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Contest Powwow: Sport and Native American Culture

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Abstract

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Keywords

collectivism, coding, contest powwow, Native American, sport, qualitative research, theme development

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The Native American powwow has served to maintain the culture of North America's Indigenous peoples since before the arrival of European colonialists. In traditional forms of the powwow, competition is not common whereas contest powwows are characterized by the primacy of competition. We assess similarities and differences between the contest powwow and competitive sport found within the broader American society through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 competitive contest powwow dancers. We address a number of questions through the qualitative research process, such as what does the powwow mean to you? What are your primary goals for competing? We analyzed the qualitative data via a three-step coding process (open coding, axial coding, and theme development). We demonstrate that although the participants compete with a high degree of seriousness, they maintain traditional collectivist values and attitudes. Further, we conclude that the contest powwow serves to maintain and reproduce the unique characteristics of traditional Native American culture within the competitive contest powwow environment.

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Introduction

The Native American powwow has served to maintain and celebrate the culture of North America's Indigenous peoples since before the arrival of European colonialists. Powwows are sites in which cultural persistence, cohesion, and ritual focus are celebrated through song, dance, and social interaction (Dufrene, 1990; Kracht, 1994). Thousands of powwows are conducted each year throughout Canada and the United States (Eschbach & Applbaum, 2000). There currently exist two primary forms of the powwow, the traditional powwow and the contest powwow.

Traditional powwows are typically local events and participants generally include individuals from the same tribal group. Tribal-specific culture is emphasized at traditional powwows. As such, traditional powwows are integral to the continuity of tribal and regional cultural identity (Herle, 1994; Lerch & Bullers, 1996; Scales, 2007). Competition does not typically take place at traditional powwows and is not integral to their structure (DesJarlait, 1997; Herle, 1994).

Competition is an essential component of the contest powwow. Contest powwow dancers must register to compete; they are assigned numbers, and performances are judged and scored. Winners are selected, and cash prizes are awarded. Dancers from various tribal groups compete in numerous age categories and Native American dance styles for prize money and awards. For example, the 2017 Gathering of Nations Powwow sponsored competitions in the Fancy Shawl Dance, Jingle Dance, Traditional Northern Dance, Southern Traditional Dance, Southern Cloth Dance, Northern Cloth Dance, and Southern Buckskin Dance for females in girls, teens, women's, golden age, and elder categories. For males, competitions were offered

in the Grass Dance, Fancy Dance, Southern Straight Dance, Northern Traditional Dance, Northern Fancy Dance, Southern Fancy Dance, and the Chicken Dance in boys, teens, men's, golden age, and elder categories. Boys and girls under age 5 competed in the tiny tots dance events. Cash prizes and awards were issued in a total of 36 dance categories (Gathering of Nations, 2018). Over 3,500 dancers were involved in the competitions and in excess of $200,000 in prize money was awarded.

Thousands of people pay to watch large contest powwow competitions conducted within massive arenas that typically host athletic events. Aicinena and Ziyanak (2019) demonstrated that there was a high degree of similarity in the promotion and staging of a large intertribal contest powwow and a mid-major intercollegiate basketball game. Herle (1994) described male competitive powwow dancing and female Fancy Shawl competitions as a "type of sport" (p. 70) and equated the competitions to Indian rodeos as displays of athletic talent. However, Herle's contention was supported by neither qualitative nor quantitative data.

Several factors contributed to the genesis of modern contest powwows including the subjugation and sequester of Native Americans, forced assimilation efforts of the United States government, development of a secular Pan-Indian identity, and public displays of Native American culture for profit. Contest powwows are believed to have first been conducted in Oklahoma during the mid-1800s and achieved their current structure and form between the 1930s and 1960s (DesJarlait, 1997; Ellis et al., 2005). By the end of the 1970s, contest powwows were sponsored in all regions of the United States (Arndt, 2005). Beginning in the 1980s, large contest powwows were conducted in arenas to accommodate growing crowds. Contest powwows have continued to increase in number and popularity through the 21st century because of increased interest in Native American culture and because of enhanced levels of corporate sponsorship.

Native American high school athletes have competed publicly in high school sports since the 1920s and have won numerous state championships in a variety of sports (Sage et al., 2019). High school gymnasia are regularly packed with fans for basketball games at Window Rock, Chinle, and Monument Valley high schools on the Navajo reservation. The annual Lakota Invitational involves Native American high school athletes from several South Dakota reservations. The event is one of Rapid City's most impactful economic events, generating over $3.5 million over a 4-day period (Penwell, 2019).

Coaches working in Native American high schools often differ from their athletes culturally and hold values and expectations for behavior reflective of the dominant American individualistic culture (Allison, 1982). Often, non-Native coaches assume that Indigenous athletes share their values and outlook toward competition. However, Native Americans participate in sport on their own terms, often harboring and exhibiting traditional collectivist attitudes and behaviors (Sage et al., 2019). The differences in competitive attitudes, values, goals, and what is deemed acceptable behavior in both Native and non-Native cultures result in conflict for coaches and athletes alike. Many outstanding Indigenous athletes choose not to participate in high school sport because of conflicts caused by differences in traditional cultural values and those of the dominant culture (Simpson, 1987).

Native Americans have embraced American sport and contest powwows share many of the characteristics of sport commonly found within the broader American culture. However, there is no published study in which data has been used to establish whether or not contest powwow dancing is a sport from the competitor's point of view, nor has a published study examined whether or not contest powwow dancing meets any definitional requirements of sport. Whether contest powwow dancing is a sport or not, dancers compete at contest powwows. To date, the competitive attitudes and goals of contest powwow dancers have not been formally assessed. Assessment of the competitive goals and attitudes of competitive powwow dancers may provide insight into the degree to which participants adhere to traditional

values while competing in culturally valued dance or to those found within the dominant American culture.

In our current research, we focus on the Native American contest powwow. The purposes of the study are first, to determine if contest powwow dancing can be classified as a sport and how contest powwows dancing might reflect or differ from competitive sports found within the broader American society. Second, we strive to understand the goals and meanings of competition held by contest powwow dancers. Finally, we seek to discern the importance of the contest powwow to Native American cultural identity.

The results of this research will be of interest to sport sociologists and those interested in sport as a reflection of culture. The findings will also be of interest to scholars interested in determining how Western individualistic culture impacts the competitive experiences of Native Americans who have been characterized historically and contemporarily as collectivist in their values and behaviors. Finally, the results will supply teachers and coaches with a deeper understanding of how differences in values may cause conflict as they seek to effectively work with Native American populations.

Literature Review

We utilize sociological and philosophical sources to define sport. We then examine how dancing for profit, Intertribalism, and American sport served to contribute to the formation of the modern intertribal contest powwow. In an effort to illustrate how Native American athletes can compete seriously in sport while adhering to collectivist values, we describe the "Medicine Game," a traditional version of lacrosse, as it is played contemporarily by the Iroquois. The Iroquois' reasons for participating, outlook toward competition, and competitive behaviors are demonstrated to differ significantly from those of athletes who have adopted the competitive attitudes and behaviors reflected within the broader American individualistic culture.

