

SWEATING IN THE JOINT: PERSONAL AND CULTURAL RENEWAL AND
HEALING THROUGH SWEAT LODGE PRACTICE
BY NATIVE AMERICANS IN PRISON

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples are over-represented in both American and Canadian prisons, especially when compared to the size of their population in general. A number of scholars argue that such high crime rates are not the result of individual behavior alone but stem from a social and historical context of colonization and oppressive race/ethnic relations (Ross 1998, Waldram 1997, Grobsmith 1994). In addition, many assimilationist procedures continue when Natives enter the criminal justice system. Native offenders are not identified in terms of their cultural heritage but are lumped together under the all-encompassing homogenized label of “Native American.” The prison system itself and the rehabilitative ideas therein are based on Euro-American models of criminality, mental health, and rehabilitation that continue to alienate the Native offender from his or her cultural and personal identity and assimilate him or her into the ideals and constructs of a dis-serving dominant culture. Drawing on the work of Reed (1990), Luana Ross suggests that prison programs modeled for Euro-American society may be another way to control Native people. “Rather than focusing on the societal structure as the primary problem, Native prisoners are diverted by rehabilitative programs that search for internal, personal deficiencies” (137).

Sweat lodge ceremonies offer one means through which Native inmates can resist this assimilation. Such practices allow Native inmates access to cultural forms and social discourses that may be instrumental in (re)transforming individual and communal self-definition, experience, knowledge, and identity towards a more positive, self-confirmed end (Axtell 1985, Anderson 1991, Tinker 1993). In a sense, personal renewal and cultural renewal go hand in hand. Such renewal, however, is not guaranteed. Situational, personal, and social variables inevitably influence the effectiveness of any spiritual practice.

This dissertation will explore: 1) the ways in which the legacy of colonization and oppression affect Native American inmates, and 2) whether the sweat lodge practice provides these inmates with a means of resistance to systems of oppression and assimilation, and, if so, how this resistance is accomplished. The pertinence of this project is directly related to three distinct areas of study: Religion in Prison, Native American studies, and Ritual Theory. While

issues of ritual theory will be addressed in later chapters, issues involving the practices of Native American spirituality in prison are not so easily bracketed. It is one thing to acknowledge the rehabilitative potential of free religious involvement in prison, but it is another to negotiate the disparate realities of Native American spiritual practices in prison. Access to traditional ceremonies is different from state to state, and often times prison to prison, in terms of what is allowed, how often, and who can participate. This is further complicated by difficulties in finding elders who are willing to come in and work with incarcerated people within the confines of a regulatory prison system.

In addition, there is a very real tension between Native American practices and prison. This struggle began historically when the governments of European settlers imprisoned Native people for practicing their traditions. It is evidenced again in the necessity of legislative acts that try and protect Native American religious freedom and practice both within and outside of prison. And it continues today as Native people in prison try to negotiate traditional practices and spaces within institutions generated and fostered by different values, beliefs, and perceptions of reality. All of these issues will be addressed in the following pages.

I hope that my research will provide some qualitative evaluation of conditions under which or culturally appropriate rituals can demonstrably assist in the rehabilitation of individuals and communities. I will be focusing particularly on the context of a maximum-medium security prison in the Midwest where the Native American men incarcerated gather to sweat once a week.

Problem and Significance

The presence of the sweat lodge in prison is set against a historical backdrop of dramatic colonization and assimilation campaigns by white Europeans against Native cultures and spirituality. Through these campaigns, Native traditions were mocked and destroyed and Native peoples were prosecuted and/or incarcerated for practicing their traditional spiritual or healing ceremonies. As a result, many Natives have grown up with little or no knowledge of traditional spirituality, language, or culture. In addition, the trauma of colonialism and oppression still reverberates in the memory and lived experiences of contemporary Native people through such experiences as racism, oppression, abuse, crime, internalized oppression, and conflicts of self-identity (Ross 1998, Axtell 1985, Tinker 1993). The practice of Native spiritualities and healing

practices, especially in the prison setting, has the potential to play an operative role in communal as well as personal renewal and rehabilitation.

Until recently, Native peoples in both U.S. and Canadian prisons were denied access to traditional practices of their spirituality. Legal and political action to correct that situation began in Nebraska in the 1970's and Canada in the 1980's (concomitant with the national struggles for recognition and religious tolerance in society-at-large). Winning protection as a "religion," however, has not been trouble free. Access to and availability of religious leaders and ceremonies remain inconsistent from state to state and prison to prison. Women inmates often have less access to Native American religious leaders and ceremonies than their male counterparts (Ross 1998, Grobsmith 1994). The Western category of "religion" is in itself problematic in representing Native experiences and worldviews. In addition, the practice of Christianity is often held as the norm for other non-Christian religious activities, thereby limiting the availability of Native practices to those that have Christian parallels (practices that can be practiced for an hour on Sundays and Wednesdays, in one specific room within the prison (Waldram 1997)). Issues concerning "reasonable access," the term used and most widely interpreted in regards to free exercise jurisprudence in prison contexts, to ceremonies and admission of Native spiritual leaders into prisons continue to be litigated in the American court system.

The consequences of this litigation are multi-fold. Not only have positive gains been made in the exercise of Native religious freedom and cultural rights, but subtle political consequences have been felt as well. Such consequences include, for example, a stronger Indian identification, a tremendous rise in group solidarity, and the pride that Natives experience in being the only ethnic group in prison to have a special federal court order which dictates that the prison is compelled by law to allow their spiritual and cultural expression (American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978) (Grobsmith 1994). Native American inmates unite around their unique cultural and religious activities during incarcerations, resulting in a strong and cohesive population.

This unification tends to coalesce around a highly Plains-influenced, pan-Indian religious community characterized by strong ethnic markers as well as a desire to stand apart from other inmates (Grobsmith 1994). The sweat lodge itself seems to be the most common "universal" ceremony that has come to transcend tribal affiliations, especially in the prison setting. On one

hand this pan-Indian practice would seem to perpetuate the assumed homogeneity of Native tribes and hinder the exercise of their cultural diversity. On the other, it opens up an effective avenue for cultural renewal and healing. Participating in Native culture and spirituality allows these individuals to experience their lives in the context of a greater historical process in which personal and cultural loss and restoration go hand in hand (Waldram 1997). The sweat lodge itself has a history of accommodating to the needs of its participants and being a focal point for solidarity and identification (Bucko 1998). Sweat lodge practices may be inherently tuned to concepts of interdependence, empowerment, and the notion of helping others. Participation in sweat lodge activities provides opportunities for learning about Native history, culture, and spirituality, complete with values and ideologies which, arguably, are antithetical to the values and ideologies that landed these men and women in prison in the first place. Participation also allows for recovering suppressed heritage(s), building and affirming personal and communal identity, and offering the opportunity for self-creation over-and-against prison culture as well as society-at-large (Ross 1998, Waldram 1997, Grobsmith 1994, Deloria 1994).

