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## Dancing Together: The Lakota Sun Dance and Ethical Intercultural Exchange

Ronan Hallowell

Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Southern California

Reflecting upon my twenty years of participation in several Lakota Sun Dance ceremony communities, this article explores ethical questions that arise from non-Native people practicing traditional Native American ceremonies, especially the Lakota Sun Dance. Through personal stories of lessons learned attending twenty Lakota Sun Dances, being taught for many years to sing ceremonial songs by a fluent Lakota singer/elder, and a historical overview of the Sun Dance, I discuss paths toward mutually enhancing intercultural communication based on respect, shared sacrifice, generosity, integrity, and the cultivation of long-term thinking for the well-being of people and the planet, now, and for generations to come.

**Keywords:** *Native American Sun Dance; Lakota Traditions; Intercultural Communication; Ceremony; Ethics*

In the book *Research Is Ceremony* (2008), Cree scholar Shawn Wilson grapples with the challenges of conducting and articulating scholarly work that employs indigenous research methods in ways that are guided by, and in service to, the concerns of particular indigenous communities that have experienced Western scientific research as invasive, colonial, and lacking respect or understanding of indigenous ways of knowing. Wilson also discusses the struggles indigenous scholars face in regards to having their work taken seriously in the academy. His work primarily focuses on indigenous scholars in Canada and Australia, but many of his insights are relevant to other indigenous scholars and non-indigenous scholars interested in these conversations. Additionally, he discusses how Western scientific approaches clash with indigenous ones, stating:

There are several problems with the dominant scientific approach to Indigenous research. One of the most obvious is that researchers, no matter how objective they claim their methods and themselves to be, do bring with them their own set of biases. At the very least the choice of research topic and methodology...In addition, this approach focuses on problems, and often imposes outside solutions, rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities. (Wilson 2008)

Wilson adopts a novel writing style to address these issues in a way that maintains the integrity of indigenous research methods while also framing his work using elements of the Western scientific research paradigm to both discuss issues of concern to indigenous researchers and to engage in scholarly dialogue with others in the academy. He uses two different fonts to indicate two voices. One voice, in which the author addresses his three sons, builds a relationship with the reader by sharing personal background and motivations for his current work in an effort to create the appropriate, relational context for his subsequent discussion of indigenous research methods. He discusses his personal voice directed toward his children, saying:

Addressing parts of the book to Julius, Max and Falco became a device for me to try to provide both context and definition. Instead of writing directly to readers, which is difficult without knowing their culture and context, I chose to write to my children. I further develop the relationships I have with the ideas through my relationship with my sons. I hope this literary tool allows you to develop your own relationships both with me and with the [ideas] in this book. (Wilson 2008)

Wilson's other voice is more academic and addresses how researchers can develop paradigms, agendas, methodologies, and methods that serve indigenous communities and shed the negative consequences of dominant research paradigms.

Although my particular positionality and interests are not identical to Wilson's, I respectfully borrow from his style of writing in *Research Is Ceremony* to tell a story about and reflect upon my twenty years of attending Lakota Sun Dances. Additionally, I discuss some experiences from a decade I spent learning Lakota singing from a Sicangu Lakota elder as well as a vision quest ceremony (*hanbleceya*) I undertook in a traditional manner with the direction of a Lakota medicine man. For a large portion of the past twenty years my involvement with three Lakota Sun Dance communities in California and the Pacific Northwest has been as a participant, not specifically as a researcher. My research began first when I was an MA student studying philosophy and religion, then continued as a doctoral student in education. In these roles, I have wanted to understand how non-Native people can come to respectfully learn from and dialogue with Native traditions, and, more specifically, the Lakota Sun Dance. Wilson's approach informs my writing style in this article. Following his example, and the feedback from two anonymous reviewers, I have included a more personal style in the form of a letter to my Native American great-great grandmother from Iowa interspersed with an academic approach. My use of two different font styles (following Wilson) indicates two different voices, each trying to find an appropriate mode for intercultural reflection. My intention is to help you, the reader, understand my motivations and positionality as a gay-male, half-Irish, North American native to California who has been deeply impacted by Lakota traditions.

I do not claim that I am speaking from a Native American perspective or speaking for Native people by discussing my personal and scholarly interests in the Lakota Sun Dance and how I came to learn that my great-great grandmother was Native American. I try to be upfront about my interests, who I am, and what I have learned so far. My writing is an attempt to respectfully incorporate key insights from Wilson's work, such as establishing and nurturing appropriate relationships that create context for shared work and research. Despite reservations about commenting on the Lakota Sun Dance, I believe the teachings Lakota and other American Indian people have shared with me are important to share with others. I am grateful for the generosity of Lakota and other Native American people that have allowed me to participate in their

ceremonies. Although I am aware of, and am not completely immune to, the pitfalls of a non-indigenous researcher discussing indigenous ways, I have genuinely attempted to find appropriate modes of relationship and communication. My goal is to share with non-Native people some thoughts about what I have learned from the Lakota tradition so that they might have a better sense of how to approach intercultural communication in a good way. I also hope that indigenous people and scholars can find something worth discussing or engaging in after reading this article. It is not my intention to tell Lakota or other American Indian people how to interpret their traditions or recommend anything for their communities. I do seek to become a better ally to my American Indian relatives, friends, and teachers. I hope my deep respect for Lakota and Native traditions will be recognized, along with my concern for our world today and for the future generations that will inherit our common home. I offer this reflection in that spirit.

### Generations

*Dear Grandmother,*

*This is your great-great grandson, David Ronan Hallowell. Your grandson, Cecil Robert Hallowell Sr., was my grandfather. Your great-grandson, Cecil Robert Hallowell Jr., is my father. I didn't find out about you until my dad died and your great-granddaughter Ann (my aunt) showed me a picture of you with the family in Iowa from the late 1800s. I asked her who the dark-skinned, Native American woman was amongst all of those white people. She told me that was you, but she didn't know your name. I wonder what your name is and what tribe you are from? What language did your tribe speak? How did you end up with the McChesney's and Hallowell's? Are we really related by blood, or is there another story? Was your husband (my great-great grandfather) a good man? Were you forced to marry? What was life like for you?*

*Grandmother, I know you cannot answer these questions for me right now. Would it be okay if I told you about my life and how I came to remember you? Let me tell you about our relatives and my parents. Their encouragement helped me find you.*

*Your grandson, Cecil Sr., died before I was born. I didn't know much about him except that he worked for the railroad and travelled a lot. Your great-grandson, Cecil Jr., was born in 1919 in Omaha, Nebraska. He was ten years old when the Great Depression began and his family home had just burned to the ground due to an electrical accident. This made an already difficult situation even harder. Dad was a diligent student and received a scholarship to go to college at the University of Nebraska. Shortly after starting in 1938, he was diagnosed with type-1 diabetes at the age of nineteen. Insulin had only become widely available in 1923; before then, diabetes was a death sentence. Fortunately, he had access to insulin but the disease still brought many challenges, especially insulin reactions that made him disoriented and sometimes lose consciousness. The onset of his diabetes was the beginning of a lifetime of managing the illness and had a profound impact on his life.*

