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## You Are What You Wear? The Visual Rhetoric of Identity at Indiana Powwows

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Powwows, one of the most visible expressions of Indianness today, were once seen as part of a “melting pot Indian culture,” Pan-Indian in form and function,<sup>[1]</sup> and a “powerful synthesis of related traditions.”<sup>[2]</sup> Today, they are considered more of an amalgam of various sources and practices, both generalized and particular, allowing individual communities to maintain ties with their specific tribal traditions by incorporating elements and symbols that affirm specific tribal identities rather than just a generalized sense of being “American Indian.”<sup>[3]</sup>

In order to more fully understand the role powwows play in the lives of Indian people, it is necessary to have a firm grasp of not only their forms and functions but also their constituents. Providing a systematic, cross-cultural understanding of powwows in general is, however, not the focus of this article. Rather, it offers insight into an essential element of powwows: the people who dance at powwows. It is, more specifically, an analysis of powwow regalia, and of the factors that guide dancers’ aesthetic choices in putting together their outfit. More importantly, it looks at powwows outside their usual geographic and social contexts, focusing on events east of the Mississippi, and thereby on powwows that are far less studied and understood than their counterparts in Indian Country.

In what is called Indian Country, substantial American Indian populations have ensured the continued practice of powwows for over a century. In the 1950s, advances in technology and travel promoted their spread from the Great Plains to all regions with American Indian populations. During the 1960s-1970s, in the midst of a more general revival of Native cultures, a need for a more recognizable American Indian identity marker emerged. Because powwows communicate Native values to non-Natives, they became such a prominent expression of Indian identity that many tribes with no historical powwow traditions started incorporating powwows into their culture. Consequently, Indians and non-Indians alike came to associate Indianness with the wearing of beads and feathers worn at powwows.<sup>[4]</sup>

Powwows transformed into intertribal, public cultural performances that strengthened a sense of Native identity and aided in the revival of many moribund traditional practices. Competitive dancing, one of the most important aspects of the powwow for Indians, led to the development of many clothing styles, incorporating highly decorative featherwork, ribbonwork, and beadwork, which in turn prompted a revival of textile arts. For many American Indians, powwows have become a lifestyle choice, providing an outlet for artistic creativity and skill, as well as a means of livelihood: dancers and singers compete for substantial prize monies; vendors of arts, crafts, and dance regalia find a market that is being continuously renewed; and sizeable audiences drawn by the visual extravagance of the event assure the visibility of the organizing community on the cultural map of mainstream America.

In the Midwest, the success of forced assimilation and the absence of reservations or tribally held lands have rendered the Indian populations virtually invisible. In 2004, their official numbers in Indiana, the primary site of my study, were at 17,532, or about 0.28% of the total population of

over 6 million.<sup>[5]</sup> Today, the unofficial number is around 30,000, which includes people who are bi- or multi-racial, as well as those who did not participate in the official census. The Miami Indians of Indiana are the only state-recognized nation, albeit one without a land-base and thus federal recognition. (Since powwows “affirm in concrete, tribally specific terms their status as Native people,”<sup>[6]</sup> they have become one of the means of trying to gain such political recognition from the federal government since the 1980s.) Other tribes that have historically occupied territories in Indiana include the Delaware, Iroquois, Kickapoo, Ottawa, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Wea and Wyandot. Today, however, representatives of Native nations from all over the continent, from Navajo to Gwich'in, can be found living in Indiana, having moved here for work, family, or other obligations.

Due mainly to the above-mentioned absence of populations federally recognized as American Indian, most Indiana powwows are officially defined as “hobbyist” powwows, with the majority of dancers being non-Indian. Nonetheless, a great majority of those dancers consider themselves Indian, even if to the “untrained” eye they do not seem to conform to what the general public expects an Indian to look like. The “trained” eye, however, one that knows what to look for in terms of regalia and movement, can easily discern Indian dancers from non-Indian dancers. A long history of intermarrying with Euro-Americans resulted in a significant loss of “Indianness” both in terms of coloring and public expressions of that identity.