Imprisoned Native Americans are not all equally touched by Native spirituality, however, nor do they all pursue their culture or religion as a method of rehabilitation or as a way to resist oppression. As Weibel-Orlando notes in her study of Native Americans and alcohol treatment programs, anthropological research tends to optimistically appraise the use of indigenous curing practices in the treatment of alcohol and substance abuse for indigenous peoples. In reality, success rates are much more ambiguous. This ambiguity may be affected by the extent to which individuals participate in the ritual, understand and accept the symbols and meanings associated with the ritual, and internalize these understandings in ways that affect social and personal action, interaction, and belief (McGuire 1988, Pargament 1997). Different cultural and historical contexts for judging efficacy may be problematic as well (i.e., differences in identifying what “success in treatment” really means) (Waldram 1997).

Claims of sweat lodge use and efficacy thus must be weighed against ethnographic report and analysis. Such report will provide the foundation for a truly integrated reflection on the lives of Native inmates and the ceremonies in which they participate while incarcerated.

Methodology

The major part of this study is designed to focus on the spiritual practices of ten Native American men incarcerated at a maximum-medium security prison in the Midwest. Out of thirty inmates who were identified as having some involvement with the sweat lodge ceremonies there, these ten volunteered to meet with me. The participants were asked both in writing and verbally if they would consent to participate, and interviews were carried out in the form of explorative, semi-structured interviews that were tape-recorded and transcribed almost verbatim. The purpose of these interviews was to gather demographic data, information on social backgrounds, and insider perspectives on the realities and experiences of their current religious practices (how and why they are involved in the sweat lodge, interpretations of personal and social impact). My understandings and interpretations were shared for confirmation and feedback from my consultants and other Native American community members in order to maintain ethnographic integrity.

The interviews lasted 45-80 minutes. I analyzed the data collected from these interviews using the grounded theory, open method of qualitative research as developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990). Field notes were made directly after each interview. The collected material was carefully read and comments were made in the margins as to concepts and associations presented therein. Significant statements were selected and compared in order to find sources of variation or agreements. Concepts and statements in agreement were organized within respective preliminary groups that were in turn critically analyzed and compared in order to find the central content within each group. Finally, the constructed categories were compared with each other.

Data analysis focused on identification of key variables contributing to the meaning and impact of participation in sweat lodge ceremonies for Native American inmates, to the obstacles in such participation, and to how participation affects the person. The examination of ritual data in particular includes categories derived from this analysis as well as explication of the functional and operational connections between ritual and community, identity, healing, and resistance.

In an attempt to highlight the voices of the participants, I use extensive quotations whenever possible. Listening to the voices and experiences of these men is the beginning of an

effort to humanize prisoners otherwise dehumanized by prisonization. Likewise, as a researcher, I attempted not to be the singular voice of authority and interpretation, but rather used an approach that gives the voice of my collaborators a major role in conveying meaning, experience, and understanding, with awareness of the subjective, contextual experiences of these men. I do not intend my findings to be the end-all, be-all, final authority on the subject, but rather a part of larger, on-going conversations regarding Native American communities, prisons, and spiritual practices therein.

Reflections on Native American spiritual practices in prison cannot be separated from the historical and contemporary contexts of Native peoples. As Marianne O. Nielsen points out in *Native Americans, Crime, and Justice*, the issue of Native peoples involvement in the criminal justice system “cannot be understood without recognizing that it is just one of many interrelated issues that face Native peoples today. Political power, land, economic development, individual despair – these and other issues must be considered in exploring Native involvement in the criminal justice system” (10). To this end, this work begins with historical and contemporary inquiries into Native lives and cultures. My methodology reflects an attempt to integrate cultural history, the speech of informants, and analysis of sweat lodge practices. My goal is to present an integrated reflection on the role of spiritual practices in the renewal of individuals as well as the communities of which they are a part.

It is also important to remember that Native cultures are not homogeneous, and the category of “Native American” glosses over the great diversity of cultures, languages, customs, and traditions among tribes. This itself is a hold-over from colonization in which people and groups are identified in terms that are not their own, and stereotypes are enforced which continue to influence the ways Native people are treated individually, politically, socially, and bureaucratically (Deloria 1994, Ross 1998, Nielsen 1996, Grobsmith 1994, Waldram 1997, Weaver 1998). In terms of this paper, I have identified Native people and communities in terms of their tribes whenever possible. Rather than impose a standard vocabulary, I use the terms Native American, American Indian, tribal communities, Native, Aboriginal, and Indigenous more or less interchangeably, while recognizing that they are all inadequate. I have also respected terminologies used by individual authors’. In regards to terminology regarding White non-Natives, I have deferred to the preferences of individual authors as well, which tend to vary from Euro-American, Amer-European, and Western, generally.

Finally, it is important to recognize that when one speaks of religious identity, “one is dealing with something intimately consequential for Native peoples” (Weaver, xii). Traditional Native American understandings of religion are pervasive and contiguous with all other function of life, and there is no sharp distinction between sacred and profane spheres of existence. As Jace Weaver notes in the preface to *Native American Religious Identity*,

Native cultures and religious traditions are in many ways synonymous and coextensive. As Charles Eastman (Sioux) states, “Every act of [an Indian’s] life is, in a very real sense, a religious act.” It is this intricately intimate relationship between culture and religious tradition that makes the question of religious identity a vital inquiry. It also means that some of the pieces contained herein – which may on their face have very little to do with “religion” as commonly conceived – are nonetheless profoundly religious in their implications. (x)

The same is true here. Many of the pieces contained in this study, from colonization to crime, from prison culture to spiritual practices, can be profoundly religious, even if not visibly so. To the extent that any action affects one’s community or one’s relationship to that community, it can be religious. To the extent that any action takes place in community, it is religious. As one of my collaborators said,

“Religion” is a word that was given to the Indian. It was not a word of the Native people. We believe that there is a spiritual aspect to all living things, and our spirituality is something that is sacred and practiced every day. Everything is spiritual, everything as a spiritual aspect to it. One sees God in all things, not just in “religion.”

Outline

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter One begins with a review of Native American involvement in the criminal justice system, including reflections on the role that social, political, and historical contexts play in the criminalization of behavior. At the crux of this discussion lies the experience of religion, not only to the extent that Native practices were targeted for persecution and destruction, but also to the extent that religion (in the form of Christianity) was a primary impetus for European colonization. This chapter also addresses issues of cultural syncretism and differing opinions regarding the ways in which Native and non-Native traditions have interacted and continue to interact (i.e., Treat 1996, Weaver 1998) in shaping Native experiences.