*After graduating from college in 1941, Dad moved to Santa Monica, California and worked at Douglass Aircraft as part of the war effort, since he was ineligible for military service. A little over a year after moving to Santa Monica, he contracted tuberculosis from a roommate. He spent the next three years in a sanitarium in the San Fernando Valley. Diabetes, tuberculosis, and isolation were a deep blow to a bright young man in his twenties. Dad rarely ever spoke of this time. If our mother hadn't told us, my sister,*

brother, and I may not have ever known. Only in the last year of his life (in his mid-80s) did he share with me how hard it had been to see many of his friends at the sanitarium die. After overcoming tuberculosis toward the end of World War II, Dad struggled to get his life back together. He found it hard to secure employment and manage his diabetes. Eventually, he joined a start-up engineering firm. The company never really got off the ground despite its successes, like developing one of the first heart-lung machines. Eventually he found another career as an accountant after marrying Mom in 1962. My mother, Monica Lawless Kearns Hallowell, was attracted to Dad because of their shared spirituality. He was a humble man with a good-hearted soul. You would have been proud of him, Grandmother.

Mom was fourteen years younger than Dad and had grown up in Ireland until the 1950s. She was one of seven children and her father had fought in the Irish War of Independence to end centuries of British colonization and oppression. Her dad died when she was a young adult so she stayed at home to help her mother until she was twenty-eight, when she decided to immigrate to the United States. Although she was very close with her family, she felt that there wasn't much opportunity for her in Ireland. She was the only one from her family to ever move to the United States. When she arrived in California, she connected with an Irish immigrant community. We stayed connected with this community over the years, especially because of my sister's Irish dancing. I'm grateful to have had a connection with my Irish roots in Southern California and to have been able to build relationships with my Irish relatives during numerous trips to Ireland and England.

Dad always said that Mom's love was his greatest spiritual teacher. She gave him the strength to take better care of his health and become a father at the age of forty-six. Mom grew up Roman Catholic and practiced that throughout her life. Overall she was not dogmatic and was interested in other religions and spirituality more broadly. Mom was a very loving person. Her love came from a deep spiritual place and she shared that with us. Mom lost her first baby and had complications with both my sister and me. Despite some trauma from these experiences, she loved being a mother and life was pretty good until depression and a back surgery disabled her during my teenage years. The next fifteen years of her life, until she died at age seventy, were difficult. After the long recovery from back surgery, she was diagnosed with a kidney disease that eventually led to dialysis and, ultimately, her death.

Mom and Dad were simple people in many ways and as white, Euro-Americans they did not have to deal with racial discrimination. They both had experienced economic hardships when they were young, which impacted them throughout their lives. However, with hard work, some luck, and the advantages of being white, our family enjoyed many of the benefits of middle class life. Despite these blessings, my parents' illnesses that stretched for over fifteen years brought much heartache to our family. This period coincided with my teen and young adult years when I was trying to understand myself as a gay person with a deep sense of spirituality that seemed at odds with the dominant culture. My parents provided a solid foundation for my interest in spirituality through their unconditional love, their effort to live by the Golden Rule, and their non-dogmatic approach to religion. As my spiritual life intensified in my twenties, I sought to understand how different cultures and religions viewed the meaning of life. At the same time, I grappled with what I perceived to be serious social problems in the United States. These interests, and my university studies, led me to study Native American history and eventually to learn about the Lakota Sun Dance through attending multiple ceremonies.

*Early on in this journey, several teachers emphasized that I should learn deeply about my own family and cultural traditions in addition to learning about the Lakota Sun Dance ways. I continually work to expand self-knowledge and be authentic. I want to be the best ally I can with the Native people I know, and will come to know. Grandmother, I would not have learned of you if I had not pursued these studies. We come from different times and cultures, but I wonder what it would be like if we could talk around the fire at a Sun Dance? We could sing songs together and pray in the arbor. You could tell me what life was like on the plains when you were a child, and when your ancestors lived there before the white people came. Have you ever heard a song I sang when I thought of you? I've prayed for your guidance before, and for the guidance of all of the grandmothers and Grandmother Earth. I pray again for that guidance, great-great-Grandmother.*

### **Lenses, Legitimacy, and Methodology**

When I began to study and participate in Lakota ceremonial traditions two decades ago I was a student pursuing an MA in philosophy and religion. My interest in Native American ways was both scholarly and personal. As I immersed myself in learning about Native cultures during a year of thesis research, I wrestled with the difficult history of colonialism, genocide, and hegemony that has proven so deadly and damaging to the Native people. I confronted ethical questions about the appropriate methods with which to conduct my study. Traditional ethnography and other anthropological approaches had significant baggage and associations with colonial forms of scholarship that often studied Native people as “others,” with little effort by scholars to come to understand Native people on their own terms and not predominantly through the lenses of Western, academic paradigms (Battiste 2008; M. Gergen and K. Gergen 2000). Tewa professor, Gregory Cajete (2000) addressed this issue, stating:

In the past five hundred years of contact with Western culture, Native traditions have been viewed and expressed largely through the lens of Western thought, language, and perception. The Western lens reflects all other cultural traditions through filters of the modern view of the world. Yet, in order to understand Native cultures one must be able to see through their lenses and hear their stories in their voice and through their experience. (4)

My methodological approach in writing my thesis and this article was more informal and is based on extensive observation and participation, not on extensive note taking, in an attempt to participate in the Sun Dance on its own terms and through the lens of an indigenous worldview, to the extent that I am able. Later, after much contemplation, I would write about the experience. Elders dissuaded me from reading, recording, or taking notes during a Sun Dance so as to remain supremely present to the sacred ceremony at hand. I have written about my experience in a Western, academic format while reflecting on the ethical issues involved in this process in an attempt to find a bridge between Native and non-Native cultures. At each Sun Dance I worked in some capacity by tending fires, singing, providing security, or washing dishes. Staying present, contributing to the community, and closely observing elders and the activities of the ceremony, while trying to bracket my Western analytical frames, even if imperfectly, was my attempt to respectfully interact with the Lakota tradition.

After the first Sun Dance I attended in 1996, I spoke with the Lakota medicine man and his wife who led the dance to ask their permission to continue my studies in their community. Before submitting my thesis to my committee, I asked them to read and critique the draft. Today, I continue to receive counsel from the medicine man's wife, even after his death. I also consulted another highly respected Native elder and

his wife from this community for guidance throughout the process. Building authentic relationships and becoming part of a community was an important aspect of respectfully learning about Lakota ways. Fortunately, in addition to my core Sun Dance community in the Pacific Northwest, I was able to join a small circle in the Bay Area led by a native speaking Lakota elder singer and his wife. I sought their advice throughout my original research process and continued to learn Lakota ways and singing by attending a circle once a week for five years and then less frequently for another five years.