Coming to Indiana powwows after having experienced powwows in Oklahoma, I found an interesting assortment of dancers. The findings of six years of attendance as a spectator and three years of focused fieldwork as an ethnographer at these Indiana powwows can be distilled into five major types of dancers. The terms for these categories were generated from conversations with dancers, organizers, vendors, craftspeople and spectators, and are thus emic to the community of powwow-goers in Indiana.<sup>[7]</sup>

Based on their clothing and dance style, then, Indiana powwow dancers fall into the following categories:

- status or card-carrying Indians: members of federally or state recognized tribes, locals or visiting/transplanted from their home states;
- non-status Indians: mixed-race, adopted, or relocated Indians raised with little or no knowledge of their heritage, now returning to their roots through powwow connections;
- hobbyists: mostly non-Indian enthusiasts, committed to historically accurate and authentic reproductions of Indian culture - material and visual;
- historical reenactors: Indian or non-Indian enthusiasts, committed to historically accurate representations of Indian life in specific time periods before the present;
- Indian Hearts and wannabes: persons of undocumented Indian heritage, seeking spiritual rather than material associations, such as the so-called New Agers.

My interest in studying these Indiana dances was initially prompted mainly by the diversity of clothing seen at these events and their apparent departure from Western powwow regalia. Upon closer study of the dance regalia, I found that they are consciously used by many of the dancers as a vehicle for expressing their identities within the powwow circle. And while this may be true for powwow dancers in Indian Country as well, here in the Midwest it is more expressly so.

The following chart offers an overview of the continuum of the above listed identity categories and their basic signifiers.

Identity	Residence	Understanding of traditions	Integration of values	Regalia
status Indian	reservation/community-based (by choice)	full/substantial	full/substantial	fully/substantially unified, cohesive

non-status Indian	urban/suburban/rural (forced relocation)	limited	substantial/limited	somewhat unified, amalgamated
hobbyist/reenactor	urban/suburban/rural (by choice)	substantial/specialized	moderate/selective	fully unified, anachronistic
wannabe	urban/suburban/rural (by choice)	limited/selective	selective/none	non-unified, idealistic

This second chart offers a comparison of the categories of dancers that comprise mostly non-Indian dancers.

<b><u>Hobbyist/Reenactor</u></b>	<b><u>Wannabe</u></b>
may or may not have Indian blood	no documented Indian blood
life-long commitment	no specific knowledge, learning from others, only at powwows
intense interest in material culture	lack of knowledge of material traditions: emphasis on spirituality
access/commitment to best resources (materials, teachers, craftsmanship): meticulous research	lack of access/commitment to resources: inaccurate representations, misinterpretations
rigid rules about historical/geographical accuracy/authenticity: old-fashioned, archaic, obsolete look	no commitment to specific traditions: mishmash of styles

A brief definition of a powwow and of the categories into which powwow dancers are generally organized will introduce the basic vocabulary of the powwow regalia canon, which is based on Western Oklahoma standards, the cradle of powwow culture.

Indian people gathered at various times of the year to renew family, clan and tribal ties, as well as to forge social and political alliances, celebrate victories, and to practice religious and spiritual ceremonies. These gatherings involved music and dance, gambling games, athletic competition, and ceremonies. Dances were performed for various occasions and purposes: some were used to communicate with the powers of the universe, others to honor the spirits of powerful beings, and still others were owned by specific societies and performed only by members of those societies, such as the Omaha military society's Grass dance.

During the reservation period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, tribal customs and practices were outlawed by the United States government, along with the use of Native languages. Powwows emerged in the 1870s in Oklahoma as a new way of practicing these outlawed ritual customs in the guise of a social festival, which involved family reunions, courtship, singing, dancing, games, food and crafts. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows employed many Native American men, prompting significant changes in the dance styles and dance outfits, making the war dances they usually performed fancier, more visually enticing. The modern powwow evolved from a combination of such practices, gaining in popularity since the 1940s, when they were revived as occasions to honor and welcome back returning war veterans. They evolved into a venue for Indians to not only socialize, but also to remember the old ways and to preserve their cultural heritage. They serve as places to reinforce the values of working together as a family and bonding as a community, as well as to expose young people to the language and teachings of their elders. Most importantly, they provide a viable means of expression of the survival of Native cultures, a common meeting ground for Indians of all tribal affiliations, as well as interaction between Indians and non-Indians.

Today the two most common types of powwows are the traditional powwow and the competition powwow. Traditional powwows involve a mixture of social, religious, and political activities that directly affect the organizing community, such as adoptions, namings, honorings, or "first" dances. The competition powwow, on the other hand, is more theater than ceremony, more

intertribal and public than tribally specific and locally meaningful. It allows dancers to make a semi-professional living of competing for prize monies. But only registered, card-carrying Indians can compete for these monies.