Chapter Two presents a brief history of the sweat lodge ceremony in North America, as well as its introduction into prisons and the description and specific history of my research site. The relationship between ceremonial participation and Native American understandings of religion and spirituality is explored as well.

Chapter Three presents the findings of my interviews. The schedule of questions asked during interviews is included in the Appendix.

Chapter Four presents theoretical considerations as to how sweat lodge practices influence the personal and social development of practitioners in prison, drawing on data analysis, ritual theory, and coping theory. Issues of syncretism and pan-Indianism, the politics of resistance, and the problematics of using Western constructs (such as “religion,” “ritual,” and “success”) to interpret Native experiences are explored as well.

In *Native Americans, Crime, and Justice*, Marianne O. Nielsen remarks that:

in Canada Native offenders and Native criminal justice issues are a major focus for both scholars and administrators, but in the United States native issues and offenders receive comparatively little attention from scholars and prison administrators because they are overshadowed by the large numbers of African American and Hispanic offenders in the system. (13)

This dissertation is my humble contribution to reversing that trend, and to locate the experiences of Native Americans and crime in their historical and contemporary contexts. If we truly desire to restore and renew individuals incarcerated in US prisons, we must also commit ourselves to the restoration of their communities. While the ultimate struggle in this restoration is towards sovereignty and self-government, there are moments in the midst where the colonized are fighting back, resisting their oppression, and rebuilding themselves and the communities around them. In the words of Katharine Pearce, “...don’t let me steal/that last life from you...”

Own

By Katherine Pearce

I hear your voices, on the wind,
faint in the exile my ancestors gave;
I glimpse the fires of your hearths and homes
in the trodden land my people stole.

I hear your stories in words my family caught
or see your words on a scattered page.
I feel your songs inside my soul-
but rest content with my heritage.
A daughter of pillagers, don't let me steal
that last life from you: the dignity
to sing your songs in your voices, your words.

CHAPTER II

COLONIZATION, CRIME, AND INCARCERATION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between the colonization of the Americas and the presence of Native Americans in prison. While a direct correlation between criminality and colonization may be precarious, the historical experience of colonization continues to affect the lives of Native American men and women today through such guises as community trauma, systematic discrimination, racism, and a variety of social ills. In addition, there continues to be a basic “culture clash” between Euro-American and Native American political realities, social realities, and general worldviews. Inasmuch as Native Americans are expected to integrate into realities and world views that are not their own, the process of colonization continues. If the rehabilitation of Native American offenders is truly intended, then investment in the restoration of their cultural traditions may be necessary as well.

I begin with a review of Native Americans and crime, examining their involvement as both perpetrators and victims in criminal activity. Beyond statistics, it is important to note the role that social and political contexts play in the criminalization of behavior. I then turn to the history of colonization. At the crux of this history lies the experience of religion, not only to the extent that Native practices were targeted for persecution and destruction, but also to the extent that religion (in the form of Christianity) was a primary impetus and/or rationale for European colonization. Within this history, there are also strongholds of resistance and determination that have helped Native Americans survive and thrive through today.

Native Americans and Crime

Native Americans are over-represented in both Canadian and U.S. correctional systems, especially when compared to the size of their population in general. In 1991, the national crime rate in Canada was 92.7 per 1000, and the crime rate for Indian bands was 165.6 per 1000, almost twice as high. In terms of violent crime, the Indian band rate of 33.1 per 1000 was almost four times the national rate of 9.0 per 1000 (Hamilton and Sinclair 1991:81, in Waldram 21). The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (1999) reported that in 1992, American Indians comprised

just less than 1% of the nation's population but 1.6% of the federal prison population, and 2.9% of the population in local jails nationwide. On an average day in 1997, an estimated 63,000 American Indians were under the care, custody, or control of the criminal justice system – about 4% of the American Indian population age 18 or older. By comparison, an estimated 2% of white adults, 10% of black adults, and less than a half of 1% of Asian adults were under correctional supervision. From 1992-96, 1 in 25 American Indians age 18 or older annually was under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system in the U.S. – 2.4 times the rate of whites and 9.3 times the rate of Asians, a rate 38% higher than the national rate. In September 1994, 75 out of 124 juvenile delinquents confined under Federal jurisdiction were Native Americans - about 60% of such juveniles.

The numbers of Native Americans involved in the criminal justice system may in fact be larger than statistics tend to report. According to Robert A. Silverman (1996), crime and arrest rates are often based on faulty numbers as census data does not accurately reflect the population. There is the added difficulty of identifying subpopulations, as many people do not specify racial or ethnic groups on census reports, which is further complicated when racial and ethnic mixing is involved. Silverman also contends that there are problems collecting crime data, specifically with regard to the notation of 'race' that is often based on observation on the part of the police officer and is confounded by the fact that some jurisdictions omit "Native American" as an available category on the arrest form. In addition, Silverman found variable reporting practices that often under-report the crime and arrest rates from rural areas, areas in which Native populations often reside, and crime data about them are more likely to be missed. Within the prison system itself, statistics relating to the number of incarcerated Native American inmates is often problematic depending on how race is being determined and who is identifying it (it is often reported by intake officer who bases his judgement on the appearance of the inmate). As a result, Native Americans are often recorded as Hispanic, and they are never identified according to their tribal affiliations (Grobsmith 1994).

Despite the inaccuracy of numbers, Silverman reasons that "they probably give us a reasonable notion of the relative position of Native Americans with regard to arrests made" (66). According to his analysis, the arrest rates of Native Americans are actually similar to those of white Americans, with the exception being alcohol related crimes such as public drunkenness, driving while intoxicated, and liquor violations. David Lester (1999) reported similar results,

finding that if alcohol related crimes were excluded, and adjustments were made for socioeconomic status (very low in Native communities) and age (a higher proportion of youths in Native communities), then Native American crime rates are actually extraordinarily low. Of course adjusting for socioeconomic status and age essentially discounts the social context of Native American communities and offenders, but I digress. In regards to crimes involving alcohol, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1999) reports that the 1997 arrest rate among American Indians for alcohol-related offenses (driving under the influence, liquor law violations, and public drunkenness) was more than double that found among all races. Arrests of Native Americans under age 18 for alcohol-related violations are also twice the national average. In addition, about half of convicted Native inmates in local jails had been consuming alcoholic beverages at the time of the offense for which they had been convicted. An estimated 7 in 10 American Indians in local jails convicted of a violent crime had been drinking when they committed the offense. Nearly 4 in 10 Native inmates held in local jails had been charged with a public-order offense – most commonly driving while intoxicated.