For approximately ten years after my initial thesis research I continued as a participant in the Sun Dance ways but did not write about or approach the Sun Dance from an academic perspective. I did occasionally share Lakota songs with my high school students in the ways that my elders had taught me. After my hiatus from thinking about the Sun Dance in academic terms, a colleague asked if I would write about my experiences and recent thoughts on intercultural challenges and opportunities that have emerged with the on-going expansion of the Sun Dance in the twenty-first century (Hallowell 2010).

### Sacred Journey

*Dear Grandmother,*

*For a long time I was not quite sure why I had taken such an interest in Lakota ways. I knew that Dad had been deeply affected by the landscape of Nebraska, and that the Lakota had inhabited these plains. It wasn't until graduate school, at the age of twenty-three, that I began to seek knowledge about American Indian traditions. Several sweat lodges had originally introduced me to American Indian ceremony. A very old Arapaho elder conducted one of the first sweat lodges I attended. His ceremony was one of the most powerful I have experienced. This glimpse into Native wisdom, and my subsequent introduction to the Sun Dance in 1996, set off a two-decade journey of transcultural exploration and an attempt at holistic self-understanding.*

*In the winter and spring of 1997 I prepared for my second summer of Lakota Sun Dances as part of my master's thesis research. During the previous nine months, I had the opportunity to sit with a small circle led by an elder Lakota singer and his wife. I learned many songs and observed the relational dynamics embedded in the Lakota ways. That summer, I spent six weeks on the road, attending Sun Dances in Washington, Oregon, and South Dakota. I was particularly looking forward to the Dance in South Dakota, since it took place on the Rosebud Sicangu Lakota reservation where my singing teacher grew up.*

*The drive from Oakland to South Dakota took me through a range of landscapes and feelings. After traveling alone for days through deserts, basins, mountains, badlands, and prairies, I felt great anticipation as I approached my destination. Located in southwestern South Dakota, Rosebud borders the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota reservation. Shortly after arriving at the Sun Dance, I entered a sweat lodge ceremony where I was the only non-Indian person. I felt honored to attend this ceremony and sweat with Native people. In fact, it was when I expressed this gratitude that I had one of my most humbling experiences thus far at a ceremony. During the sweat, men in the circle offered brief reflections. After I said a few words, a Lakota man spoke railing on whites that come to ceremonies and steal Native ways for their own self-interest. He did not speak to me directly, but it felt like his words were aimed my way. This man spoke of the atrocities his people have suffered at the hands of the United States government and a racist mainstream society. I heard the pain, bitterness, and resentment in his voice. For a moment, I*

*felt guilt and shame knowing that, indeed, my culture, and quite likely some of my own ancestors, had oppressed these Native people whose ceremonies and cultures I admire. Though I felt confronted, ultimately I was grateful to learn more about the culture and history of the Lakota since so many Lakota people have shared such deep teachings with me. The rest of the Sun Dance was an incredible experience. I was friendly, respectful, and helpful and, in return, many Lakota were kind to me.*

*Grandmother, I learned at ceremony that I love to sing. The Lakota songs are beautiful and sacred. When we sit around the drum and sing we try to be of one mind and heart. Whether we're in a sweat or at a dance, we sing and drum to support each other's prayers and visions. I'm so grateful to be part of the Circle, they really support me and we all love the songs (olowan). Once a month we would sweat together and every summer we attended a Sun Dance. The singing and drumming opened me up in such profound ways. After two years of attending the Sun Dances, I went on the hill "to cry for a vision" (hanbleceya). In English it's called a vision quest.*

*I went on the hill in Oregon about an hour from Uncle Bill and Aunt Donna's ranch. Uncle John taught me hanbleceya songs and also provided encouragement. I learned so much on the hill, Grandmother. For three days and three nights, with no food or water, wrapped only in a blanket, I prayed in my altar with the Sacred Pipe (chanunpa). At dawn I sang four directions songs and prayed for confidence, respect, encouragement, and patience. I cried for Mom and the pain she had suffered from being ill. I prayed for her healing. She spoke to me in my vision, smiling and healthy, and told me to take heart. "You're a good son, David," she said, "try not to take yourself so seriously, you're okay." When I prayed to my grandmothers on the hill I did not know that you were one of them, great-great Grandmother. Maybe you heard me?*

### **Lakota Sun Dance: Background and History**

The Lakota Sun Dance is part of the Lakota Sacred Pipe (*chanunpa*) tradition that includes the vision quest along with other ceremonies. The Lakota are part of a larger nation often referred to as the Sioux (consisting of two other linguistic groups, the Dakota and Nakota). Sioux is a name given to them by their rival neighbors, the Ojibwe. Seven Fireplaces (*Oceti Sakowin*) is the name more commonly used by the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota to describe themselves collectively. From the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, the Sioux were a dominant force in the middle part of North America with territory ranging from the woodlands of Minnesota to the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming (Lycett 2014). The conquest and settling of the Sioux on reservations in the late 1800s, and the U.S. government's subsequent attempts to stamp out Indian culture, threatened the survival of the Sacred Pipe tradition and the Sun Dance. Despite colonization and extreme hardship, Sioux traditions persisted through the tenacity of small, isolated, extended families. During the second half of the twentieth century to the present, the Sacred Pipe tradition has seen a remarkable renaissance in spite of on-going difficulties facing Sioux culture. Although the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota (collectively the Sioux) share many of the same traditions, the Lakota (who currently have reservations in North and South Dakota) have been the most prominent group in the renaissance and spread of the Sacred Pipe and Sun Dance.

From my understanding, in Lakota culture the *chanunpa* is a cosmic and holographic embodiment of the sacred teachings given by the legendary White Buffalo Calf Woman (*Tatanka Cicala Skan Wakan Wiyan* or also referred to as *Pte San Wi*). The version *Tatanka Cicala Skan Wakan Wiyan* was used by my Rosebud Lakota elder who taught me to sing in Lakota. These teachings were given to the Lakota people

in ancient times so that they could learn to live in a sacred manner. Joining the bowl and stem of the *chanunpa* in ceremony indicates the merging and harmonizing of male and female energies and spiritual forces of nature. The Sacred Pipe tradition emphasizes the deep interconnectedness of humans with the “more-than-human” (Abram 1996) world, while also providing instructions on how to create healthy relationships with one’s family, tribe, and surrounding environment (Black Elk and Epes-Brown 2003; White Hat and Cunningham 2012). Although the Sun Dance is the most dramatic and comprehensive ceremony of the Lakota, its performance is only part of the larger Sacred Pipe tradition. Lakota holy men and women over the generations have elaborated on the original instructions that came with the *chanunpa* through the practice of traditional life and ceremonies. Core spiritual teachings from the tradition remain intact across the generations, while elders and lineage holders of the tradition adapt certain aspects to accommodate shifting historical and cultural circumstances (Hallowell 2010; Neale 2011).