What is Sport?

Sports are social constructions that incorporate the realm of cultural life referred to as physical culture. Sport sociologists have proposed numerous definitions of sport. Sage, Eitzen, and Beal (2019) observed that there is no universal definition of sport and define sport as consisting of activities involving physical activity and rules. Renowned sport sociologist, Jay Coakley (2017), summarized the definitions of sport ascribed to scholars from throughout North America and Europe: "physical activities that involve challenges or competitive contests" (p. 6).

Philosophers have considered sport as a topic worthy of reflection since the time of the ancient Greeks (Reid, 2011). As is true in the discipline of sport sociology, sport philosophers have tendered numerous definitions of sport (Torres, 2014). According to Devine and Frias (2020), the philosophical definition crafted by Suits (1973) is a classic. Suits (1973) defined sport as being related to games; games consist of a goal (winning a contest), a means of winning (what constitutes winning the contest), rules (procedures one must follow in seeking victory), and acceptance of the rules of competition. Further, Suits (1973) stated that to be considered a sport, an activity/game must involve skill, the skill must be physical in nature, the activity must have a wide following, and the activity must demonstrate stability over time.

For the purposes of the current study, we will use Coakley's definition of sport as we seek to determine if contest powwow dancing can be classified as a sport from a sociological perspective. We will turn to Suits' requirements to determine if contest powwow dancing can rightly be classified as a sport from a philosophic perspective.

Dancing for Profit: Early Stages

Today, Native Americans dancers compete at contest powwows for cash prizes. Before the latter 1800s, the generation of income through public performance of traditional dance forms was uncommon. Between 1883 and 1933, hundreds of Native Americans toured the country and world as they publicly performed culturally significant dances and ceremonies for pay in Wild West shows including "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," the "Miller Brothers' 101 Real Ranch Show," and others (Lottini, 2012; Moses, 1999). The shows included reenactments of famous battles, recreations of Indian villages, dance performances, and traditional powwows. Over one million people attended Wild West Shows in 1885 alone (Moses, 1999). Organizers had little trouble recruiting Native American performers who sought money, travel, and adventure (Albers & Medicine, 2005).

During the same period, various tribes contemporaneously began performing dances and holding powwows for the ticket-purchasing, non-native public. Two examples will serve as illustrations. As early as 1895 the Ho-Chunk of Wisconsin publicly performed War Dances for the paying public. By 1898, ticket-purchasing customers were able to witness members of the Meskwaki tribe perform culturally important dances during their annual Thanksgiving powwow (Warren, 2009). Many Native Americans have become accustomed to sharing and performing culture in public for profit and this is exemplified in the contest powwow dancers' willingness to compete in contest powwows for cash and prizes.

Intertribalism and the Rise of Contest Powwows

Native American tribal groups differ in their languages, religious practices, and in a myriad of other ways. At traditional powwows, tribal and regional culture are celebrated and reinforced (Herle, 1994; Lerch & Bullers, 1996; Scales, 2007). Conversely, contemporary contest powwows can bring together individuals representing tribes from all across North America. In contest powwow settings, cultural values and traditions common to participants and their tribal groups are celebrated and reinforced (Scales, 2007). In the long history of Indigenous North American peoples, the concept of Intertribalism and the existence of the contest powwow are relatively recent phenomena that found their genesis within the reservation system.

The reservation system implemented by the American government brought Native American tribes from various parts of North America to "Indian Territory." Indian Territory was established west of the Mississippi with the passage of the Native American Intercourse Act of 1834 and included lands within the modern states of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Iowa (Everett, 2009). Ellis (2003) noted that plains tribes including the Eastern Dakota, Crow, Plains Shoshone, and Omaha shared common values and ideals. Their kinship facilitated the sharing, adaptation, and adoption of powwow cultures between them (Kracht, 1994). Proximity facilitated the incorporation of traditional dances and ceremonial activities of resident plains tribes into powwow cultures of relocated tribes (Scott, 1911).

Sharing of powwow cultures has assisted in the genesis and spread of Pan-Indianism which is also known as Intertribalism. Accordingly, modern powwows, especially contest powwows, have come to represent the socio-religious sphere of the intertribal, or Pan-Indian, movement (Brant, 1950; Hertzberg, 1971; Hirabayashi et al., 1972; Howard, 1983; Thomas, 1965).

Intertribalism characteristic of contest powwows affords Indigenous peoples from disparate tribal affiliations the opportunity to identify as Native American (supra-tribal community) and as a member of a tribe (tribal community) concurrently (Powers, 1980). The Panhellenic games of the ancient Greeks served a similar unifying social function. Citizens of

independent city-states such as Sparta and Athens did not share identical values and customs. Pan-Hellenic festivals including the Olympic, Isthmian, Pythian, and Nemean served to unite them as Greeks (Kyle, 2015; Van Dalen & Bennett, 1971). Though competitive athletic events were conducted in each of the four crown festivals, they were prominently sacred religious festivals considered integral to religious life (Guttmann, 1992; Kyle, 2015). Each festival featured worship, sacrifices, banquets, ceremonies, arts, poetry, song, and dance. Athletic contests were considered religious acts in and of themselves. The games were said to have been brought to the Greeks by the gods and it was believed that the Gods oversaw the contests. Commonalities shared by Greeks were celebrated and strengthened during the festivals.

Pan-Indian identity was further established through the government run Indian boarding school system as Native American children who were removed from their homes interacted with one another during unsupervised free time, recess, and interscholastic athletic activity (Kachur, 2017). The boarding schools were instituted in an effort to remove the traditional culture from the children and replace it with that of the dominant American culture. Children were prohibited from speaking in their language, wearing traditional clothing or hair styles, or participating religious traditions.

Near the end of the 19th century the belief that sport could instill values needed to make individuals and America great was popularized by J. P. Morgan and President Teddy Roosevelt. Through participation in sports, it was argued, the values of achievement, individualism, and competition associated with success in the industrialized, Christian, capitalist culture could be inculcated (Allison, 1982; Overman, 2011; Stevenson & Nixon, 1972; Zirin, 2005). In the 1930s, athletics became a vital part of Indian boarding school life and assisted in formulating a corporate Indian identity amongst its students (Hyer, 1990; Sullivan, 2005).

Successful performance by Native Americans in collegiate, Olympic, and professional sport also assisted in the spread of Intertribalism. The Carlisle Indian School football team consisted of young men from numerous Native American tribes and is considered to have been one of the best collegiate squads in the country during the 1910 and 1911 seasons. The team's success garnered national recognition. It also fostered Pan-Indian identity and Native pride within team members, the student body, and Native Americans across the country (Buford, 2012; Eschbach & Applbaum, 2000; McDonald, 1972).