In some states Native offenders are not only overrepresented in terms of their arrests or numbers in prison but receive longer sentences and serve more of their sentence than any other group (Nielsen 1996). T. Bynum and R. Paternoster (1996) found that American Indians were significantly less likely to be released on parole than whites, and were more likely to be incarcerated than whites for similar offenses. In their article entitled “Discrimination Revisited,” Bynum and Paternoster equate this disparity with the tendency that racial minorities in general can be expected to be subject to more frequent and more severe treatment at all levels in the criminal justice system because of their relative lack of economic, political, and cultural power in American society. Their behavior is more subject to criminal definition, and they are often less able to resist enforcement. Furthermore, this racial disparity is more likely to take place in the “backstages” of the legal system, meaning processes that are withheld from public view, rather than the “front region,” in which highly visible ceremonies are scrutinized under an official public ideology of equal treatment before the law. Research focused on regions in the legal process that are more protected from public inspection and scrutiny, where only criminal justice system actors have access, such as the issuing of arrest warrants, access to private counsel, release on bail, and the granting of parole, show consistent racial disparity in the treatment of offenders (229-230).

Statistics and numbers are only the beginning. To say that such crime rates and incarceration statistics are reflective of individual behavior overlooks the greater social and political context of Native peoples. As Nielsen (1996) remarks,

This same trend of overrepresentation is found in every country in which an indigenous population has been overrun by an invading group. It is found, for example, among the Aborigines of Australia, the Maoris of New Zealand, and the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea, Scandinavia, Japan, Russia, and many African countries. With few exceptions, it seems that the processes of invasion and colonization produce conditions that increase the involvement of the original inhabitants in the criminal justice system of the dominant (colonizing) society. (13).

Similarly, James Waldram quotes the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba in arguing that “[c]ultural oppression, social inequality, the loss of self-government and systematic discrimination, which are the legacies of the Canadian government’s treatment of Aboriginal people, are intertwined and interdependent factors” in the criminalization of Native people (22). The realities of cumulative community trauma inevitably shape personalities, attitudes, values, and behaviors of both individuals and communities. As Waldram states himself, “A whole community or society which is victimized by trauma is likely to develop aberrant moral reference points for its citizens, leading to the intergenerational transmission of pathological behaviours. The experience of trauma then becomes the lived experience of a whole culture” (46).

Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Justice (1999) demonstrate the experiences of Native Americans not as the perpetrators of crime, but as the *victims*. From 1992-1996, Native Americans were victims of violent crime at more than twice the rate of whites, blacks, or Asians in the United States (the average annual violent crime rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older was 124 for Native Americans, 61 for blacks, and 49 for whites). For this period, the average annual per capita rate of violent victimization translates into about 1 violent crime for every 20 residents age 12 or older. By race, however, Native Americans experienced about 1 violent crime for every 8 residents age 12 or older compared to 1 for every 16 black residents, 1 for every 20 white residents, and 1 for every 34 Asian residents. Native American victims of violent crime were also more likely to have been injured than were white or Asian crime victims.

Rates of violence in every age group are higher among Native Americans than that of all races, and nearly a third of all Native American victims of violence are between ages 18 and 24.

This group of American Indians experienced the highest per capita rate of violence of any racial group considered by age – about 1 violent crime for every 4 persons of this age. This rate is more than twice that found among whites and blacks of the same age.

At least 70% of the violent victimizations experienced by Native Americans are committed by persons not of the same race – a substantially higher rate of interracial violence than experienced by white or black victims. In comparison, among white victims of violence, 69% of offenders were white. Likewise, black victims of violence were most likely to have been victimized by a black offender (81%).

Each year the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System of the Department of Health and Human Services obtains from child protective service agencies nationwide the number of reports of alleged maltreatment of children. Published data for 1995 indicate that about one million children were substantiated to have been victims of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, medical neglect, or other forms of verified maltreatment. Native Americans, accounting for just under 1% of the population age 14 or younger, accounted for just under 2% of the victims of child abuse/neglect in reports collected nationwide in 1995, overrepresented twofold as victims of child abuse. Per capita, this data indicates about 1 substantiated report of a child victim of abuse or neglect for every 30 Native American children age 14 or younger, compared to one of every 66 white children, 30 black children, 209 Asian children, and 80 Hispanic children.

Why are crime rates so disproportionate in Native American communities? Troy Armstrong, Michael Guilfoyle, and Ada Pecos Melton (1996) found the following set of factors to be consistent: poverty, lack of education, chronic unemployment, substance abuse, marital and family disruptions and violence, loss of cultural identity, over-reliance on aggression to resolve disputes, and an inability or reluctance to assimilate into mainstream American society (83). In their book, *A Native American Theology*, Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. “Tink” Tinker remark, “statistics repeatedly report American Indian people in the worst position of any ethnic community in North America: the highest rates of unemployment, alcoholism, teen-age suicides, school drop-outs, and the lowest rates of longevity, education attained, per capita income, etc.” (5). Studies repeatedly link social problems of Native American cultures with the disruption of culture, custom, and tradition following in the wake of contact and conflict

with European society (Nielsen and Silverman 1996, Ross 1998, Tinker 1993, Grobsmith 1994). I turn now to a review of that conflict.

The Legacy of Colonization

One of the main motives of colonialism is economic exploitation, and cultural suppression almost invariably accompanies colonialism... Cultural suppression is a legal process that involves deculturation – eradication of the indigenous people’s original traditions – followed by indoctrination in the ideas of the dominators so the colonized may themselves assist the colonial project... The process, in which the colonized are removed from their cultural context through enslavement or transplantation, involves the abandonment of culture and the adoption of new ways of speaking, behaving, and reasoning.

Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage*, 11-12

Colonialism is much more than just setting up shop in a foreign land. The destruction of social, economic, and cultural structures and institutions inevitably brings changes in technologies of the self, or in ways that people think, feel, and experience themselves and the world around them. As institutions change, structures and systems of knowledge change, and the ways in which individuals understand and interact with themselves and others change as well. As such, the new culture becomes a method of control to the extent that people adopt these new modes of understanding and being in the world.

In her 1991 book about the experiences of Huron and Montagnais women during colonization, Karen Anderson asserts that colonization was “successful” to the extent that it was able “to change both the individual’s self-definition, experience, self-knowledge and will to act and the institutional and social knowledge basis that helped to form and reproduce the individuals identity” (163). As changes in economy, devastating disease, famine, and warfare took place, traditional ways of experiencing oneself and understanding oneself were usurped, replaced by understanding generated and perpetuated by the invading culture. As Anderson states, “[w]hat ultimately brought about the subjugation of [Native peoples] was a momentous change in the expression of self and in the institutional structures and knowledge basis that supported such a change” (ibid.). In other words, cultural and personal transformation was successful because the Native people began to adopt the colonizers views and practices of self, power, and worth. “A new philosophy and morality was accepted that... gave men and women a new way to think, feel, and experience themselves” (98).