### **The “Classic” Sun Dance**

During the 1700s the Sun Dance emerged as the major religious ceremony not only for the Lakota, but for approximately twenty other plains tribes including the following: Cheyenne, Arapaho, Gros Ventre, Blackfeet, Crow, Shoshoni, Ponca, Sarsi, Arikara, Hidatsa, Assiniboiné, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwe, Blood, Piegan, Ute, Kutenai, and Kiowa. Other tribes such as the Mandan, Omaha, and Osage performed ceremonies that resembled the Sun Dance (Spier 1917, 459). Scholars often call this early, pre-conquest period the Classic Lakota Sun Dance (Walker, DeMallie, Jahner 1980; Walker 1917)

The Sun Dance was held for various reasons, like to achieve success in hunting and war, and to fulfill vows made in a time of distress. Preparations for the dance were initiated by a medicine man or, in some cases, a man or a woman who had been instructed through a dream or other circumstances to do so. Sun Dances usually took place around the time of the full moon in June or July and often coincided with a buffalo hunt. Tribe members who had been dispersed during winter and spring seasons came from tribal territories to visit with friends and relatives and to participate in the important religious activities of the tribe. The camp was assembled for close to two weeks, during which time the Sun Dance grounds were prepared by building a circular ceremonial lodge (arbor) where the dancing took place around a sacred cottonwood tree that had been selected by the Sun Dance intercessor (i.e., the medicine man or chief who served as the spiritual director for the ceremony). The time leading up to the dance included extensive socializing and preparatory ceremonies, such as sweat lodges.

The Classic Sun Dance itself lasted three to four days. Ceremonial singers and drummers provided the traditional songs for the rounds of dancing that took place from sunrise to sunset. During this time, dancers refrained from food or water while dancing in place, in a circle, around the cottonwood tree. Other austerities, such as piercing the flesh, served a sacrificial purpose with the hopes that diligent performance of the ceremony would renew their communities and ways of life. Enemy tribes commonly adhered to a truce during the Sun Dance and were even known to be occasional observers and participants at the dance of an enemy (E. Deloria 1988).

### **The Contemporary Sun Dance**

The U.S. government banned Sun Dances in 1881 but they never completely died out, even though traditional culture was rapidly deteriorating under the pressure of reservation poverty, despair, and missionization. The Sun Dance continued underground, led by a small group of people who would not



relinquish their traditions even in the face of oppression. During this time, many Native children were forcibly sent to boarding schools where they were often beaten if they spoke their own language or practiced their own religion; this lasted well into the 1960s. A Sun Dance elder who was married to the leader of a Lakota Sun Dance in the Pacific Northwest explained the impact of boarding schools in an email message to the author on October 26, 2011, expressing that:

Forced attendance of ... Indian children [at] those ‘civilized’ schools—determined to de-Indianize them—caused devastating harm: almost an entire generation missed out on family/parenting experience and training. A literal erosion of the family unit and values. This was a major cause of alcohol, drug and child abuse on the reservations. (Anonymous)

The U.S. government’s intent to conquer and assimilate American Indians included outlawing or seriously restricting religious and ceremonial practices. Progress was not made legally until the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act and its subsequent update in 1994 that addressed issues surrounding peyote-using traditions.

Beginning in the 1950s, the Lakota Sun Dance started to re-emerge more visibly, though still underground for the most part. Several Lakota medicine men continued to practice their shamanic traditions and made critical contributions to the preservation of traditional ways. The most well-known spiritual leader, Frank Fools Crow, is acknowledged as a crucial figure in the resurgence of the Sun Dance, and many dances today claim some connection to him (Mails 1975; Fools Crow and Mails 1990). He is thought to have been born around 1890 and died in 1989. Along with men close to his age, such as Bill Eagle Feathers, Frank Arrowsight, Robert Stead, Pete Catches, John Fire Lane Deer, and others, he began to regularly perform the traditional Sun Dance in the 1960s. Following this time, a younger generation of Lakota medicine men, such as Leonard Crow Dog and Godfrey Chips, began Sun Dances in the 1970s. In the late 1970s, Brave Buffalo, Martin High Bear, and Wallace Black Elk brought the Sun Dance off the reservation to various locations in Oregon and Washington. During the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Dances on and off the reservation exploded. This trend continues today, and Sun Dances of other tribal nations have also been renewed.

As in pre-conquest times, dancers (also called pledgers because they “pledged” to undertake the ceremony) who perform the actual dance abstain from food and water, with some rare exceptions, and many undergo various types of piercings and flesh offerings. Today, dances last four days with four days of “purification” that precede the ceremony. During this time, dancers prepare the Sun Dance grounds, participate in sweat lodges, and conduct other ceremonial preparations. One such preparation involves making tobacco tie prayer offerings that are placed on the ceremonial tree on the fourth day of purification when the sacred cottonwood is felled and planted in the center of the ceremonial arbor. On the day that the cottonwood is brought into the arbor (“tree day”), the ceremonial fire, located in the west directly behind the arbor and the ceremonial altar, is lit and subsequently stoked twenty-four hours a day by a team of fire tenders who also assist the intercessor, head dancers, and other helpers who lead the pledgers through the ceremony. In all of the contemporary Lakota Sun Dances I am familiar with, pledgers commit to perform the dance for four years. This was not necessarily a requirement during the Classic Sun Dance according to James Walker (1917), who served as a physician and amateur anthropologist on the Pine Ridge Lakota reservation from 1896 to 1914. Additionally, pledgers make a number of commitments to various self-disciplines throughout the year so that they will be prepared for each year’s dance. During the Dance the pledgers pray for “the people,” their families, and for the on-

going renewal of life and tradition through various acts. These acts include dancing in place, undergoing piercings, waving eagle feather fans, blowing on eagle bone whistles (for the men), laying hands on the cottonwood tree when instructed to do so by a dance helper, and by processing in and out of the central dance area (*hocoka*) at sunrise, in-between rounds of dancing, and at the end of the day's final round. Once a dancer has fulfilled his or her four-year commitment they may choose to dance in subsequent dances for as many days as they wish.

### **Non-Native Participation in the Contemporary Lakota Sun Dance**

In the early days of the contemporary Sun Dance's revival, members of the political American Indian Movement (AIM) were heavily involved and many resented any attempt by whites to observe the ceremony or actually dance. In 1971, Fools Crow invited the Jesuit priest Paul Steinmetz to participate in a Sun Dance on the Pine Ridge reservation to the consternation of many AIM members (Steinmetz 1990).

When the Sun Dance started to make a real comeback in the late 1960s and the 1970s, it became an avenue for many different Indians to find a way back to their traditional identity that had been shattered by their subjugation and colonization. It is hard to overstate the devastation experienced by Native people since their contact with Europeans (V. Deloria 1969; Stannard 1993; Jennings 1976). Genocide, cultural destruction, poverty, and loss of ancient identity structures that their traditional cultures had provided, have, understandably, led to instances of despair and, at times, bitterness.