Jim Thorpe, who was educated within the Native American boarding school system, is the embodiment of the ideal Native American competitive athlete. Thorpe is enshrined in the Professional Football Hall of Fame, played professional baseball for 6 years, and won gold medals in both the Olympic pentathlon and decathlon during the same Olympiad. He has been considered by many sport historians and writers to be the world's greatest athlete (Wheeler, 1979). The cable television sports channel, ESPN, placed Thorpe 7th on its list of the 20th century's North American top 100 athletes (ESPN, 1999). The athletic accomplishments of Thorpe and numerous other Native American athletes have contributed to a sense of Pan-Indian pride.

Dominant and Native American Cultural Attitudes towards Competition

One of the purposes of the current study is to determine in what ways, if any, the competitive attitudes, goals, and behaviors of contest powwow dancers may align with or differ from those associated with the dominant American culture. Below, we examine the dominant cultural attitudes generally held by Native Americans and those common to the dominant American culture.

It is difficult for many influenced by Western individualism, Christianity, and Western dualistic views of life to understand why, despite historic and continuing assimilation efforts,

Native Americans and others from collectivist societies do not compete with attitudes similar to their own. We often heard exasperated non-Native American coaches on the Navajo reservation complain that their athletes were not physically aggressive, shied away from contact, refused to hurt others, and did not do what it took to be fully committed to achieving competitive success in sport. The shock that the coaches experienced may have been due to ethnocentrism and the mistaken belief that it was reasonable to expect athletes from a different culture to share the same competitive motives and goals.

The conflict caused by Native American collectivist values and the individualistic values of the dominant American culture within athletic settings were formally studied by Maria Allison (1980, 1982). Adherence to collectivist values and behaviors was considered by coaches to be an impediment to competitive success and to full assimilation into mainstream society. By refusing to wholly assimilate, Native American athletes demonstrated commitment to their culture's traditional collectivist values in the face of pressure to abandon them. According to Sewell (2005), the meaning of high school basketball has been transformed by Native Americans domiciled upon the reservation to meet their cultural needs. Participation affords an opportunity for them to express and retain their Native identity. Sport has often been called a microcosm of society, for sport and how it is played springs forth from culture (Coakley, 2017; Kyle, 2015; Sage et al., 2019). It is reasonable to expect peoples from different cultures to compete in sport with different goals, motivations, attitudes, and values. We will use differences between organized competitive lacrosse and the traditional version of the sport known as the "Medicine Game" of the Iroquois to illustrate differences between Native Americans and non-Native Americans concerning their reasons for participating, outlook toward competition, and competitive behaviors. The Iroquois still proudly conduct Medicine Games. Our description of traditional Native American competitive attitudes, values, and behaviors is gleaned from a depiction of lacrosse when played by the Iroquois as a traditional Medicine Game (Price, 2010). The description of Americanized lacrosse is something manufactured from experiences and observations the first author made as a competitive athlete, youth sport coach, high school coach, collegiate coach, collegiate athletic director, and researcher over a 43-year period. It is reflective of the power and performance orientation toward sport crafted by Coakley (2017). The contrast in participation motivations, values, and behaviors observed in the playing of the two forms of lacrosse is palatable and must be appreciated if one is to comprehend how it is possible for Native Americans to seriously compete in sport and competitive powwow dancing while rejecting many of the competitive conventions of sport as it is commonly contested within the broader American culture.

Dominant Cultural Attitudes toward Competition

A lacrosse player adhering to the goals and values commonly associated with American sport competes in a formal league. Pick-up games are informal contests played between friends. Pick-up games are not real lacrosse, and they are discouraged by coaches who believe all games are to be played in the correct manner or not at all. Competitions are scheduled well in advance. Boys, girls, men, and women are segregated and grouped by age and or gender. It is only right that girls and women play, for they should have opportunities equal to males in all things sport.

The game is played with a manufactured hard rubber ball on finely manicured or artificial fields adorned with regulation goals and markings. Players compete with factory-manufactured lacrosse sticks typically consisting of an aluminum or composite material shaft, plastic heads, and nylon webbing. Athletes believe that technology improves athletic equipment and their performance. When the game is played, referees enforce codified rules.

The ultimate goal of playing is to achieve success. Victory is to be gained through the employment of all necessary means. Winning is everything. To the victors go the spoils and

individual worth is proven through competitive success. Standing above the crowd is an important goal of participation.

To the truly committed, it does not matter if cheating or violence is used to elevate one's standing. "Whatever it takes." Injuries are often attributed to cheap shots taken by opponents who purposely injure others as a competitive strategy. An appearance of religiosity may be seen during ubiquitous pre-game prayers but during play, religious mandates for reciprocity are discarded in the name of victory. God is thanked for victory often tainted.

If a lacrosse stick is broken during play, it is discarded, and another is purchased to replace it without a second thought. The world is filled with disposable things made of resources we take and use at our will. The world belongs to humankind and we are in control of it. After the game, a trip to McDonald's is taken to celebrate the day's glory or to anguish over a competitive failure.

Individualism is characteristic of cultural groups within which individuals focus upon the self rather than others (Beckstein, 2014). Members of individualistic cultures are motivated by their personal needs and desires (Triandis, 2018). American, European, and other Western cultures tend to highly value individualism (Sampson, 2000). Individualism has long been associated with modernity, is highly compatible with economic development, and has been associated with the Westernization of Indigenous peoples (Kagitçibasi, 1997). Achievement, recognition, acquisition of possessions, and acquisition of wealth are highly valued goals within individualistic cultures. Mainstream American culture encourages individualism and individualism is reflected ubiquitously within competitive American sport.

Native American Attitudes toward Competition

The traditional form of lacrosse is central to the Iroquois culture and tribal members are reluctant to discuss the traditional form of the sport with outsiders (Price, 2010). It is known as the "Medicine Game." Medicine Games can be organized any time during the year and are called whenever a tribal member is in need of comfort or healing. Medicine Games are often held in conjunction with funerals and lacrosse sticks are frequently buried with the dead, for it is believed that those who pass will play on through eternity. The game itself is a gift from the Creator. All players are recipients of the good medicine supplied by the Creator through competition. Playing is viewed as a means to thank Him for blessings provided.

Games are held in the traditional manner, sometimes until three goals are scored and at other times, to five goals. Unmarked open fields sport two posts wedged into the ground that serve as goals. An unlimited number of males from age 70 down to age 7 take the field at the same time. Handmade deerskin balls used to play the game are given to individuals who are suffering, for they are considered good medicine.

Only traditional handmade wooden sticks can be used in Medicine Games. The wooden lacrosse stick is believed to be a gift from Mother Earth. A good stick may take more than one year to craft. Its webbing is made of cow gut. Through the stick, the spirit of the sacrificial tree becomes one with the player and the spirit requires that the Medicine Game be played in a spiritual manner: with humility and with calm. When a stick breaks, its caretaker may shed tears of grief.

Dirty play is considered disrespectful. To injure another intentionally is contrary to tradition and reason. As a consequence of tradition, women are not allowed to play the Medicine Game, and in fact, they are not allowed to touch a stick. The typical Iroquois sees Medicine Games and formal lacrosse competitions as a means to commune with the Creator, not prove himself number one. The people are one with the Creator as they play and, following the game, as they feast communally.