Tinker (1993) explains this change as a transformation of what he refers to as “deep structures” of meaning and cognition. As structures of society and culture change, they inform the deeper meaning-making structures of individuals, deeper structures that give value and definition to a people. According to Tinker, new deep structures must slowly evolve to meet the impositions of a new surface (34). As Native cultures and traditions were destroyed and replaced, the underlying values and meanings of that culture and tradition were destroyed and replaced as well.

Not only were these values and meanings replaced, but the replacements imposed by the new culture included values and meanings that undermined and devalued Native peoples and their traditional ways of life. Native traditions were declared “false” and “demonic,” full of lies and devoid of reason. Religious practices were mocked and idols destroyed, gods dethroned and uprooted, myths scorned and criticized unrelentingly. Many tribal religious practices were forbidden and banned by the U.S. government from the late 1800’s until 1934, and those who dared to openly practice were incarcerated. As Rivera points out, devaluing Native religion means devaluing the meaning and value of Native life as well, for “one’s religion is one’s life,” and the intimate relationship between culture, religious tradition, and identity in traditional Native life is incontrovertible (as cited in Weaver, ix-xiii). Devaluing Native religion, eradicating the complex vision of values and ideals, combined with the demographic catastrophes that Native peoples suffered, inevitably gave rise to “the incurable melancholy of those who have experienced the irreversible profanation of their sacred space and time” (Rivera 166-67).

Furthermore, the eradication and destruction of the Native people and traditions was often justified by religious and theological claims of the conquerors. Religion was used to legitimate and justify the armed domination and imperial expansion of the colonies. “Salvation of souls” and “Christianization” was often the official ideology of the conqueror, and Native resistance to conversion was understood to allow and enforce servitude and genocide of entire tribes (Rivera 1992). The cultural practices and ideologies of the Europeans were also underscored by universal claims of an aggressive Christianity (Grant 1984), complete with illusions of Indian inferiority, deviance, and savagery (Ross 1998, Axtell 1985). George Tinker (1993) calls this “the inevitable confusion of virtually every missionary between the gospel he, or occasionally she, proclaimed to Indian people and the missionary’s own European or

Euroamerican culture.” Missionaries not only preached a new gospel of salvation, “but also just as energetically imposed a new cultural model of existence on Indian people,” and these two tasks “became nearly indistinguishable in practice” (4). Institutions of marriage, law, agriculture, and self-expression were all laden with Christianized presuppositions, and Christian presuppositions came laden with cultural practices and ideologies. For many, Europeans and Natives alike, colonization, then, was a struggle of religious identities, identities which deeply informed each group’s respective modes of being in the world (Axtell, Anderson 1991, Rivera 1992, Tinker 1993). As James Axtell notes, the struggle between cultures “remained primarily a contest between two concepts of spiritual power and the quality of life each promised” (19). And as Vine Deloria Jr. notes, “the Indian tribes could not be broken politically until they had been destroyed religiously” (1994, 211).

Another factor in the transformation of deep structures and meanings is the historical openness of Native peoples to other religious experiences and expressions of spirituality. Native religiousness is grounded in an oral tradition of transformative practice, wherein new ideas and revelations are considered and absorbed to the degree that they are seen as meaningful and helpful to the people. They are not bound by creed or dogma, but by usefulness, or applicability perhaps. As Andrea Smith (1998) notes, “Native cultures have always changed to meet current needs” (186). As the world around them changed, Natives were faced with situations and phenomena of disease, warfare, and destruction beyond the scope of their traditional methods of understanding and coping. Grounded in pragmatism, Natives would readily incorporate practices and beliefs that seemed directly helpful and sensible to them. The very nature of Native understandings of religion, not as a discrete category of life but an entire way of life, also aided in incorporating religious ideas and practices into everyday life, especially if these ideas, institutions, and practices were laden with “spiritual” import. As Native peoples were destroyed by epidemics and war, they were also more susceptible to Western understandings of causality and social constructions of meaning and value. All of these situations factor in varying degrees into the changing climate of Native culture and self-understanding.

Unfortunately, the new climate of religious and social structures included meanings and values that taught self-hatred and the destruction of self-worth on the part of the Indian people. As Tinker states, “The transformation generated included aspects of unmentionable pain – namely, self-hatred, alienation, and rejection – that have never really received attention in

historical analyses of the period or in discussions of the contemporary context of Indian people” (36). The new religious language of sin, confession, and morality worked together with the rejection of Native culture, history, and structures of spirituality to teach “denial of self and inculcation of self-hatred” (40). James Axtell recounts how Native peoples had to be taught to feel remorse and guilt for having offended a Christian God. “The Indians of southern New England had to be stripped of their former beliefs by strange events and strong teaching and given a plausible set of new beliefs to replace them” (231). These new beliefs fostered new expressions of worthlessness, self-condemnation, and a desire to “escape” from “Indianism” (sic) (232). In addition, Native converts remained second-class Christians, thereby dominated not only economically and politically but theologically as well. As Axtell states,

One must at least suspect that the process of Christianization has involved some internalization of the larger illusion of Indian inferiority and the idealization of white culture and religion. Some have called it internalized racism, and as such it surely results in a praxis of self-hatred... Communities of oppressed peoples internalize their own oppression and come to believe too many of the stereotypes, explicit and implicit, spoken by the oppressor. (3)

One of the stereotypes Tinker (1993) identifies in particular is that of white superiority. Just as such an attitude was internalized and assumed by the missionaries, Tinker contends that it also took root in the Indian subconscious as Indian people began to internalize the attitudes of white oppression.

The message was – and is – that white, Euroamerican culture and its values are good, while Indian culture and values are inferior and outright bad. The white world has lived out this lie consistently and has even believed it. The tragedy is that Indian people have also believed and lived out of the lie, reaping not the benefits but the implicit consequences of self-destruction. (93-94)

Ross refers to the continued idealization of white culture as an expression of “colonial racism,” wherein the culture of the colonizer is upheld as the ideal, and the colonized are systematically devalued and objectified through the perpetuation of stereotypes and the normative evaluation of groups as more or less acceptable (according to their likeness to “us”) (52). The result, according to Ross, is “internalized oppression.” She states,

Internalized oppression is incessant in Native communities, which suffer every social ill possible, with high rates of substance abuse, homicide, domestic violence, and poverty, to

name a few. The etiology of the anger, frustration, and violence behind these problems is debatable. Some Native scholars... believe that the internalized brutality, the warring against members of our own communities rather than the “real” enemy, is an unfortunate byproduct of colonialism. Because of institutionalized racism, the “real” enemy is, by now, invisible. (53)

As seen above, the Native peoples of North America were not only destroyed economically and politically, but internally as well, through subjective experiences of value, worth, power, identity, meaning, and understanding. Although the extent of the culpability of missionaries in the process of self-destruction may be debatable, the effects of Native subjugation in the name of religion and colonization are deep. The religion of the conquerors provided language, images, and personal and societal constructs that were internalized by Native people, and the institutional and societal transformations brought about transformations of identity, experience, and self-understanding as well.