The Counter Culture of the 1960s brought with it an interest in Native spirituality among some young whites (at times called hippies). This interest continued in the 1970s, and in the 1980s the burgeoning of New Age ideas brought more non-Native people who wanted to experience Native ceremonies. In the 1990s, the Sun Dance expanded dramatically, with many non-Native people performing the ceremony as dancers, not just attending as observers. Some Native people saw this as the last step of colonization and as a way to assuage white guilt about what white culture had done to Native Americans without any real socio-political sacrifice (P. Deloria 1998). Also, as some whites became exposed to traditional Native shamanic practices, they took bits and pieces and began to promulgate various forms of neo-shamanism and personal development workshops, some of which lacked integrity.

A 2009 tragedy in Sedona, Arizona, involving several deaths and serious injuries at a "sweat lodge" run by the now disgraced workshop leader James Arthur Ray, serves as an extreme example of how the allure of Native ceremonies can be exploited in very harmful ways. Ray led "Spiritual Warrior" retreats with a \$10,000 per person price tag that offered people a route to boundless personal development and wealth if they had the meddle to endure a series of extreme experiences over several days that included fasting in the desert, a seven hour "Samurai" game, and a sweat lodge that served as a capstone event at the end of the retreat. Although Ray was not claiming to be doing a specifically Native American sweat lodge, he had claimed to have studied with various Native people and had obviously based his sweat lodge on the Native American practice. Ray's *mélange* of activities, pilfered from other cultures, illustrates Brunk and Young's (2009) definition of appropriation, "[A]ppropriation...occurs when outsiders from one culture ... adopt religious beliefs, rituals or ceremonial practices from an Indigenous culture, often, but not always, over the protests of the insiders, in this case members of an Indigenous culture."

Ray's blatant appropriation and exploitation took bits and pieces from different cultural practices that were useful for him to accrue financial gain. He showed no understanding of any Native tradition. Ray's sweat lodges were conducted with arrogance and little regard for the safety of his participants. He used coercive tactics to pressure people to stay in his inordinately hot and long lodges (Ortega 2011), a practice generally frowned upon in traditional sweat lodges. His hubris eventually led to the death of three people, and Ray was convicted of negligent homicide. Some Native people argue that cases like this, and ones that are less extreme, but still egregious, warrant total exclusion of non-Native people from all Native ceremonies. Despite these unfortunate examples, not all non-Native participation in Native or Native-influenced ceremonies can be lumped together with people like Ray.

### **The Circle: Sitting, Singing, Praying**

*Grandmother,*

*Before going to a ceremony, I never knew a Native American person. Ceremonies gave me a place to meet people from many tribes and the opportunity for me to be myself. I'm grateful for the Circle we had in the Bay Area because we got to know each other deeply over many years. Every week we learned Lakota songs, listened to our elders' teachings, and prayed in a way that was authentic for each of us. I remember once when I felt really bad and everyone sang for me for a long time to help me feel better. The Circle supported me through the difficult period when my parents were really sick. When the time came to help Mom and Dad crossover, my relatives were there to tell me how to care for someone as they are dying. Life scattered us to the directions but we do our best to stay connected. The wholesome family values I learned from Mom and Dad helped me appreciate Lakota perspectives on what it means to be a relative. Grandmother, I know some non-Indian people who get involved in Lakota ways can be selfish and disrespectful. I want you to know that I have always tried to learn in a good and respectful way.*

### **A Native American Critique of Intercultural Sharing**

Interest in Native ways by non-Native people has caused severe criticism in many traditional Native circles, with non-Natives and Native leaders who share practices with non-Natives being accused of appropriating and debasing traditional ceremonial ways and threatening the viability of Native cultures (P. Deloria 1998; Garrouette 2003; Stover 2001; Townsend 2003). Specious appropriation by Ray and others is deplorable (Castaneda 1968; De Mille 1976). However sincere, intercultural sharing that does not succumb to harmful appropriation can take place. Deep and critical consideration of ethical issues and standards of behavior need to be constantly revisited by both non-Native and Native participants in traditional, cross-cultural, and neo-shamanic ceremonial practices.

Many perspectives exist on what is and is not appropriation. This can cause confusion for someone trying to ethically participate in a Native tradition. For example, let us suppose that a Native leader from one extended ceremonial family believes that, under certain circumstances and with proper preparation, it is permissible to let non-Native people be pledgers at a Sun Dance. However, this leader strongly believes that even when a non-Native person has completed their four-year commitment to dance, they should not be allowed to lead sweat lodge ceremonies for others under any circumstances. Now, on the other hand, there is a Native leader from another extended family who believes that, if a person has finished their Sun Dance commitment and they have apprenticed with a sweat lodge leader who has received an altar (meaning they trained with someone with the authority to teach the tradition), then it is okay for the Sun

Dancer to lead sweat lodges for others. From the perspective of the first Native leader, if the Sun Dancer conducts sweat lodge ceremonies, that could be considered a form of appropriation, whereas the second Native leader thinks that it is perfectly legitimate for the Sun Dancer to lead sweats as long as they maintain high ethical standards and follow the instructions of their elders. From my understanding, in the decentralized way that Lakota tradition exists, there is no way to come to an ultimate determination about which perspective is correct. Even though there are recognized leaders in the Lakota tradition, such as Arvol Lookinghorse (the Keeper of the Sacred Pipe), no one person holds the authority to impose doctrinal uniformity on the wide range of extended families and communities that practice Lakota traditions (White Hat and Cunningham 2012). Linda Neale discusses these differences in *The Power of Ceremony: Restoring the Sacred in Our Selves, Our Families, Our Communities*, by quoting Laverdure:

Each medicine man has a variation in the Sun Dance. Some things are universal: the four directions, the tree, and the four days, and prayer with a universal pipe. But there's different things, like the rounds and the songs and the altar. They're all according to that medicine man's vision. That's the way it always was...it doesn't mean the other person's wrong. (Neale 2011)

Although guidance should be sought from a variety of sources, especially elders, at some point, after a thorough examination of one's intentions and behavior, one must trust one's own conscience and be willing to continually work to avoid negative types of appropriation. Learning about the history of cross-cultural interaction can serve as a foundation for understanding the complex nature of appropriation.

### **New Age Appropriation of Native Traditions**

The New Age movement is an important, historical instance of cross-cultural interaction that has been criticized by many Native leaders because of its tendency to appropriate Native cultures in harmful ways. The New Age movement is a decentralized set of widely varying ideas and practices generally acknowledged to have emerged in the 1960s, with antecedents before then. The New Age movement ranges from generally benign ideas about the oneness of humanity, human potential, and spirituality in general, to a variety of fringe ideas such as UFOs, channeling, and a hodge-podge of flaky and commercialized metaphysical ideas (Aldred 2000). Certain sectors of the New Age movement have appropriated various Native traditions to the chagrin of many Native people who claim they are bastardizing and stealing their culture while only adding to the history of colonization. Some of these syncretic attempts do take Native traditions and appropriate them for unethical, financial gain and personal aggrandizement.

