point for celebrations of traditional religious and cultural activities. H. Schuster, "Yakima and Neighboring Groups," in Walker, vol. 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Plateau*, 342; S. Lahren Jr., "Reservations and Reserves," in Walker, vol. 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians: Plateau*, 501–7; cf. C. Relander, *Drummers and Dreamers* (1956; repr., Seattle, WA: Pacific Northwest National Parks and Forests Association, 1986). For the Nez Perce, Medicine Dances or */weyekweecet/* were an older form of spiritual gathering involving the worship of */tamaalwit/* through individual spiritual guides. They were held during the winter months and involved primarily the adult population singing and dancing (staff, Nez Perce Tribe, Cultural Resources Program). Peyotism, or the Native American Church, moved from the Plains where it developed in the late 1800s,

across the American Southwest and Great Basin, and into the Plateau area some one hundred years later.

50. Olney emphasizes the family context of powwow in his recent study on the Yakama Nation. J. Shellenberger, *Yakama Pow Wow: A Place for Family, Community, and Competition* (master's thesis, Resource Management Program, Central Washington University, 2006).

51. Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*.

52. Shellenberger and Andrews, *Native American Dance*; Andrews and Shellenberger, *Culture, Dance and Song*.

53. Cf. Fowler, "Local Contexts of Pow Wow Ritual." Fowler considers the complexity of powwow elements in northern and southern Plains contexts that have retained or taken on sacred statuses based in traditional religious beliefs, although they have moved into new social contexts. Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*, 147; C. Ellis, "The Sound of the Drum Will Revive them and Make them Happy," in Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham, *Powwow*, 11; P. Albers and B. Medicine, "Some Reflections on Nearly Forty Years on the Northern Plains Powwow Circuit," in Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham, *Powwow*, 26.

54. Shellenberger and Andrews, *Potlatch and Pow Wow*; Andrews and Shellenberger, *Culture, Dance and Song*.

55. Olney focused on the importance of the film medium for documentation and teaching about dance in his graduate research, and the video he produced was a major component of his resource management thesis. Shellenberger, *Yakama Pow Wow*.

56. Several videos focusing on the potlatch and other aspects of Kwakwaka'wakw culture have been produced in association with and are distributed by the U'mista Cultural Centre. "Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids Us Dance" and "A Box of Treasures" are the two most focused on the history and contemporary celebrations of the potlatch.

57. The word is derived from /qillilu/ for *rawhide* and /wawya/, which translates to *striking repeatedly as in drumming*. The ceremony involves the departing individuals drumming and singing around an outstretched rawhide while surrounded by family, friends, and relatives. The group would move from one dwelling to the next as more individuals gathered around those departing (personnel communication, staff, Nez Perce Tribe, Cultural Resources Program).

58. Ibid., 2004b, interview 7 (confidential).

59. J. A. Jones, "Nez Perce Women, Music and Cultural Change," *Women of Note Quarterly* 3 (1995): 6–18; Andrews and Shellenberger, *Culture, Dance and Song*, interviews 3 (confidential), 4, 7 (confidential).

60. Ibid., interviews 2, 10, 12.

61. Jones, "Nez Perce Women, Music and Cultural Change."

62. Cf. J. Keali'inohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," in Williams, *Anthropology and Human Movement*, 15–36. Keali'inohomoku's early study of Hopi dance emphasized the growing anthropological concern with keeping individual dances contextualized, "because it is the entire dance *event* which is important to the Hopis rather than just the actual rhythmic movement(s)" (23). She considered this continuing connection to the broader event as essential to understanding the Hopi interpretation of the extent and value of women's participation in ritual and ceremony—which was not simply limited to dance performances.



63. This distinction may be narrowing as Fowler has recently asserted that among some Plains Indians, “the powwow provided a context for validating authority in innovative ways. For example, a major transformation in concepts on ritual authority has been occurring in Plains communities. The possession or use of certain regalia or other symbols of human relationships with supernatural forces once was a matter of individual achievement through an exploit or a vision experience or through long apprenticeship. Now the powwow is one context in which some individuals publicly claim rights and statuses through inheritance from an original owner rather than through achievement or apprenticeship. Thus individuals call attention to family genealogy and history . . . to generate public support for innovative ideas about authority in ritual or religious realms.” Fowler, “Local Contexts of Pow Wow Ritual,” 80.

64. Cf. Glass, “The Thin Edge of the Wedge.” Another analytic approach to the Kwakwaka'wakw public dances in Alert Bay and powwow could emphasize specifically the impact of the tourism industry on live performances and bodily display, e.g., in J. Desmond, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

65. *T'sit'sak'alam* (News), U'mista Cultural Society newsletter (Alert Bay, summer 2005), 7.

66. [www.cashsave.com/islandnative/events.html](http://www.cashsave.com/islandnative/events.html) (accessed 4 December 2006) and Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry, [www.valleylinks.net/communityservices/aboriginal/uiwna](http://www.valleylinks.net/communityservices/aboriginal/uiwna) (accessed 4 December 2006).

67. Another source of conflicted attitudes about powwows is linked to the illegal killing and international trading of bald and golden eagle body parts, which are especially evident in British Columbia with its comparatively large population of these birds. Eagle down and eagle iconography are important parts of Northwest Coast Indian ceremony and religion. A number of other religions and segments of the art market seek eagle feathers and body parts. However, as described in a recent newspaper report, the primary culprit in the “black market” trade is claimed to be powwow performers: “(wildlife officials in Canada and the U.S.) . . . say the biggest demand is at Native American powwows, where feathered regalia can help competitive dancers win thousands of dollars in prizes.” M. O'Hagan, “Eagles Slaughtered for Cherished Parts,” *The Seattle Times*, 31 July 2005.

68. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song* (1998); Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*; Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham, *Powwow*.

69. Fowler traces an interesting connection between symbols of identity between younger Gros Ventre and the Nez Perce's Chief Joseph, which includes the Lapwai Chief Joseph Pow Wow. Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings*.

70. A. Royce, “From Body as Artifact to Embodied Knowledge,” in *The Anthropology of Dance*, (1977; repr., Huddersfield: H. Charlesworth and Co., 2002), xv–xxv.

71. Desmond, “Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies,” in *Meaning in Motion*, 49.

72. Kaeppler, “Visible and Invisible in Hawaiian Dance.”

73. D. Williams, review of *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*, by H. Thomas, *Visual Anthropology* 18 (2005): 465–76, at 470.