The Legacy of Law

At the time of European first contact, Native tribes had their own legal systems in place. Although details of practice varied from tribe to tribe, the general mode of operation involved communities working together to mediate restitution and compensation, and to restore the transgressing member back into community. This was done not by proving guilt, but by mediating the perspectives and experiences of each situation. There were no prisons, only systems of re-integration (Deloria and Lytle 1983).

Just as with other modes of life, however, the tribal systems of justice were dismantled and replaced by Euro-American systems. This new system was and is based on Euro-American values of hierarchy and power with the objective of establishing fault or guilt and then bestowing punishment upon the offender (Deloria and Lytle 1983). This new system brought with it definitions of crime and punishment that defined tribal traditions and practices as criminal. In the 1880's the Department of the Interior even established it's own “Court of Indian Offenses” which tried activities such as dancing, practicing tribal medicine, plural marriages, immorality, mourning practices that involved destroying the property of the deceased, speaking Native languages, neglecting to engage in what Euro-Americans defined as “work,” refusing to cut their hair, and participating in sacred ceremonies and rites (Ross, 11-23). Native people were defined

as “deviant” and “criminal.” Genocide against Native tribes was not seen as murder, and in the Old West the murder of Native people was not even considered a crime (Ross, 15).

Disagreements between tribes and the burgeoning U.S. government over land and resources were disposed of in Euro-American fashion. Euro-American definitions of criminality and due process were continually imposed on tribes.

For example, in 1817 the United States Congress passed the General Crimes Act, awarding itself federal jurisdiction over Native land and tribes. Tribes retained jurisdiction only over offenses in which both the offender and victim were Native. In all other cases, tribes now held concurrent jurisdiction with the federal government, and the federal government would decide which activities merited trial and then meted out punishment. In 1825 Congress expanded the number of crimes that could be tried by federal courts when offenses were committed on Native land, and this was expanded again in 1885 and 1976 (Ross, 19). Interestingly, the act applies only when the offender is Native, and when the offense is committed within the legal definition of Indian Country (Deloria and Lytle 1983). By taking jurisdiction over crimes, the federal government assumed the power to punish. As noted earlier, Native Americans charged with major crimes on an Indian reservation often receive harsher treatment than non-Natives charged with the same crimes either on or off the reservation, since crimes committed by non-Natives are tried in State and county courts with their own standards of punishment. According to Ross, penalties from federal judges are often twice as harsh as those falling under state jurisdiction (19).

In 1934 Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which was presented as a restoration of Native American self-government and yet overturned that self-government by overthrowing traditional organizations and promoting “democratic” tribal council systems that were structured along the lines of American government and corporate businesses (d’Errico 2001, Ross 1998).

In the 1950’s the federal government initiated policies to terminate the sovereignty of one hundred Native nations, and allowed certain states to impose state laws on reservations without tribal consent. Public Law 280 (PL 280) was authorized in 1954 and was amended in 1968 to include the necessity of tribal consent. It limits and defines the penalties that tribal courts are allowed to impose, effectively confining action in tribal courts to misdemeanors. Furthermore, states are allowed to relinquish jurisdiction if it becomes too burdensome, but tribes are not

empowered to demand retrocession (Ross 1998). To this day, Native law enforcement has no jurisdiction over white criminal behavior on Native land, but whites have jurisdiction over Native. White people living on reservations are not under the authority of tribal police or laws, and non-Natives are immune from tribal prosecution. As Luana Ross states, “Indian reservations are the only places in the United States where the criminality of an act relies exclusively on the race of the offender and victim” (27).

When Native Americans end up in prison, the alienation from their tribal communities can continue. Inmates are not only separated from their families, tribes, and land, but are subjected to prison programs modeled after Euro-American society in which the hierarchies of power determine guilt and punishment, and the search for internal, personal deficiencies to be “corrected” is the norm. The correctional notion of rehabilitation is based on “the assumption... that someone is ill or deviant in some manner, and the goal is to restore well-being through various therapeutic models and education” based on Euro-American norms (Ross, 127). These counseling and educational models tend to accent individual responsibilities and deficiencies and the building of individual self-esteem, “overlooking the social structure, society’s deficiencies, or the effects of the prison regime on prisoners’ mental health” (Ross, 135). With budget cuts and waning public support for spending money on inmates, efforts at rehabilitation often give way (if not theoretically, then practically) to efforts of housing and control.

Little Rock Reed (1990) suggests that many Native Americans view rehabilitation differently than those from Euro-American culture. Reed argues that prison programs modeled for Euro-American society are another way to control Native people by diverting them from the problems of social structure and relationship to a search for internal, personal deficiencies. Reed advocates the cultural specificity of prison programs, and asserts that the purification ceremony or sweat lodge is especially important and central to rehabilitation for Natives.

Ross contrasts the American system with the Navajo system of law, which Chief Justice Robert Yazzi of the Navajo Tribal Court describes as one of horizontal justice where there is no one authority that ascertains the “truth,” but rather all parties are allowed to explain their views. There is a system of restorative justice based on equality and participation, involving recuperation both to the offender and the victim (30). Reconciliation and healing are emphasized rather than punishing the offender. In his article “Justice and Native Peoples” (1996), James Dumont identifies some persistent, core values of Native peoples and explores the ways in which

these values are incompatible with the concepts and values of the Euro-Canadian justice system.

As he states:

Euro-Western concepts of sovereignty, authority, hierarchy and ruling entity appears diametrically opposed to the concepts of spiritual compact, tribal will, custom/tradition, and respect for the inherent equality and integrity of the individual of the Aboriginal worldview. Where it has almost universally been applied to Aboriginal people, it has been a system imposed upon them and found to be basically incompatible with the concepts and values of persisting Aboriginal culture and world view. (33)

An exploration of those values and world-views will take place in later chapters. For now, it is important to note that even in prison, and perhaps especially in prison, Native peoples and cultures continue to collide with Euro-American politics, laws and values. Subjective experiences of value, worth, power, identity, meaning, and understanding continue to be formed and transformed through institutional and social structures of knowledge, assessment, and power. Norms of behavior are regulated by hierarchies of power that can determine whether or not a Native man can grow his hair long, share food with a friend, possess a medicine bag, or participate in traditional ceremony. As Luana Ross says, “Colonialism as control and denial of culture is clearly evidenced by the number of incarcerated Native Americans and by their experiences in prison” (4).