Although it is difficult to speak of the New Age movement as one phenomenon, it is important to critically identify problems with New Age appropriations of Native American traditions. One particularly harsh critic, Philip Deloria, is the son of the famous Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr.<sup>1</sup> In his book, *Playing Indian* (1998), he addresses the complexities of Indian and white identity construction and the colonial power dynamics that have tainted Indian/white relations since first contact. He uses the New Age movement as an example of the ironic appropriation of "Indianness" by whites, and how it serves various functions for white identity conflicts and the paradoxical history of whites' relationship with Native

Americans. This history has included romanticizing Indian “aboriginality,” while at the same time demonizing, conquering, and attempting to exterminate Indians. He goes on to criticize the New Age movement for its individually oriented pursuit of “spiritual enlightenment” that tends to ignore social and political power struggles, stating:

The tendency of New Age devotees to find in Indianness personal solutions to the question of living the good life meant that Indian Others were imagined in almost exclusively positive terms—communitarian, environmentally wise, spiritually insightful. This happy multiculturalism blunted the edge of earlier calls for social change by focusing on pleasant cultural exchanges that erased the complex histories of Indians and others. (P. Deloria 1998)

Deloria makes an important point. Non-Native people need to seriously consider such criticism when interacting with Native traditions. I have seen instances that Deloria describes, but I have also witnessed and participated in on-going ceremonial relationship with Natives and non-Natives where truly meaningful community has developed and thorny, political issues have been considered and tentatively worked through. The political and cultural conflicts have not always been completely resolved, but they have been reconciled to a degree that allows for the continuation of the ceremonial community. I believe, on the whole, this supports the preservation of Native ways.

Philip Deloria’s critique often holds true, but there are also examples of intercultural sharing that do not quite fit into the scenarios Deloria describes. In *Playing Indian*, Deloria claims that all of the rejoinders of “multicultural” sharing and positive Indian/white relations are empty, ironic, and essentially harmful to Native people. “The presence of multicultural images and statements ... let Indian players claim a sincere, but ultimately fruitless, political sympathy with native people. Indeed, the New Age’s greatest intellectual temptation lies in the wistful fallacy that one can engage in social struggle by working on oneself” (ibid.).

Despite the accuracy of Philip Deloria’s critique in many instances, not all people or communities who interact with and participate in Indian ceremonies and communities can fairly be characterized as “New Agers.” Although the flakiest and appropriating sector of the New Age movement that falls prey to apolitical narcissism deserves to be denounced, we still need to find more nuanced ways to understand the wide range of people who come to interact with Native ways. Deloria’s condemnation of “working on oneself” as a way to engage in social struggle, though sometimes valid, may not necessarily be true in all circumstances. There is a danger in simply using one’s experience of Native ways as a means to serve only personal goals and to evade the social and political implications of one’s actions. However, to say that “working on oneself” is always useless fancy risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Spiritual and social transformation takes place in the complex interface between individuals and groups. Individuals that genuinely seek to develop their best human qualities through participation in Native ways can make real contributions to the groups to which they belong. Over years of attending Sun Dances, I have seen people who were able to work on themselves to overcome addictions, traumas, and other problems. In many cases this work was a necessary precursor to being a better contributor to one’s community. The awareness gained through working on oneself and becoming a better human being, in many instances, has also led people I have known, and others, to become more politically engaged with their local Indian communities (Stover 2001; Gustafson 1997).

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### Identity and “Indianness”

In addition to Philip Deloria’s New Age critique, he further warns of problems that can arise when non-Native people start to see themselves as “Indian.” He goes on to say:

Non-Indians began taking up permanent native identities in order to lay claim to the cultural power of Indianness in the white imagination. Likewise, many native people found empowerment in a white-focused, spiritual mediator’s role, and they acted accordingly. It became difficult to sort out who was whom along the continuum, and the questions of mediators’ Indian identity has been fiercely and frequently contested ever since. (P. Deloria 1998)

Our postmodern diaspora makes the issue of identity particularly vexing and complex. The accelerated blending of cultures worldwide, beginning with the Age of Discovery and followed by modernity, has challenged the ways in which we think about who we are. Clearly there are dangers when non-Native people try to assume an inauthentic Indian identity by trying to be someone they are not and appropriating Native culture in self-serving ways. However, there can be a difference between identifying with certain ideals and practices of a Native culture and trying to claim an Indian identity in a culturally colonizing way. Native people themselves have widely varying views on who exactly is “Indian.”

The situation of people with mixed blood is particularly salient when examining these thorny identity issues because they inhabit a hybrid and liminal position between cultures. Philip Deloria presents a very insightful and personal consideration of these issues in his 2002 article, “Thinking About Self in a Family Way.” He has had a unique journey as a mixed blood scholar from a famous family. Deloria has experienced the irony that can emerge from the confusing landscape of identity politics and cross-cultural interaction. He tells a story about race relations and tensions between Indians and whites that he experienced on a rural school bus when he was a child. His father, Vine Deloria Jr., was a professor at Western Washington University and had recently published the bestseller *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969). Deloria writes:

Everything in that world was fine until I got on the bus to middle school. The bus had already picked up the Lummi kids, some of whom rode to the nearby high school. They were tough, well prepared for the conflicts that can take place on a school bus. Indeed, on that particular bus, the racial calculus shifted with each addition and as the bus got nearer to town and school, it turned increasingly white, and the Lummi kids lapsed into silence in the back. On the homeward journey, however, the situation was reversed. Each afternoon, pale students who lived in the reservation borderlands sank into their own studied silence. The Lummis had been radicalized, and when they decided to pick on non-Indian kids, their taunts had recognizable political content. So I suppose I should not have been surprised when Jimmy, the biggest and toughest, pushed my face hard up against the window of the bus one day and screamed, “Custer died for your sins, man!” Jimmy did not know it, but he was forcing a question of identity of which I was only dimly aware. What was a scrawny sixth grader, the near image of his other grandfather—the Swedish one—to do? Should I yell back, “Hey! I know a bunch of stories, my great-uncle went to Haskell Indian School, and my dad made

up your slogan?” Those were the tokens of Indianness I had to offer. They would never serve as adequate currency for Jimmy—and why should they? I knew I would do best to enjoy the scrunched-up view and content myself with the knowledge that I had acquired a particularly rich understanding of irony at an early age. (P. Deloria 2002)

In her book, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native Americans* (2003), mixed blood Cherokee sociologist Eva Marie Garrouette articulates the challenging position that people of mixed blood have inhabited. “For centuries mixed bloods have bridged the chasm between cultures—bridged it with their bodies, bridged it with their spirits, bridged it with their consciousness, bridged it often whether they were willing or unwilling” (Garrouette 2003). A mixed blood identity brings with it many conflicting demands to negotiate between cultures. Sadly, people of mixed blood may never be fully embraced by either culture.