It is nonetheless the competition powwow that gave powwows the four major categories of dance style repertoire: men's and women's Northern and Southern Traditional, Grass, Jingle Dress, and Fancy.<sup>[8]</sup>

These dances have a strong personal and spiritual dimension, with many different interpretations for each dance style, depending on tribal and family background. Similarly, dance regalia are also very personal and artistic expressions of the dancer's life, feelings, interests, and spiritual quest. An outfit evolves and changes as the dancer evolves and changes in life. Changes are made each season depending on the fashion of the time or a personal change in taste, and one's dance outfit is never "finished." When a dancer wants to get a new outfit, he or she may gift the old outfit to a younger dancer who is just starting out in the powwow circuit. Various regalia elements are also given as gifts by elders or treasured people in the dancer's life, and are to be worn with pride and responsibility.

What characterizes traditional Indian dance clothes is unity of composition: all elements have cohesion, make sense, and complement each other to communicate something specific about the dancer (e.g., tribal, clan, or family affiliation). The degree of this unity or cohesion is often seen as an indicator of the dancer's knowledge of powwow rules and practices.

Each regalia style also developed as a direct reflection of the dance it corresponds to and has specific markers that identify it. The men's traditional dances, for example, are variations on the war dance, the oldest form of dance in Native culture, in which warriors would "dance out" their hunting or war exploits. Hence you will see a lot of crouching and movements imitating the stalking of animals or battling of enemies. The dancers are often veterans and carry items that symbolize their status as warriors—shields, weapons, honor staffs and medicine wheels.

Various tribal influences and different traditional outfits have been blended together into a more general style, influenced mostly by Plains traditions. Because the dance outfit is a very personal expression of creativity and artistry, you will never see two outfits that are exactly alike.

Several elements in the men's Northern Traditional or War Dance outfit reflect items worn by early warriors: a bone breastplate worn for protection against arrows, a neck choker for protection against knives, ankle bells or jingling hooves, and a hide shield decorated with tribal symbols. The most distinguishing element, however, is the circular or U-shaped bustle of eagle feather spikes tied at the waist. Other elements generally worn by a northern traditional dancer include a feather war bonnet, a coyote hide headdress, or a porcupine roach,<sup>[9]</sup> beaded moccasins and leggings, a breechcloth, and various beaded accessories, such as belt, armbands, cuffs, and necklaces, as well as a flat eagle feather fan. Face paint is often employed in different styles derived from the designs of the dancer's family or nation.



The men's Southern Traditional or Straight Dance comes from Oklahoma tribes. It is an understated style in which the dancer keeps a steady, flowing pace that is not interrupted with fancy moves or extra footwork. Many of the articles a Straight dancer wears are unique to his style and cannot be seen anywhere else. The regalia usually consist of a roach headdress or otter-skin turban, a headband of white handkerchief rolled up and knotted on the forehead, an otter-tail or broadcloth trailer decorated with beadwork, ribbonwork, or silver or brass conchos, a ribbon shirt, a vest, breechcloth and leggings, beaded moccasins, fingerwoven sashes, and bandoliers worn from each shoulder, crossing the chest. The dancer always carries a fan (loose, flat or wing), and often a dance staff that is shorter and thinner than in other dance styles.



The Grass dancer wears a yoke and breechcloth fringed with rows of brightly colored or white yarn, which replaces the long prairie grass tucked into a belt in the old Omaha dance. He also wears a roach headdress with two upright eagle feathers in them to spin, rock and twirl with each movement. The dance is a very fluid and



bendable style, in which the dancer tries to move his fringes in as many places as possible at once. Movements consist of many sways, dips and sliding steps, as if flattening the tall grass to make a new camp site, one of the legendary purposes of the dance. It is also said to reflect the need for balance in life: each movement danced on one side must be repeated on the other. The dancer keeps his head moving side to side or up and down with the beat of the drum, nodding quickly several times to each beat, which keeps the roach crest feathers spinning, and must finish with both feet on the ground on the final beat.