The Legacy of Resistance

In the end, it must be said that colonization is never complete, and it is important to recognize that not all Native Americans respond (or responded) to oppression through the negative internalization of experiences. There are always strongholds of resistance and determination, elements of agency and forces for change. Although often overwhelmed, overlooked, and worn out, Native Americans have been able to survive with varying degrees of success. Tensions rise when that success is measured over and against the prevalence of self- (and other) destruction, and mere survival is in no way the ultimate goal, but their ability to persist and adapt remains crucial to their past, present, and future. As Karl Kroeber (1994) notes,

What is most impressive about the survival of American Indians, their success in not vanishing, is that they resist not merely by clinging to the past but by changing, accepting, even welcoming at least part of the present. Their persistence should provoke

us (though so far it has not done so) to realize to what a large degree culture is transformation. (11)

Culture is transformation in the way it adapts and changes over time. At first glance, this may sound like assimilation, but adaptation can also be a form of resistance and cultural continuity. Colonized people can adopt portions of the colonizers culture in ways that help them carry their own culture and identity forward. When missionaries promoted hymns as part of their campaign to Christianize and assimilate the Ojibwa, some of the Ojibwa made the hymns their own. As a result, the Native singers were ingratiated into the resourceful protection of the well-connected mission at the same time that they engendered the solidarity and community necessary for survival, and the generative power to carry traditional values and meanings (such as the manifestation of community and identity) into the future (McNally 1997). As James Axtell presents in *The Invasion Within*:

According to the social and political circumstances in which they found themselves after contact, they accepted the missionaries offering in just the amounts necessary to maintain their own cultural identity. They may have made individual or short-term miscalculations of self interest, white strength, and policy direction... but in general they took what they needed for resistance and accepted only as much as would ensure survival. (286)

In Axtell's analysis, faced with the options of annihilation or accommodation, the missionaries offered a means of adaptation by providing techniques for coping with the "new world." Axtell even goes so far as to say that as badly as the Indians lost, "the Christian missions also softened the blow" (332). Their acceptance of Christianity not only allowed them to survive but in one sense "preserved their ethnic identity as particular Indian groups on familiar pieces of land that carried their inner history" (ibid.). Indian Christians were still Indians and always would be, no matter how "Christianized" they became.

James Treat notes in the introduction to *Native and Christian* that many Natives today deliberately choose the Christian tradition, as many did during the times of colonization, and they do so without abandoning or rejecting Native religious traditions. The result is a continual dialogue with the self as both Native and Christian; there is no need to be exclusive. In his essay "Jesus, Corn Mother, and Conquest," George Tinker (1998) evaluates a small bit of Christianity through a Native lens, sifting out the oppressive colonial-style theology from the inclusive, creative, and healing one. For Tinker, it is the latter that allows Natives to understand their

Christian commitments on their own terms, “in ways that incorporate their own cultural traditions of the sacred. The Christian Indian interpretation of Jesus as the Christ will eventually differ considerably from the interpretation offered in the colonizer churches and hierarchies” (153). Tinker challenges colonizer churches to give up their notion of Christian exclusivity “and make room for American Indian religious traditions as being potentially as powerful and salvific as the best vision well-intentioned peoples have for Christianity” (ibid.).

These experiences of religion and culture, consistent with Native openness to new visions, challenge myths that accept Indians as Indians only to the extent that they exhibit pre-contact monikers of “traditional” culture. It also helps to explain the diversity of religious languages and experiences within Native communities, from mainline churches to Native American Churches to traditional ceremonies and everything in between. Culture as movement, or culture as transformation, allows for the diversity of history and experience to shape meanings and practices that both accommodate and resist change.

Culture is also transformation in the way it informs the subjective value and meaning structures of its people. As such, it can provide structures of power and meaning that allow people to define, name, and experience themselves as individuals and collectives over and against the powers-that-be and in their own terms. Inasmuch as Native people are bound in Native community, then it becomes that much more imperative that community and culture claim and reclaim self-determination and definition. I believe this imperative is ultimately religious, for as Jack Forbes says, “our “religion” is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think – all of these things – twenty-four hours a day. One’s religion, then, is one’s life.... All that we do, and are, is our religion” (quoted in Weaver, p. ix-x).

Concluding Remarks

The history of the colonization of America’s indigenous people is a tragic one. From the time of European contact to the present day, these people have been imprisoned in a variety of ways. They were confined in forts, boarding schools, orphanages, jails and prisons and on reservations. Historically, Native people formed free, sovereign nations with distinct cultures and social and political institutions reflecting their philosophies. Today, Native people are not free; they are a colonized people seeking to decolonize themselves.

It is difficult if not dangerous to speak of decolonization outside the realm of sovereignty and self-government. Without sovereignty, claims of self-determination and direction are tenuous in many respects. The realities of a people struggling towards sovereignty necessitates a keen awareness of that ultimate goal behind (before?) all others – to gain more power and to develop and control more of their own social institutions such as education, health care, social services, criminal justice, and the like. Living in a culture that effectively (and affectively) defeats many members of society, it is also necessary to remain aware of the many processes of (re)claiming hope.

Culture is one means through which people struggle for self-definition, self-creation, and self-determination. For Native Americans in prison, this struggle takes place in a social environment rife with control and power, little of which is in the hands of the inmates, coupled with a focus on individual failure and personal deficiencies and an expectation to conform to American models of correction and rehabilitation. This makes the presence of intentional, sacred spaces of communal experience and the renewal of culture and ceremony that much more important.

CHAPTER III

THE SWEATLODGE IN PRISON

In the spiritual life of Native Americans, ceremony plays a unique dialogical, performative, and interpretive role in communities. Ceremonies do not act as static carriers of doctrine and belief, but are interactive processes of encounters with sacred beings as diverse as the history and experiences of the people who participate in them. They are communal religious experiences that constitute and reconstitute life and living and give voice to the visionary connections that transcend time and space and manifest multiple levels of reality. They empower the life of people through the continuous revelation and practice of specific knowledge, tradition, and power. This knowledge and power cannot (should not) be separated from its source of production or the community and site within which and at which it is experienced – they are inextricably bound one to another. Considering the primacy of religious experience in Native life, ceremonial expression and participation is primary as well. The purpose of this chapter is to present a brief history of the sweat lodge ceremony in North America, as well as its introduction into prisons.