Garrouette notes that, “Indians have the highest rate of intermarriage of any ethnic group with slightly more than half of all Indian men and women marrying non-Indians” (ibid.). This mixing of Indian blood has deeply affected Indian cultures and continues to be a heavily contested site of identity and tribal politics. The U.S. government and tribes themselves have a variety of ways to determine blood quantum requirements for eligibility as an enrolled tribal member. Garrouette gives an in-depth account of this process in her book. She also considers complex issues of identity and inclusion, or exclusion, based on real and/or perceived degree of Indian blood quantum, and less clearly defined ideas of being culturally Indian. Indian views on who is a “real Indian” vary greatly, with one extreme wanting to, as strictly as possible, reserve Indian identity for people who can provide both genealogical and cultural bona fides. On the other end of the spectrum, there are Indian people who believe that mixed bloods and even non-Indian people can legitimately claim a cultural Indian identity if they conform to certain standards of behavior and if they have developed legitimate personal ties with Indian people.

Garrouette shares several stories from her anonymous Indian informants that support the view that non-Indians can develop authentic ties with Indian people by embodying particular aspects of an Indian worldview. An Osage educator, quoted by Garrouette, believes that, “In general, when I say someone is an Indian...I [mean] they’re like me. Not necessarily in appearance but in spirit. They have an ‘Indian Heart.’ Somebody is like me because somebody has taught them like my teachers have taught me on how to live and how to look at other people” (ibid.). Another informant in Garrouette’s book named Joyce J. agrees, saying:

It doesn’t matter how much blood they are or how much this or that, but if they are of the old, of the spiritual way, if their heart is Indian...their *minds* and their thoughts are Indian, then they’re...going to be enveloped in some family, in an Indian family that will *take* them and teach them even more. So I think what...makes an Indian has nothing to do with amount of blood...I think it’s their thinking, their mind, their soul, and their heart. (ibid.)

A Sun Dance elder in an email to myself on October 26, 2011 affirmed this sentiment when she stated, “I was taught [that] this [perspective] is ‘traditional’ thinking” (Anonymous). The quotes from Garrouette’s informants are not meant to serve as a simplistic rationalization for how non-Natives can assume a Native identity. However, they do serve as an example of the complexity of views on Indian identity and how people of mixed blood and non-Native people can come to incorporate aspects of “Indianness” into their identities. Questions of appropriation and interpretations of what a truly authentic Indian or “Indian-

informed" identity is will likely continue to be subjects of contention and debate. Construction of an identity is always dynamic and embedded in historical and cultural circumstances. Since attending Sun Dances and other ceremonies, I have witnessed firsthand how people attempt to come to terms with issues of identity and authenticity. There is a continuum ranging from inappropriate incorporation of "Indianness," to genuine integration of personal identity with ceremonial and cultural traditions. Elders have taught me that the most important indicator of whether people are appropriately participating in a Native ceremonial or cultural tradition is how they live their life and treat other people. If they are ethical, sincere, and contribute to the healthy functioning of their family and surrounding community, that will be the evidence that they have dealt with issues of cross-cultural sharing and identity construction in a good way. Fools Crow said, "These ceremonies do not belong to Indians alone. They can be done by all who have the right attitude, and who are honest and sincere about their belief in Grandfather and in following his rules... We are keepers of certain areas of knowledge, which we are to share for the good of mankind" (Fools Crow and Mails 1990). He goes on to say in another book, "The survival of the world depends upon our sharing what we have and working together. If we don't, the whole world will die. First the planet, and next the people. The ones who complain and talk the most about giving away medicine secrets are always those who know least" (Fools Crow and Mails 1991).

### Dancing Together

*Dear Grandmother,*

*I want to tell you more about my elders that shared the Sun Dance with me. Uncle Rod is A'kimel O'odham from Arizona. I met him through his wife Linda, whom I met at the first Sun Dance I went to in Washington. Rod was about sixty-five then, now he's in his late eighties. Uncle is pretty quiet, but when he has something to say it's heart-felt and deep. Rod and Linda always welcomed me in their home to sweat and advised me on my thesis. A couple of years ago, Rod and Linda helped me out with an event for a NASA education grant I co-directed. They came to sing and speak with a group of Native students from Chemawa Indian School. Rod had just recently been really sick, but he made the effort to come teach American Indian high school students. He met students from his nation and from neighboring tribes in Arizona and across the West. We had a really great group of Native and non-Native teachers for that retreat. The kids loved singing and drumming, talking about diverse tribal ways, and learning about NASA Earth science. I wish we could have had more than two days. Rod told the students to always keep learning and to cultivate the ability to go beyond currently perceived limitations.*

*Rod started Sun Dancing in Oregon in the 1980s. When I met him in the late 1990s, he frequently ran sweat lodge ceremonies for Native and non-Native people. Rod was the first elder I sweat with at the Sun Dance in 1996. On the day before "tree day," the official start of the next phase of the ceremony, many people arrived in camp. At about ten o'clock at night, thirty-five men got into the sweat with Rod for the next three hours. He was quite different in the sweat lodge. His teaching and prayers bore witness to the great suffering he had experienced in his life. He is one of a small number of tribal members fluent in the O'odham language. Although he retained his language, and much of the worldview encapsulated in it, he grew up in a time when the old ways of his people became less and less viable. After a long struggle with alcoholism, he moved to Portland where he became part of the emerging Pacific Northwest Sun Dance phenomenon. In a book Linda wrote called *The Power of Ceremony*, she asked Rod why he invited non-Native people to the sweat lodge. Rod answered:*



*I don't invite them, they just come.*

*Linda: But why don't you turn them away, then?*

*Rod: Why should I?*

*Linda: Well, some people would say you shouldn't be teaching white people especially.*

*Rod: But this isn't mine. I'm just sharing.*

*Linda: So some people think they own a particular ceremony?*

*Rod: No one owns anything. Many of the people who promote that concept of ownership of the ceremonies don't use their own language. If they're really into that ownership thing, why do they have to use English? My understanding is that if you really have something that you claim is yours, you won't want to keep it really, out of respect for where it's coming from. So you offer it to the people at large—you offer it to them, what you consider yours. So what happens is they use it to their own level of understanding. Because once you share something it's not yours anymore, whether it's a song, a prayer, a ceremony. My understanding is that we're just all carriers of the teachings and messages. We're only the messengers, not the message. (Neale 2011)*

*Grandmother, I'm grateful that Uncle Rod offered me the opportunity to sweat at his home and pray at the Sun Dance together. Even though he is an eloquent speaker, he teaches more by example than with words. I really respect that. That's also how Uncle Buck taught.*

*My friend Matt introduced me to Uncle. They had taught together at the same school in the late 1980s. Uncle was from Rosebud and went to Sun Dances as a kid. His wife told me that his grandparents taught him Lakota ways. He observed, asked questions, and danced in the ceremonies. At ten or eleven years old his grandfathers sponsored his hanbleceya (literally, crying for a vision or crying through the night) (White Hat and Around Him 1983, 27). Auntie told me about his hanbleceya in an email a few years ago, saying:*