The Fancy Dance is the most contest-oriented of the powwow dances, and thus also the most indicative of the latest fashion trends in the powwow world, both in motion and in regalia. It allows the dancer to demonstrate his athletic ability, stamina and originality. The freestyle footwork and flashy clothes are meant to make him stand out in a crowd. The dance features jumps, twirls, splits, and back flips, and the dancer must follow the changing beat of the drum and stop when the music does, with both feet on the ground. The signifying elements of the outfit are the two bustles of brightly colored feathers, ribbons, fluffs and horsehair, one on the waist and one at the back of the neck, and sometimes smaller bustles on each arm. The colors and patterns of the bustles are repeated on beaded arm- and headbands, harnesses, moccasins, yoke and breechcloth, side tabs, and other accessories. A roach headdress trimmed with colored horsehair features two upright eagle feathers decorated with plumes and reflective tape, in a rocker spreader designed to keep them either spinning or rocking. Angora anklets and sleigh or hawk bells just below the knee complete the outfit, and a dance stick decorated with ribbons or feathers.



Women's traditional dances also require enormous stamina, concentration and grace. The movements are very focused. The feet move in time with the drum and never completely lift off the ground. The dancer has to stay in perfect rhythm with the drum, stepping lightly, slightly bobbing up and down, and allowing the fringes of the dress and shawl to sway like the prairie grass.

Northern Traditional dancers may wear one of two styles of regalia: buckskin or cloth. A well-dressed Buckskin dancer usually dresses from the feet up: she begins with beaded knee moccasins of white buckskin tied just below the knee, followed by a long white buckskin skirt with a cotton tank attached at the waist, and a fully beaded buckskin yoke with long strips hanging down below the knees. Sometimes a breastplate will be worn over the dress. A choker or a neckerchief is worn around the neck. Hair can be worn loose or braided, with a single feather attached in the back with beaded clips or barrettes. Dancers carry a fringed shawl folded over one arm and an eagle feather fan, as well as a beaded awl and knife case on the belt. The beautiful beadwork is usually made in colors and patterns reflecting tribal affiliations.



The other style is a cloth (velvet or wool) dress decorated with elk teeth, cowrie shells, or dentalium shells, complete with leggings and moccasins, fan and shawl, and many other accessories of the Buckskin dancer.



The Southern Traditional Dance comes from Oklahoma tribes, and incorporates Southeastern dance styles. It is slow and graceful, the dancer swaying side to side, her feet barely touching the ground, bending forward from the waist at specific beats. The outfit reflects the constant intertwining of white and Native cultures as the settlers crossed the Plains. One type of the Southern Traditional outfit is the Southeastern-style long tiered dress, called the Cherokee tear dress, which is often complemented by a fringed shawl matching the dress in its patterns.



The Southern Plains style outfit features a tee-dress over a full slip, made of any fabric suitable to one's region or climate. The apron worn above the dress wraps around the waist and overlaps to the left. A concho belt [10]



keeps it in place. Over the shoulders, a breastplate is secured by ribbons, and around the neck a neckerchief is usually worn. Knee-high boot moccasins, beaded or plain, complete the look.



A third type is the Woodlands/Prairie style outfit characterized by a wool wrap skirt with elaborate ribbonwork or beading, center-seam moccasins without leggings, and a long decorated fabric drop attached at the back of the neck. Most dancers carry a fringed shawl on their left arm, a purse, and a fan.

The Jingle Dress Dance came to the powwow scene from the Great Lakes region in the 1920s. It is considered to be a medicine dance, bringing healing through the sound that is created by employing very elaborate footwork to make hundreds of tin cone jingles move in sync with the drum. The dance steps are controlled, often in a zigzag pattern reflecting the journey of life. Besides this traditional jingle step, the dancer can also move in a sliding side step. The feet often do parallel movements. She raises her fan on the honor beats of the drum, and must stop with both feet on the ground on the final beat. The dress itself is a cotton, velvet or leather-base dress decorated with 400-700 cone-shaped rolled snuff can lids, which hit each other at every move and create a pleasing "jingle." The jingles are attached by ribbon or fabric in rows or a pattern designed by the dancer. The outfit is completed by beaded moccasins and leggings, a beaded or concho belt, a beaded purse, and sometimes a vest or scarf.



The Fancy Shawl dance is the women's category of modern competition style, characterized by vivid colors and lots of glitz, fast and acrobatic freestyle footwork, and a tremendous amount of twirling, spinning, and high kicks. It is also called the Butterfly dance, because it is said to represent the transition of a cocoon into a butterfly. The dancer wears beaded ankle moccasins with matching leggings, a calf-length flared skirt connected to a tank top or a separate blouse, and a beaded or sequined cape or vest. A yoke around the neck may be beaded, appliquéd or painted. Other variables include a choker or neckerchief and a leather or cloth belt. The most distinguishing element of this style is the shawl. It should span the dancer's arms from fingertip to fingertip, and should have fringes or ribbons hand-tied every quarter of an inch at the seam. The shawl is worn across the shoulders and held slightly out at the elbows.