Collectivism is a cultural arrangement in which members of a group are interdependent and other-focused (Beckstein, 2014; Triandis, 2018). Collectivists are motivated to adhere to social norms. They value connectedness and harmonious relationships. The group is held paramount in collectivist societies and its success holds precedence over personal accomplishment. The culture of Native American groups has been and continues to be described as collectivistic in nature (Hossain et al., 2011; Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Native Americans have maintained collectivist values despite hundreds of years of the dominant American culture's assimilation efforts (Heine, 2008). Collectivist values are reflected in how the Medicine Game is played.

Medicine Game

The documentary film, *The Medicine Game: Three Brothers, One Goal* (Korver, 2013), tells the story of a contemporary professional lacrosse player and his brothers. Miles Thompson, a member of the Onondaga Nation, is a two-time winner of the Tewaaraton Award which is bestowed upon the NCAA's best lacrosse player. He was drafted into the National Lacrosse League and played in the Major League Lacrosse league.

Thompson was taught by his father never to play for the name on the front or back of a jersey, but instead, for the Creator. He explains, "It should never be about yourself . . . It should be about affecting someone else . . . It's about being thankful for everything I have been given already." His people believe the Creator provides everyone with a gift, and he believes his gift is the ability to play lacrosse.

Thompson deems that in lacrosse and in life, the goal should always be the same: being a good person with a positive mind. During competition, he keeps in mind that the game is sacred, "So I would say the Creator's happy when I'm playing the game." Playing is a joy and players should have fun. Thompson's outlook toward playing lacrosse as a collegiate and professional player is reflective of how the Medicine Game is played amongst the Iroquois. Thompson also serves as an example of how modern Native American athletes can compete successfully at the highest level of sport while adhering to traditional values and beliefs.

The Authors' Interest in this Project

The first author, Aicinena, worked with Native American students from 1979–1986 at Crownpoint High School in New Mexico as a biology, earth science, and physical education teacher. Aicinena also coached the sports of football, track and field, basketball, and volleyball during his tenure. Aicinena is married to a member of the Navajo Nation who worked with him at Crownpoint. Crownpoint is located on Navajo owned lands and Aicinena developed an interest in Native cultures while there. It was clear to Aicinena that although his athletes practiced and competed hard, there was still a palatable difference between what guided their behaviors and competitive attitudes and those which he held as a competitive high school and collegiate athlete. Aicinena attributed the differences to a variance in cultural values. Rather than recoil against the differences, Aicinena accepted them. His experiences with Native American athletes served as the present study's genesis.

The second author, Ziyanak, has published several papers in the areas of culture and acculturation. As Ziyanak was raised outside the United States, the prospect of the current study was of great interest to him and the project falls within his primary research interests. Because interdisciplinary research is of interest to both authors, we agreed to work together. Since Ziyanak did not have personal experience with Native American groups, he was able to provide an additional level of objectivity for reexamining methodological and analytical research procedures. Ziyanak also served to ensure that ethical standards of research were adhered to.

The literature enables us to conclude that Native American athletes can seriously compete in sport. Yet, the literature also demonstrates that Native Americans do not always compete in ways that align with those expected within the broader American culture. The goals, experiences, and perceptions of contest powwow dancers have yet to be investigated by researchers. The question of whether contest powwow dancers compete in a way that aligns with traditional or dominant American culture has yet to be determined. Finally, it has yet to be determined through any formal data collection process if contest powwow dancers consider their events as sport. These voids in the literature led to the development of our research questions.

Research Questions

In this paper, we have addressed the following questions:

1. What are the goals, experiences, and perceptions of contemporary competitive powwow dancers?
2. Do competitive powwow dancers embrace the dominant culture's individualistic values when competing or do they adhere to traditional Native American collectivist values?
3. Do contest powwow dancers consider contest powwow dancing a competitive sport?

Methodology

For this project, we sought to systematically determine how competition in contest powwows might reflect and differ from that common to established American sports in the lived experiences of our participants. We employed qualitative methodology techniques including interviewing, coding, and developing themes as practical tools to conduct and analyze semi-structured qualitative data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Use of qualitative methodology enabled the researchers to develop a deep understanding of the lived experience of competitive powwow dancers (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Smith (2008) raises numerous concerns about non-Indigenous peoples (colonizers or Imperialists) conducting research with Indigenous peoples. As neither of this paper's authors are Indigenous, some may question our motives and perhaps the ethics of our research. Smith provides guidelines for non-Indigenous researchers to follow when conducting research with Indigenous peoples including respect the people, conduct your research face to face, look at your participants, listen and speak with your participants, be cautious, do not trample over the mana (life force/spiritual energy) of people, do not flaunt your knowledge, and share and host participants while extending generosity. We intentionally endeavored to adhere to Smith's guidelines throughout the process of completing our study.

Smith (2008) declares that "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes" (p. 28). However, to date, no research has been conducted upon Native American contest powwow dancers and no published study has examined the relationship of the contest powwow to sport. It is our sincere hope that Native American scholars expand upon our humble research efforts in the future for we believe the contest powwow to be important in the lives of many Native Americans. We state here that we do not harbor an "Imperial" agenda, nor a decolonizing agenda.

Participants

Fourteen Native American competition powwow dancers were interviewed in order to understand and describe the goals, attitudes, and behaviors they held while competing in the world's most prestigious contest powwow. We employed a purposeful sampling technique to select our participants in order to maximize the depth and richness of data (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano, 2011). We utilized three criteria to identify potential participants to ensure that they were, indeed, contest powwow dancers at the time of the interviews. Individuals were only approached and asked to participate in the study if they appeared to be at least 18 years old, wore regalia, and wore an official Gathering of Nations powwow competitor's number. Participants were informed verbally and in writing as to the purpose of the study and the participation requirements. By signing the informed consent form, participants verified that they were at least 18 years of age.

Thirty-two competitive dancers were approached by Aicinena and asked to participate in the study. Those approached wore regalia, wore a Gathering of Nations competitors' number, and appeared to be at least 18 years of age. Seven of 10 females approached agreed to participate. Seven of 15 males approached agreed to be interviewed. Seven potential participants approached did not meet the minimum age requirement for participation.

The participants traveled to the powwow from various regions of the United States (Northwest, Northern Plains, Southern Plains, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast, and Pacific Islands), and Canada and represented 18 Indigenous tribal groups including Cheyenne, Chippewa, Cochiti Tewa, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Cree, Crow, Dakota Sioux, Hidatsa, Lakota Sioux, Mandau, Navajo, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Pueblo, Shoshone, Sioux, Tututni, and Zuni. Some participants stated affiliation with more than one tribal group. The sample of participants represented an array of tribes. Participants held differing degrees of contest powwow dancing experience. Six participants had 0-10 years of competitive experience, 4 had 11-30 years of competitive experience, and 4 had 20 plus years of competitive experience. Participants also reflected a wide range of ages. Six participants were aged 20-29, five participants were between 30 and 49 years of age, and three ranged in age from 50 to 81. There were equal numbers of male (7) and female (7) participants.