*This is where he had the BIG Vision. The Vision was him sitting on a hill in front of a whole bunch of non-Indians, teaching the Lakota way. The Vision both scared and confused him. About twenty-five years later, after his near-death experience, sobering up and then doing road trips with [a Lakota medicine man and his wife] for a few years, his elders...sent [him] out to finally begin fulfilling this Vision and teaching non-Indians. They felt that if the non-Indian understood more about the Lakota history and spirituality, the non-Indian [might] not be such a pain-in-the-arse AND could possibly become a valuable ally. ("Auntie" Anonymous. October 26, 2011)*

*I knew Uncle Buck for a little over ten years before he crossed over. I heard him say that when he first began to walk his vision he was dismayed to have to work with non-Indian people and share ceremonies with people whose ancestors had tried to stamp out Native people and cultures. Nonetheless, the vision was so strong that he was compelled to follow it, regardless of his personal feelings. Once he began to teach and share his vision, he returned to "the hill" for hanbleceya many times over the course of fifteen years. During these ceremonies, he received further instructions and medicines related to his original vision.*

*Uncle faced a lot of criticism from some for sharing with non-Indians, but he kept strong ties with local Indian grandmothers in Washington, several of his Lakota relatives, and with people from many tribes who found a home at the Sun Dance. Uncle was a real character. He had been a Marine sergeant and fought in the Vietnam War. I could tell that he had seen a lot in his life. He could be sort of intimidating and barked at you if you did something wrong. Sometimes he was just teasing, which was his way of saying that he welcomed you to the family. It took me a little while to get that. I really appreciated that Uncle and his family respected gay people. I felt more accepted as a gay person at ceremony than I do in the dominant culture I come from. Being gay, feeling like an outsider, and experiencing discrimination has made it a little bit easier for me to identify with others that have, or currently do, experience marginalization. Uncle brought people together to heal racial and ecological oppression through ceremony, sacrifice, prayer, and working together. That isn't something that happens all at once, but Uncle helped us enter into the process. Just like anyone, he wasn't perfect, but he cared deeply. I miss him.*

### **Future Research**

The Sun Dance taught me important lessons about transcultural and intergenerational communication that would be worth exploring further at some point. In future research, I would like to explore how to create new modes of teaching and learning that draw on the wisdom contained in ceremonies like the Lakota Sun Dance. As a graduate student in my twenties, learning about American Indian history, traditions, and cultures eventually led me to teaching. Observing how elders mentored and instructed youths, along with working side-by-side with young people on a variety of tasks to support the ceremony, showed me how to relate to teenagers in ways that continue to guide me in the classroom today. Building respectful, genuine relationships and facilitating wholesome experiences for students is crucial for motivating them to exert the effort needed to learn and find ways to contribute to their communities and world.

Teachers need ongoing opportunities for growth that empower them to meet students where they are. A teacher education program that includes participation in Sun Dances for teacher candidates who plan to work in Native American schools would be one area of future research that could be pursued in partnership with institutions such as Sinte Gleska University and Oglala Lakota College. Both of these schools have Lakota studies, teacher education programs, and educators who bring together Lakota traditions for educational purposes. Future research would support the ongoing work of these institutions and the priorities that Native educators have established for themselves to serve their people. This work could be pursued in a more intertribal context at institutions such as the Haskell Indian Nations University and Northwest Indian College.

Another area of future research would be to explore how western Earth scientists and Native Earth scientists, elders, and educators can learn from each other about how to cultivate sustainable relationships with Earth's life systems. This research would expand on the *Native Earth Ways* program that I directed from 2011 to 2015 as co-investigator of a NASA Earth science education grant titled, "Beautiful Earth: Experiencing and Learning Science in a New Way." The project collaborated with five science centers around the United States to produce an informal education experience for K-16 students that included teachings from Native elders, Native teachers, science center educators, a planetarium show with live music, and hands-on Earth science education workshops led by NASA Earth scientists. *Bella Gaia*, the planetarium show by artist Kenji Williams, took the audience on a tour of the Earth from the perspective

of an astronaut to simulate the “overview effect,” an experience reported by many astronauts when they comprehend the profound interconnectedness and fragility of the Earth while seeing it from space (White 1987). For future research, augmented reality (e.g., Meta or MS Hololens) could be used to create immersive visualizations and holistic learning environments to help facilitate a new kind of transcultural communication aimed at bridging understanding gaps between people of different cultures, worldviews, and mindsets.

At several of the NASA grant events, Native elders and educators shared traditional teachings about healthy human, non-human, and Earth relationships. Future research might explore new ways to provide people opportunities to experience these kinds of healthy and multidimensional relationships. Tewa professor Gregory Cajete (2000) believes that renewing indigenous ways of knowing and Native science can help Native people reconnect with the wisdom of their ancestors, explaining:

[I]f we learn once again to feel, see, hear, smell, and taste the world as our ancestors did, we may remember something truly wonderful about nature in humans... This does not mean that we should or even can return to the pre-modern, hunter-gatherer existence of our ancestors, but only that we must carry their perceptual wisdom and way of participation into the twenty-first century, where the environmental challenges we face will require a totally different way of living in nature. (23)

Although it may not be possible for non-Native people to fully encounter this kind of ancestral experience, all people in some sense have an indigenous lineage even if that lineage is fragmented and remote. Developing effective ways for Native and non-Native researchers to enter into each other's world to seek common ground could provide new wisdom to address the profound social and ecological challenges we all now face.

### Conclusion

*Hau Unci (Dear Grandmother),*

*I wish I knew your name and how exactly we're related. I know from the picture that we are related as family. Dad was interested in family history but apparently had not seen the photograph of you. I'm grateful Dad sparked my interest in ancestors. Often, at ceremonies, I have pondered my roots and my connection to the land. I guess this led me to you. The Earth and sky speak to me at ceremony and evoke great beauty. As I spent time in rural areas where Sun Dances were held, I realized how much I had missed growing up in a suburban environment without regular access to wilderness. I have always loved landscape, but have mostly been ignorant of its natural rhythms. Unfortunately, the dominant culture I grew up in has caused much damage to American Indian people and the land of North America. I wish more Americans could understand Native Americans' concerns and make an effort to learn about the issues. I think several of the key tensions in United States history need to be continually revisited and grappled with so that we are not naive about pathological elements of our past that persist today.*

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*Grandmother, if you were alive today, what advice would you give the children and their parents? How did you endure hardships? What made you joyful? I'm grateful to Dr. Wilson for giving me the idea to write to you like this. I hope I have honored his work by emulating it. I couldn't address everything he talked about, but I have taken his teachings to heart. Great-great Grandmother, I hope to learn more about you some day. Hetchetu, so it is. Mitakuye o'yasin, all my relations.*

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#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> My presentation of Deloria's argument in *Playing Indian* does not claim to represent a comprehensive reading of Deloria's perspective. However, the quoted text serves as a starting point for reflections on the problems of intercultural sharing. Considering that the book was published in 1998, I imagine Professor Deloria could have a different way of looking at things now. I hope, someday, to have the opportunity to speak with him in person to discuss his latest thinking since I highly regard his work.

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