As mentioned before, in Indiana, where the Native population is minimal, fairly spread out, and constantly fluctuating, powwows are mainly hobbyist events with minimal Indian participation. These types of powwows are really a subculture apart from the Indian powwow world. To most non-Indian participants, powwowing is the ultimate way of being Indian, whereas to Indians it is just one of many. Generally speaking, Indiana Indians are not nearly as anchored in their identity as most Indians in Oklahoma, so they appeal to images and styles that are immediately apparent for their Indianness and commonly understood and appreciated as Indian by both Indians and non-Indians. That is why you see so many Plains-style traditional dancers at these powwows: it is the ultimate symbol of the Indian warrior, and they might feel a sort of connection with the pan-Indian values it represents. However, no one ever goes to a powwow to confirm their identity as a pan-Indian. They might wear clothing that signals a generalized sense of Indianness to spectators, but in almost every case it is attached to a tribally specific sense of identity. The dancers' perceptions of powwow participation rules, the visual expressions of those rules, and the meanings they ascribe to powwow performances indicate this constructed image of themselves. Dress in general is used in many ways to communicate "who" people imagine themselves to be, but at Indiana powwows, aesthetic choices in dance clothes play a key part in establishing the credibility of their powwow identity.<sup>[11]</sup>

Let us now turn our attention to the specific characteristics of Indiana powwow dancers as they fit into the five categories introduced at the beginning of this article. Status Indians who attend Indiana powwows are usually locals who live in the area, or have traveled from neighboring states, often upon invitation by family or friends or the organizing committee. They come to the powwow to socialize, exhibit their skills of dancing, singing, or regalia making, or just listen to the drums. Their clothes often reflect a deep knowledge of the underlying contexts and meanings behind each element, demonstrated by a cohesive and unified composition (i.e., matching elements in style, color, and/or regional significance), identifiable cultural references (i.e., colors, patterns, or cuts representative of specific tribes), contemporary and fashion-conscious style (i.e., following the latest trends in powwow regalia), and excellent craftsmanship.

The second category comprises people who have Indian blood but have had little or no traditional upbringing because of adoption, relocation to urban areas, inter-racial marriages, or other factors.<sup>[12]</sup> Most of them consider themselves Indian, but do not qualify for tribal membership (i.e., not enough blood quantum, or no documentation for a lineal descent from a tribal member) and are thus non-status Indians. Some status Indians refer to them with the derogatory terms “apples” (i.e., red on the outside, white on the inside) or “born-again Indians.” They attend powwows because it is usually their only connection to Indian culture, and especially because it is the place where they feel a sense of belonging, a sense of community with others who are in the same predicament. They have a somewhat limited contextual knowledge about what they are wearing and what it all means because they are still in the process of re-discovering and learning about their heritage. They really want to fit in, so their outfits show considerable effort but are often “not quite right,” usually because of some mismatched elements.

The third type of dancers are the hobbyists, who have acquired a special knowledge of Indian traditions and practices through many years of involvement, often starting in the Boy Scouts, and progressing through several stages of improvement. Most hobbyists are master craftsmen, creating elaborate outfits with materials and techniques that are authentically Indian. The majority of them are good dancers in fine regalia, but you will also see clothes that are not very well made—on people who are still in the lower stages of the learning process. More importantly, though, hobbyists don’t claim to be Indian—they only “play Indian”<sup>[13]</sup> for the enjoyment of the craftsmanship that goes along with being a dancer; or vice versa, they dance to showcase their craftsmanship. Their commitment to proper representation through their clothes usually results in outfits that are usually well made, geographically and historically accurate, but also often quite anachronistic in terms of modern powwow standards, since “old-time” (pre-1930) outfits are generally preferred over “modern” (post-1930) outfits by most hobbyists. In fact, one of the ways to tell hobbyists from Indians is a “too perfect,” extravagantly expensive but often outdated outfit.<sup>[14]</sup>