Data Collection

We obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from The University of Texas Permian Basin for the project. In addition, to ensure adherence to IRB principles and ethical requirements, written consent to conduct interviews was also obtained from the Gathering of Nations administration before data collection commenced.

Data were collected at the Gathering of Nations which has often been referred to as the "Super Bowl of all Indian Powwows" (Dell'Angela, 2003, p. 2). The two-day competitive cultural event is held each April in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It involves more than 3,500 competitive dancers. Over $200,000 in prize money is awarded, and it is estimated that 150,000 people attend the powwow each year (Nathanson, 2018). Participants in the 2018 Gathering of Nations powwow represented 565 tribes recognized by the United States government and 220 Canadian First-Nations groups (Larse, 2018). We chose the Gathering of Nations Powwow as the site for data collection because it is the premiere contest powwow in the world.

Interviews were conducted on the New Mexico state fairgrounds and within Tingley Coliseum which served as the site of the powwow. The coliseum is located within the state fairgrounds. Interviews were conducted on April 27th and April 28th, 2018. Each day, Aicinena arrived at the fairgrounds by 10:30 am and departed at 10:30 pm. A special media pass was

granted to him by the Gathering of Nations organizers which afforded him access to all areas of the arena and powwow grounds.

Data collection began with the conduction of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed us to ask prepared questions and to gather unexpected data through follow-up questions (O'Leary, 2017). We were interested in identifying participants' personal experiences within the traditional powwow, contest powwow, and established American competitive sport (e.g., basketball, ice hockey, volleyball). Secondly, we were interested in determining participants' competitive goals and the value they placed upon competition and winning to determine if they aligned with traditional collectivist cultural orientations, or those of the dominant individualistic culture.

The researchers worked together to formulate semi-structured interview questions used in the interviews. Questions were based upon our review of literature. In broad terms, we were interested in determining, in the experience of contest powwow dancers, if contest powwow dancing is a sport, how contest powwow dancing and competing in established American sport may be similar or different, what is required to be a successful competitive powwow dancer, and how it might be similar or different from what is required to be a successful athlete, and how competitive powwow dancing serves to reinforce or supplant traditional Native American collectivist values.

Several steps were taken to help participants feel comfortable before interviews commenced. Aicinena wore a shirt displaying the university's logo and offered them a university business card. He shared with each participant that he had been a teacher and coach at Crownpoint High School for 7 years and that he worked with Navajo students. It was disclosed that his wife was Navajo. He also engaged in informal and unrecorded talk with participants before they reviewed the informed consent form and signed it. After informed consent was given, he began the semi-structured interview. The formal interviews were electronically recorded with an iPhone 6 Plus.

In order to gather an in-depth understanding of the powwow dancers' involvements and to evaluate transformation of the powwow as a sport activity, we conveyed overarching questions such as, "What does powwow mean to you? What differences have you observed in the traditional and contest forms of the powwow? What are your primary goals for competing? How do you feel when you win and lose a contest powwow event? In what ways do you believe contest powwow competition mirrors athletic competition? In what ways do you believe contest powwow competition mirrors sport?"

Interviews ranged in length from 15 to 98 minutes. The shortest interview involved a participant who was participating in her first competition powwow. She was not a high school athlete, did not care for competition, and belonged to a Pueblo tribe that seldom performs dances off the reservation. She competed in dance during the powwow as a component of the Miss Indian World contest, which is in and of itself a competitive event. Though her experience in competitive dancing and her responses were brief, we believe that her voice needed to be heard. The longest interview involved a participant who was 81 years of age. He served as Chief of his tribe and participated extensively in competitive sport both as a high school student and as an adult. He wanted to tell stories not directly related to our study, but respectfully, we allowed him to share them with us. Thirteen interviews were conducted outdoors in a large concession area adjacent to the coliseum in which the dance competitions took place. One interview was conducted in an outer hallway of the coliseum while seated with the participant. Aicinena attempted to conduct as many interviews as possible over the two days of the powwow. Each participant was interviewed once. By the eleventh interview, the receipt of similar responses from participants indicated that sufficient information was gathered in order for other researchers to replicate the study. However, we sought additional participants in order to have a reasonable representation of sexes, ages, and levels of contest powwow dancing

experience. For example, the last three interviews were conducted with male participants, and their participation yielded equal representation of male and female voices in the study.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed completely within 2 weeks following data collection. Transcripts were read a minimum of three times in their entirety before data analysis commenced. Data analysis began with open coding in an effort to determine whether or not the participants considered competitive powwow dancing as a sport (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2015). In this stage, the researchers concentrated upon transcribed documentation from interviews (Elliott, 2018; Soyer & Ziyanak, 2018). Any participants' comments that seemed to be associated with the research questions were provided a code. We categorized each line with codes articulating concepts related to the lived experience of competitive powwow dancers. This process yielded 50 codes. For example, initial codes included contest powwow dancing is a way of respect to the elderly, the purpose of contest powwow dancing is winning, contest powwow dancing provides healing, contest powwow dancing provides enjoyment, and the main reason to dance in contest powwows is to visit family and friends.

In the second stage of data analysis, axial coding was employed to identify key concepts to address our research questions. We utilized associated concepts and categories to expose codes and subcategories within our participants' messages to identify similarities and differences between contest powwow dancing and commonly sponsored American sport. In particular, we sought to identify codes which yielded data regarding direct comparison between competitive powwow dancing and sport. Some of the codes overlapped, and after examination, we collapsed them into 14 axial codes including, for example, the primary purpose of contest powwow dancing, contest powwow dancing is a sport, the importance of winning in contest powwow dancing, and dancing provides healing.

During theme development, we reviewed our evidence for each theme. Reorganization of the themes was based upon linked codes observed to exist within and between codes. Each code associated with a theme was reviewed to ensure that it had a clear relationship to the theme within which it was embedded. In this phase, we identified crucial themes such as preferred type of powwow, primary goals for dancing in contest powwows, importance of winning, powwow dancing as a sport, direct comparison between competitive powwow dancing and athletics, and the spirit of sportsmanship. We determined it was logical to collapse the themes, "Do the participants view competitive powwow dancing as a sport?" and "Powwow dancing is a sport" into one theme, "Contest powwow dancing is a sport."

Trustworthiness

We applied four criteria for trustworthy in this qualitative research including credibility, transformability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative studies undertaken with these qualities in mind are considered trustworthy (Shenton, 2004). Below, we share how the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of our study were addressed with special emphasis placed upon the guidelines provided by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Shenton (2004).

In terms of credibility, honesty was foremost in the construction of and reporting of our findings. We focused upon determining the similarities and differences between the contest powwow and American sport and the experiences and observations of our participants. We strove to keep any preconceived notions and biases at bay during all phases of the project. We utilized triangulation by reviewing data in conjunction with available literature on contest powwows, traditional powwows, the responses of participants' who represented 18 tribal

groups, as well as the experiences and observations of the authors in the context of sport and Native American cultures. All dancers who were asked to participate in the study were provided an opportunity to opt out at any time. This increased the likelihood that responses were honest. Reflective commentary was engaged in after each interview. Member checks were conducted during interviews when participants were asked to repeat and or to clarify portions of their responses which assisted in clarity in the process of coding and analysis. Finally, the findings reported in this study are supported by the thickness of the data collected which led to the identification of our final themes and sub-themes.