The fourth category belongs to historical reenactors, including buckskinners, mountain men, muzzleloaders, and trekkers, all of whom reenact different aspects of the past. Most reenactors are non-Indians, but there are also many Indians who enjoy reenacting. To them, reenacting is re-living history, while a powwow is “just cutting loose,”<sup>[15]</sup> but also a spiritual adventure. Most reenactors only attend reenactment events (or rendezvous), but some do powwow. Many of them are more hardcore than hobbyists—they will shave their head and tattoo and pierce themselves according to the fashions of the time period they represent. Because they portray a specific persona from a specific geographic location in a specific moment in time, they can only wear clothes and use materials that would have been realistically available to their persona in terms of time, location, and social status. Their clothes tend to be replicas of outfits found in history books and museums, although not necessarily of the same quality workmanship. Their main concern is with representing history authentically. They believe that when they put on their historic garb and present themselves to their peers and the public, they have to be telling the visual truth. They are attracted to this hobby out of a love for history and a fascination with the lives of those before us, and feel that they owe those very same people the minimum respect of not lying about them, visually or verbally.<sup>[16]</sup>

Finally, in the last fifteen years a fifth type of constituency emerged at these powwows that separates itself from Indians, hobbyists and reenactors through its clothing and dancing style as well as its interactions with other dancers. It comprises a wide spectrum of people, and many different terms exist to refer to them, from the benevolent “Indian Heart” (i.e., the reverse of an “apple”) to the offensive “truckstop wannabe.” (Because of their offensive nature, none of these terms are used in face-to-face interaction with members of this category, and of course no one ever identifies as a “wannabe.”) Some of them claim to have Indian blood but have no documented basis for that claim, no traditional Indian knowledge, and not much interest in a deeper understanding of their assumed identity. Others are just drawn to the “exotic” nature of an Indian dance, which they have idealized as an integral part of a nature religion. Dancing and Indian crafts are not necessarily part of their everyday experience, and they tend to relate to them strictly from the spiritual perspective. When they dance, they pay little or no attention to other dancers in the arena, or to what type of dance is taking place, but rather dance to their own rhythm, in a free-form, improvised, emoting style. Or they try too hard to replicate Indian dances, resulting in exaggerated movements and expressions that come off as disrespectful, because it is hard for a spectator to tell imitation from mocking. Nonetheless, they feel an entitlement to participation based on either incorrectly invoked political rights,<sup>[17]</sup> or spiritual beliefs (such as “I was an Indian in a past life”). Most are tolerated at powwows as long as they are willing to

follow powwow protocol. However, sometimes tensions are caused by their arrogance and self-absorption that keeps them from realizing that their “mimicking” is preposterous and often insulting to Indians. Looking for their roots, most have good intentions, but by picking and choosing components of “nativeness” according to their own needs, they pose a threat of misuse, misinterpretation, and adulteration of Indian traditions.[18] For this constituency, clothes are the only marker of their identity, and they try to create their Indian identity through their dance clothes, using them to legitimize their Indianness. Because they are not anchored in any specific Native culture or tradition, and most of them are in the very beginning stages of their quest for their (real or imagined) Native heritage, their outfits reflect what some Indians call the “Heinz 57” approach: take anything that looks Indian, mix it with anything that comes from nature and can be instilled with spiritual meanings, and voilà, an “Oh My Gosh” outfit![19]

Nonetheless, there are degrees of effort even within this category. Some people are sincere about their quest and dancing, and are only limited by their access to quality resources needed to create a good outfit. But they will at least make their outfits out of leather, even if not necessarily of the best quality buckskin. Numerous people, however, show up at powwows in clothes that are not only incorrectly interpreted in style, but also poorly made and, above all, made of imitation materials like polyester. It is not too hard to see the resemblance between their outfits and those of the dolls found at many truckstops along U.S. highways (thus the name “truckstop wannabe”), most of which are stereotypical, highly romanticized creations of fantasy rather than reality.[20]



## CONCLUSION

Most of the categories listed in this article are very fluid. An "Indian heart" can in time learn enough to become a hobbyist or a reenactor. A reenactor can find his or her Indian roots through genealogical research, establish legitimate connections with an Indian community, and become a non-status Indian. Even dance clothes themselves are not an unambiguous indicator of identity, since outfits are in a constant flux, in a never-ending process of improvement. But knowing about the categories and their characteristics may help one understand the powwow as a means of public education as well as an arena for individual expressions of identity, creativity, and cultural pride. More importantly, in order to avoid misinformation of the general public, of spectators who might be seeing Indian culture for the first and last time at a powwow, it is every dancer's responsibility to represent that culture correctly.

Non-Indian presence at powwows is a very touchy issue for many, and there is perceptible prejudice against non-Indian dancers, rooted in the long-standing practice of appropriation of Native practices for individual gain. The main concern is that those who are only getting involved in powwows because of a fashion trend or because they hope to gain some kind of an image or status through it will not spend enough time and energy to learn about the real meanings behind powwow dancing. As in most cases, though, there are two sides to be considered. On the one hand, there is the Native peoples' concern about misrepresentation of their culture and values by people who do not have the right education about or understanding of those values. When you put on Indian clothes and enter the dance arena, you are representing a Native cultural practice, and undiscerning spectators could easily assume that what they are seeing is the right (or only) way to be Indian.

On the other hand, those who are genuinely interested and invested in powwowing do it because they see a real value in preserving these traditions and practices for future generations, and they

should be accepted and encouraged to learn from people who can teach them things correctly and without bias. Whether you are dark or light, full-blooded or multi-racial, it is the values according to which you live your everyday life and which you share with others around you that give you a sense of belonging. And what better place to share those values than the symbolic circle of the powwow arena where young and old, Indian and non-Indian alike can come together in joyful celebration of traditions that have sustained generations of Native people through centuries of hardship. “Indian people are like a patchwork quilt—warm and colorful,” said a dancer at the 2004 Miami powwow. “Sharing that warmth with people around you can only make the rest of the world warmer, too.”

#### Notes

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- [1] James Howard, “Pan-Indian Culture in Oklahoma,” *Scientific Monthly* 81 (November 1955): 215.
- [2] Barre Toelken, “Ethnic Selection and Intensification in the Native American Powwow,” in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*, ed. Stephen Stern and John Cicala, (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 140.
- [3] Clyde Ellis, Luke Eric Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham, eds., *Powwow* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), viii-ix.
- [4] For other reference works on powwows, see Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Powwow* (University of Illinois Press, 2002); and chapter 3 in Barre Toelken, *The Anguish of Snails: Native American Folklore in the West* (Utah State University Press, 2003).
- [5] <http://www.stats.indiana.edu/profiles/pr18000.html>, accessed March 2, 2006.
- [6] Ellis, et al., *Powwow*, xii.
- [7] These terms are not universal but rather a synthesis of what powwow participants often use to “label” other participants. N.B.: All photos in this article are the author's copyright.
- [8] For more on powwow dance categories, see the video *Into the Circle: An Introduction to Native American Powwows* (Full Circle Communications, 1992), and many others at <http://www.fullcir.com/index.htm>.
- [9] A headgear that replicates a traditional hairstyle in which the head was shaved except for a crest in the middle. The roach is a halo of deer hair and porcupine guard hairs, often dyed red, and the hairs separated by a “roach spreader.” It is fastened to a scalplock or tied under the chin.
- [10] A leather belt to which large silver medallions are attached.
- [11] Clyde Ellis, personal interview, September 4, 2004.
- [12] Most of them consider themselves Indian, and the terms “apple” (i.e., red on the outside, white on the inside) or “born-again Indian” are external labels (used mostly by “card-carrying Indians”) that are generally considered offensive.
- [13] See Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 1998).
- [14] For more on hobbyism, see William Powers, “The Indian Hobbyist Movement in North America,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 557-561.
- [15] Monty Martin, personal interview, September 3, 2005.
- [16] For more on the rules of reenacting, see Alan Gutchess, “A Modest Proposal: Some Thoughts on the

Authenticity,” at <http://home.att.net/~crowdogs/TheEasternFrontier/proposal.htm>, accessed on March 8, 2006.

[17] Their logic: according to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, they have the freedom to participate; such claims are based on a lack of understanding of important tribal sovereignty issues.

[18] See Lisa Aldred, “Dancing with Indians and Wolves: New Agers Tripping through Powwows,” in Ellis, et al., *Powwow* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 258-74; and Bruce H. Ziff and P.V. Rao, eds., *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

[19] Wesley Thomas, personal interview, April 15, 2004.

[20] For more on wannabes, see Rayna Green, “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe,” *Folklore* 99:1 (November 1987): 30-55, and Lisa Aldred, “Dancing with Indians and Wolves: New Agers Tripping through Powwows,” in Ellis, et al., *Powwow* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 258-74. For the history of dressing and playing Indian, see Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 1998), and Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (Vintage Books, 1978).



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