We took several steps to enhance our project's transferability. The boundaries of our study in terms of participant characteristics, setting, methods of data collection, and analysis were specified. Because our study was undertaken at a contest powwow and because it involved a wide range of participants representing several Native American tribal groups, we would expect participants in other contest powwow environments to provide similar responses and insights into the social world of contest powwow dancing.

In terms of dependability, we conducted data analysis over a period of 7 months. The length of time taken to complete data analysis was a means to enhance the constancy and dependability of our coding and analysis by avoiding work on the project during periods of boredom and exhaustion. The methodology employed in our study did not change over time, further adding to the dependability of our findings. In terms of confirmability, we sought objectivity in our data analysis and the writing of our findings. The use of triangulation noted above served to negate any potential investigator bias effects. Our findings accurately represent contest powwow dancers' responses.

Findings

In this study, we sought to determine the goals, experiences, and perceptions of contemporary competitive powwow dancers. We assayed whether the participants' competitive goals reflected the dominant culture's values toward sport and success. Finally, we determined whether or not the participants considered competitive powwow dancing to be a sport. Our data analysis led to the findings of 6 themes and 4 subthemes. The discussion presented below addresses each of the following:

1. The role of competition and dancers' preferred type of powwow
2. Primary goals for dancing in contest powwows
3. How important is winning?
4. How do participants feel when they win and lose?
5. Powwow dancing is a sport
6. Direct comparisons between competitive dancing and sport
   6.1 Competition and winning
   6.2 Pre-Competition emotions
   6.3 Physical preparation for competition
   6.4 Sportsmanship

The Role of Competition and Dancers' Preferred Type of Powwow

Traditional powwows and large intertribal contest powwows differ in size (small vs. large), primary purpose (unity vs. competition), and degree of organization (low vs. high). Traditional powwows are described as being devoid of competition. As Native American cultural groups have been described as collectivist historically and contemporarily, a lack of emphasis upon competition in traditional powwows serves to reaffirm traditional cultural

values. However, competition is ubiquitous within individualistic American society. Our findings demonstrate that competition impacts the participants' contest powwow participation experience as well as their preference for either traditional or contest forms of the powwow.

We asked the participants if they prefer contest powwows or traditional powwows. Our findings show the majority of our participants enjoy each type of powwow equally or state a preference for contest powwows. Participants also make it clear that they enjoy competition. Bill explains,

> I am competitive. The powwow used to be a ceremony. Now we compete. Things are more mainstream, like general culture. . . Be kind to all vs. be professional. [Contest] powwows are exactly like sports. It's more like I'm playing for a championship. At [traditional] powwows, it is mainly about meeting family and stuff.

Participants shared that the opportunity to win money and prizes is a reason for preferring contest powwows. Abe notes, "Traditional powwows have fewer people and there is no money available." Frank prefers competition powwows because he has the opportunity to compete for money, and at contest powwows, dancers are required to "dance hard."

In contest powwow settings, dancers must dance hard, with intensity, if they are to find competitive success. Success is a lusory goal in competitive activities, as it is in the contest powwow. From the participants' point of view, the traditional powwow is similar to a recreational, informal, volleyball game conducted between individuals who play to socialize and have a good time. This differs from a volleyball competition, for example, in which participants are competing for championships or monetary rewards. The level of seriousness is lessened in the recreational setting, and the environment would be considered more relaxed.

During data collection, we observed that dancers were frequently encouraged by the announcers to "Dance hard!" The call to dance hard was indelibly embossed within our minds as observers. A common exhortation in modern sport is to "play hard or go home." The researchers perceive the expression, "Dance hard!" to have the same meaning. If contest powwow dancers are not putting forth their best effort, they should not bother to compete at all.

We asked participants expressing a preference for traditional powwows why they held such a preference. Amy believes that by dancing in traditional powwows she is supporting and helping others. Freda prefers traditional powwows because, "They are closer to my home and I am representing my tribe." Disdain for contest powwows is not expressed, but rather an affinity for tribal identity, solidarity, and a collectivist's concern for others. Participants who prefer the contest powwow do so because they are competitive and because they enjoy being within the competitive environment.

This study's participants note people behave differently at traditional and contest powwows. Abe believes the large number of participants at contest powwows increases the level of stress and aggravation, and that results in increased levels conflict. Freda and Bill suggest that the large number of contestants and tight scheduling simply do not afford the same opportunities for people to socialize and make friendships; thus, making conflicts more likely. Freda attributes the conflict she observes at contest powwows to an overemphasis on winning, "It is all about winning for some people." Chuck provides additional insight to explain why conflicts increase at contest powwows, "A lot of people come here, and they all can't win."

The participants expressed that conflict and problems between competitors are greater at contest powwows. Although they viewed the conflicts occurring at contest powwows as being undesirable, most of our participants still prefer the contest powwow over the traditional

powwow. The contest powwow offers dancers large crowds, excitement, and the opportunity to test oneself in competition that the traditional powwow does not.

Primary Goals for Dancing in Contest Powwows

We asked the participants what the primary goal of their competitive powwow dancing is and why it is important. Winning is identified as the primary goal of competing by a small number of participants. Illustratively, Amy and Geneva declare emphatically that they are dancing, "To win first place!"

Additional participants share that enjoyment, or having a good time are primary motivators for competition. Others assert the primary goal of dancing is to carry on the traditions of their ancestors. Betty explains, "Contest powwows are modern, but they keep me connected to our traditions."

Visiting family and friends is the primary consideration for dancing in contest powwows for several of the participants. Chuck notes that he participates, "Mostly to visit and see relatives. You only compete in two to four events at each powwow." Participants also compete to stay healthy, to dance for those who cannot dance, to provide meaning and significance to life, and to receive healing. The powwow announcer often reminds the dancers and spectators that healing takes place within the powwow circle.

Showing off and receiving recognition from others is important for some participants. Gill competes to, "impress my idols, older chicken dancers, and hear from them that I did well." Dave dances in competitions "to be recognized by other tribes; to let others know about my tribe and that we are still here." Freda dances to show off her style.

A multitude of reasons are used by athletes to describe why they participate in popular forms of American sport. They include winning, enjoyment, social opportunities, belonging to a group, because the family is involved in sport, proving competence, and gaining attention (Coakley, 2017). In this study, contest powwow dancers provide similar reasons for their participation. However, it is notable that only three of the study's participants identified winning as their primary participation goal.

How Important Is Winning?

Success in athletic competition is broadly measured in terms of victories and losses. Twelve of the 14 participants state they have won at least one contest powwow event. We asked each participant how important it is for them to win dance competitions. None of the participants state that it is highly important for them to win.

When we asked participants why winning was not ultimately important, a variety of responses were given. Frank notes that there could be over a hundred competitors in one dance competition, yet only one can win, and few are able to place high enough to win prize money. Gill notes being new to a competitive age group places him at a disadvantage and focusing upon winning is an unreasonable thing to do. It is better for him to focus upon improving. Geneva strives for excellence in her performances. She views winning as a confirmation of her ability.

Historically, the powwow has been viewed as a place where one dances for healing, for the ill, for the dead, and for those to come. "Because I am dancing for others," is expressed by several participants as a reason for discounting the significance of winning. Winning is not of paramount importance to Dave, Chuck, Eric, Betty, or Eva because by dancing they are giving thanks to their ancestors, family, and nation. Even within the throngs of competition, participants dance for others.

Betty makes it clear that when competing, she is representing her family and tribe. To her, that is what is ultimately important. Eva explains:

> We dance for rain, and for moisture, and for the people, and for positive things. We dance for those in need of good spirits. It feels good to take the negativity out of people. It feels good to make others feel good.

Participants also express that various social aspects of the contest powwow are more important than winning. Enjoyment, family, social interaction, creating a pleasant competitive environment, and dancing for others takes precedence over winning. As such, the group is more closely aligned with collectivist values than those of the dominant individualistic culture in which winning is held in highest regard.

How Do Participants Feel When They Win and Lose?

The researchers asked the 12 participants who claimed to have won a contest powwow event how they felt after being named champion. Betty explains she felt "alright . . . but it was always stressed to me that the money was there, but that's not why you dance." Extrinsic rewards are not as important as intrinsic rewards to Betty.

Bill seems acutely aware of the temporal nature of victory: "You feel good for a few minutes, then it's on to the next one." His understanding serves to keep the significance of winning and losing in perspective. To Bill, it is reasonable to strive for competitive success, for a championship is an achievement that not all can obtain. Perhaps more importantly, he sagely conveys that winning has no eternal significance.

Participants indicate that personal competitive success reflects well upon their tribal groups. Illustratively, Freda is pleased when she is victorious because "I feel like they picked all of us, all of my tribe, when I win." In like manner, Frank explains, "winning makes it fun because you're representing your family, tribe and culture." Carla experiences a sincere state of pride after victory: "I feel a sense of pride because it encourages others to be good too."

Following a winning performance, Eric feels as though he has been "traveling with the spirits." Frank is euphoric after winning a contest: "It's the same as winning in hockey when you play hard ass!" As Geneva shares with us her litany of successes, she speaks quite pragmatically about winning. She is both grateful and thankful when she wins: "I can pay the bills and feed the kids!" The kids she refers to are her children and grandchildren. The goal of sharing with others is a traditional Native American and collectivist imperative. Geneva once gave a car that she won at a California powwow to a family member who needed one more than she did.

The participants do not hold competitive success in highest regard. Winning is something to be strived for and appreciated when achieved. Participants consider the trappings of victory as blessings they do not seem to believe they deserve. When victory escapes them, the participants find solace within the experience of participation and the social benefits they derive from joining together with others at the contest powwow.

Not one of the participants indicates that failing to win a competition is vexing. As noted above, Amy states winning is not important, so there is no disappointment when victory escapes her. She is sincerely thankful for the opportunity to dance. Participants note not everyone can win, so feeling badly in a loss is unreasonable. Winning in order to prove superiority is considered a primary objective of competition by three of the participants. Even for them, losses are discounted as winning is understood to be ephemeral.

The views of participants concerning winning and losing are contrary to slogans commonly bantered about in mainstream American society a such as, "Pain is temporary.

Winning is forever," "Second place is First Loser," "When you lose, you die a little," and "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." The ethos of competition present within the contest powwow functions in reaffirming and enhancing the dancers' collectivist Native American identity.

The participants of this study do not adhere to the performance ethic in which winning is everything. Collectively, they believe winning is a goal to be strived for; however, other reasons for participation are more important. Specifically, they value more highly participation in the production and transmission of culture and in the establishment and reinforcement of relationships.

Our findings show that for our participants, winning dance contests is simply an outcome of seeking excellence in performance, not efforts to prove superiority. When participants did win, often it was acknowledged that the honor reflected positively upon their family and their tribe. An emphasis upon the group and others is characteristic of collectivism. In turn, Native American identity and traditions are reinforced through participation in contest powwows.

Contest Powwow Dancing Is a Sport

We sought to determine if the participants viewed contest powwow dancing to be a sport. The majority of participants competed as high school athletes in the sports of volleyball, ice hockey, basketball, softball, soccer, baseball, and track and field. While attending high school, Chuck did not compete in high school athletics because he traveled too often to powwows. He explains that he viewed the contest powwow as an opportunity to compete in a sport. On the other hand, Eva declares she was never interested in sports because she detested competition. Two of the female participants did not have the option of competing in interscholastic sport because sports were not offered for girls when they were in school.

Given that the great majority of participants were athletes, they are able to share how traditional sports are similar to and different from competitive powwow dancing. Even the four participants who were not high school athletes are inundated with mediated sporting events, sports highlights, and sports terms used frequently within the broader society. They readily make reasonable comparisons as a result.

Our findings reveal that the overwhelming majority of participants believe contest powwow dancing is a sport. In describing the similarity between mainstream sports and competitive powwow dancing, they utilize terms commonly used by coaches including "mindset," "focus," "winners and losers," "competitors," "skill," "dedication," "precision," "poise," "tribe vs. tribe," "perfect," "do my best," "compete," "sportsmanship," and "competitive spirit." Below, the participants identify similarities and differences that exist between the contest powwow and mainstream athletic environments.

Comparisons between Competitive Dancing and Sport

Participants provided direct comparisons between sport and competitive powwow dancing. They specify that in sport and contest powwow dancing winning and competition are important, that they experience pre-competitive emotions, that they mentally and physically prepare for competition, and that sportsmanship is important.

Competition and Winning

Participants expressed that competing and striving to win are common to sport and contest powwow dancing. For Bill, "The size of the competitive powwow events brings out the

competitive spirit. You have to dance with the same mindset you have when you play hockey." Dee recalls, "I played softball and was a cheerleader. It is a lot the same. I learned to always do my best, and to me, that is winning." Gill explains that to be successful, "You have to be focused. There are winners and losers."

Pre-competition Emotions

Before dance competitions, participants experience a variety of emotions similar to those experienced when preparing for athletic contests. For Gill, the feeling is, "no different than when I am getting ready to play a game." Dave recalls, "I feel excitement, just like before I played basketball. When I'm putting on my regalia, it's like putting on my uniform to get ready." As Frank puts on his regalia and prepares to compete, it makes him "feel alive and good."

Carly professes mental and physical pre-contest preparation are identical in sport and competitive powwow dancing: "We have prayer and meditation to focus." Participants share that they experience adrenaline rushes, nervousness, and stage fright just as they did before basketball, softball, hockey, and volleyball games.

Physical Preparation for Competition

In competitive sports, athletes are expected to train for competitions. Half of this study's participants state they practice dancing as a means of preparing for competitions. Half state they do not practice because they dance so much in competition, they keep their skill set up to a desirable level. Though Bill does not physically practice on a regular basis, he explains, almost apologetically, that he engages in mental practice several times a day.

Twelve participants indicate they engage in fitness training, which involves walking, running, and/or strength training to prepare for dance competitions. Those who do not, explain dancing often at powwows keeps them fit enough to compete. Abe explains why conditioning is necessary. You have to be in condition before competitions, "especially for the fancy dance." Sometimes, competitors must dance four songs in a row or more and doing so can be physically exhausting. Those who do not engage in physical conditioning explain that dancing often at powwows keeps them fit enough to compete.

Most of the participants engage in physical conditioning on a regular basis as a means of preparing for competition. Half of the participants practice dancing skills regularly. Within the dominant American culture, competitive athletes are also expected to train physically and to practice before competitions.

Sportsmanship

During the current study, the researchers observed competitors wishing one another good luck before competition, just as athletes do before athletic events. After dances concluded and judges had completed their work, competitors walked toward each other in lines and shared handshakes, hugs, and fist-bumps as do athletes following basketball, baseball, and soccer games. They did so in the spirit of sportsmanship. During powwow competitions, sportsmanship is considered important. Carla notes, "We compete with a spirit of sportsmanship."

Discussion

In our research**,** participants make direct comparisons between sport and contest powwow dancing, and they use terms commonly associated with sports competition as they do. They directly link dancing to competing in sport and state they experience the same emotions while dancing as they did before athletic contests. They practice and train physically for competitions. They take competition seriously and compete with a spirit of sportsmanship. The majority of our sample of contest powwow dancers considers contest powwow dancing to be a competitive sport, yet they do not hold winning to be the most important reason for competing. Instead, by dancing in competitions they remain connected to their traditions, help to carry on traditions, bring healing to themselves and others, receive validation from elders, demonstrate respect for elders, and buttress relationships with family and friends.

Competitive powwow dancing is a competitive contest, comprised of physical activity in which only one individual is selected as the competition's winner. As such, competitive powwow dancing can be classified as a sport per the sociological definition provided by Coakley (2017). Contest powwow events provide competitors with a goal (winning). The participants in the current study express they hold goals of winning and or performing well. There is a stated means to winning a contest powwow dancing event. Victors are judged to be the best dancer in consideration of established characteristics of the dance, as well as the quality and appropriateness of their regalia. Dancers are required to adhere to rules during competition, and point deductions are made for rule violations (Pow-Wow.org, 2019a). Contestants must accept the rules of competition as they compete. Skill is required for dancers to win competitions, and contest powwow dancing is a physical skill (Pow-Wow.org, 2019b). Contest powwow dancing exhibits stability as dance styles included in competitions have existed for hundreds of years in most cases and since the 20th century in others. Finally, contest powwow dancing has a wide following as evidenced by attendance and online viewing of events such as the Gathering of Nations. Over 150,000 individuals attend the Gathering of Nations Powwow each year and over one million people throughout the world view the event on the internet as it happens. Given the totality of this evidence, we conclude that contest powwow dancing meets the philosophical definition of sport provided by Suits (1973). The evidence we glean from our interviews in combination with the fact that contest powwow dancing meets all of the definitional requirements of sport identified by Suits (1973) and Coakley (2017) leads us to conclude that contest powwow dancing is a competitive sport.

We noted several factors within the context of the powwow that served to illustrate the importance of sport and competition among Native Americans at the Gathering of Nations Powwow. Powwow announcers, who are Native American, serve several important functions. They are participants in the powwow, actors who manage and interpret what transpires during the event. On numerous occasions, the powwow announcer lets the crowd know that dancers and the children of honored individuals are athletes. For example, the men's junior head dancer is introduced as a, "Dancer and a baller." The head women's Junior Head Dancer was introduced as, "a scholar and an athlete." The second announcer's son, the audience was told, "was a college athlete." As we toured the food court and the powwow grounds, athletic logos were ubiquitously present, indicating that Native Americans have embraced American sport and value competition.

With a focus upon individualistic goals and behaviors, there often comes an increase in anti-social behavior as individuals strive to reach the upper echelons of competitive success. Therefore, antisocial behavior should be expected to increase at contest powwows as cash prizes grow larger, as the number of contest powwows proliferates, and as more dancers attempt to make a living on the powwow highway. Our participants report that they observe higher levels of conflict at contest powwows than they do at traditional powwows. Based upon

our findings, we argue that conflict is more frequently observed at contest powwows than it is at traditional powwows because of the great chasm which exists between traditional Native American collectivist values and those of the dominant individualistic American culture. Members of individualistic cultures view competitions as zero-sum events. The only competitor who can benefit is the winner, and it is functional to serve the self at the expense of others. From a collectivist perspective, as individuals compete in an effort to achieve their potential, they can acknowledge that all involved in the competition are important, that individual success is achieved through the actions of the many, and that success is a testament to the importance of them all. Such an orientation is conducive to the creation of a state of personal and collective peace. Perhaps those responsible for creating conflict in contest powwow settings as described by this study's participants have, as individuals, adopted individualistic attitudes toward competition and winning.

The participants involved in the current investigation competed on their own terms in a way that aligned with their traditions and values. The powwow circle has always been considered a place for healing in times of sickness, in times of trouble, and in times of conflict. The powwow announcer reminds the crowd, "There's a lot of healing that goes on out there in the circle, in spite of the competition."

Conclusion

Despite the efforts of the dominant culture to force Native Americans to assimilate over a period of hundreds of years, this study's participants demonstrated commitment to traditional collectivist values as they sought competitive victory. The contest powwow affords Native Americans an opportunity to compete in an Intertribal event that serves to maintain important aspects of their traditional culture. Although the number of problems and conflicts caused by professionalization of the contest powwow is likely to increase, many participants will seek to overcome them through a commitment to their traditional collectivist values.

Individuals who choose to teach and coach in Native American communities may be helped by the findings of this study. If they assume their athletes will hold the same motivations, goals, and attitudes toward sport as they do, they might be wrong. An enhanced understanding of collectivist culture and how one can seriously compete with a different set of goals, attitudes, and values than those common within the broader American culture may lead to enhanced competitive success and fewer conflicts in the athletic setting.

This study has a number of limitations associated with the data collection process. First, we focused only Gathering of Nations powwow in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2018. Our findings were limited to only one contest powwow. Secondly, we collected our participants in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It is possible that competitors from areas not represented at the powwow or in our pool of participants may have expressed different views. Thirdly, we did not examine the traditional form of the powwow. Fourth, because we are not from a Native American background, we must acknowledge a bias unknown to us may have impacted our research. Finally, over 3,500 dancers participated in the powwow, and they represented over five hundred tribal groups. Fourteen participants cannot speak for all Native Americans.

In particular, this study increases the understanding of the contest powwow, Native American identity, and Native American orientations toward competition. This study suggests further research is needed to more completely understand the importance and function of the contest powwow in modern Native American culture.

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