A Word about Native Americans and Religion

There is a fundamental religious diversity in the landscape of Native American traditions. There are more than five hundred and fifty Native tribes with more than two hundred and fifty languages (Young 2002), all with distinct religious cosmologies and landscapes of personal and communal experience. As Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George Tinker affirm throughout their book *A Native American Theology* (2001), there is no single Native American theology. “The histories and experiences of the indigenous peoples of this continent are too diverse to be accounted for in any such enterprise. The many voices of Native America cannot be contained in one effort” (ix).

In addition, just because somebody says “this is it” does not necessarily make it so. “Not every articulate utterance by an Indian person, even when they claim “traditional” status, is necessarily an authoritative part of that tradition” (Kidwell et al, 3). Issues of authority and

“right practice” are not determined by individual interpretations or utterances, but are worked out in a process of community that involves nuanced awareness of history, tradition, vision, and relationship between one another and the sacred. Raymond Bucko (1998) asserts that it is important to listen to as many voices as possible to order to avoid taking on a prescriptive role that legitimates certain voices and invalidates others (109). No one person or perspective or ideology can speak for all Native people, even within one community.

Just as individual people are not the sole spokespeople of traditions, tribal religions themselves are not a matter of personal choice or individual preference. As one of my consultants states, “I did not choose to be Indian, I was born Indian. And this is my religion.” As Vine Deloria Jr. (1994) states, “Religion is not conceived as a personal relationship between the deity and each individual. It is rather a covenant between a particular god and a particular community” (194). Tribal religions are communal affairs and experiences existing in specific groups, nations, and tribes, predicated on religious experiences, histories, and practices of the tribe. And the task of this community is not to establish individual relationships with a deity, or to confer agreed upon doctrines or individual beliefs. Rather, the religious imperative in tribal communities is to be in right relation with the community, the spirit world, and all of creation. The task of tribal religion “is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures” (Deloria Jr, 88).

It is important to note that religious experiences and traditions may in fact create very personal relationships between the individual and the spiritual world, but this personal relationship is recognized, affirmed, and intended for the good of the community (Kidwell et. al. 2001, Deloria Jr. 1994). One example of this is the centrality of dreams and visions in the religious traditions of the Plains Indians. In his book *The Dream Seekers*, Lee Irwin describes dreams and visions as direct personal encounters with sacred beings and sacred reality that imbues the dreamer with “a greater sense of personal identity because of the intimate link formed with the sacred beings” (121). This link enhances personal awareness, and empowerment, and can even confer on the visioner membership into certain communities of sacred rite and tradition. As personal as these visions may be, however, they are ultimately communal in nature. They take place within a specific socio-religious context, traditions, and histories, and confer upon the dreamer detailed knowledge of oral, ritual, or social traditions meant to empower not only the

individual but the community. Furthermore, the potency of these instructions, objects, or songs, for example, is experienced through the process of enactment; the specific contents of the vision are reenacted in socially shared contexts that allow a more empowered existence. In other words, dreams and visions open up the boundaries of perception and action as manifestations of sacred reality that contribute “to an enrichment of the social and waking world of communal experience” (65). Visions, then, are dialogical not only with respect to the past and present, but also with respect to the individual and his or her community.

This dialogical experience also points to the ways in which Native cultures and traditions change and transform over time. The religious world is not seen as static, but as emerging, with variable contents and interactions that that bring subtle change and transformation to the religious context of a people. As Irwin states,

Tradition in this sense is a process of gradual transformation of the historical and reflective consciousness of the individual and community over long periods of time. It is a dialogical process by which meaning, symbols, actions, and objects all reflect past interactions and present elaborations, regardless of how minute or subtle the change may be. There is a continual process of “mythic elaboration” in which dream and visionary experiences contribute to the general structures of mythic discourse. Simultaneously, the symbols and forms of mythic discourse are incorporated into visionary experience or reenactment and form a mythic foreground for further interpretation. Therefore, dreaming among the Plains peoples *acts both to validate cultural traditions and to facilitate their dynamic transformation.* (199, my italics)

In other words, there is a continuity of tradition in which past experiences and beliefs interact with present experiences and revelations of sacred reality that continue to inform and transform traditions today.

It is also important to realize that at the core of Native religious traditions is a belief in the ontological reality of the sacred, and that this reality reveals meaning, understanding, and empowerment through direct encounters with people (Deloria 1994, Irwin 1994, Harrod, Kidwell et. al. 2001). If we reduce Native traditions to forms of social organization or psychological defenses to an otherwise chaotic existence, then we do a great disservice to them, and fundamentally misunderstand the tradition of the holy in Native American religions. We do the same when we relegate Native “religion” to a minor category of discourse, overlooking the primacy of religious experience in Native American life. As Vine Deloria Jr. states,

Religion dominates the tribal culture, and distinctions existing in Western civilization no longer present themselves. Political activity and religious activity are barely distinguishable. History is not divided into categories. It is simultaneously religious, political, economic, social, and intellectual. (194)

Kidwell et. al. express the same idea.

Whereas outsiders may identify a single ritual as the religion of a particular people, the people themselves will likely see that ceremony as merely an extension of their day-to-day existence, all parts of which are experienced within ceremonial parameters and should be seen as “religious.” Thus, this theology treats the whole of Indian life as a religious phenomenon and does not try to separate out part of that existence in order to fit it into the Amer-European category of religion. (12)

And Eva Garoutte:

In traditional American Indian societies, spirituality and ceremony are not usually separated from other domains of life. Government, the judiciary, education, the legal system, the family – all these institutions have been constructed in the light of the sacred. (116)

This pervasive nature of religion challenges the modern Western proclivity of thinking that religion can be a discrete, bounded domain of private life. In Native tribal life, such displacement is incongruous. The practice and articulation of native ceremonies and beliefs is indivisible from cultural life.

The importance of community ceremonies cannot be overstated, especially in a tradition that transmits knowledge through oral and ritual activities, not writings. As Vine Deloria Jr. states, “Ceremonies of community-wide scope are the chief characteristic feature of religious activity” (194). These activities become pivotal in the life of the community not only as vehicles of knowledge, but as creators and re-creators of relationship, of covenant, and of community. They are the enactment of vision, of direct encounters with the primary, sacred reality. Ceremony explicitly folds the sacred into everyday living, and the sacredness of relationship and covenant are born and reborn within and among them. Sacred time, sacred place, and sacred beings present themselves in real ways, and the community is brought into contact with the origins of life (Irwin 1994).

In sum, Native American understandings of religion are not based on objective beliefs or individual persuasions, but on communal experiences and tribal ceremonies that enliven the

relations among all living things. The sweat lodge ceremony is one ceremony among many that extends these relations explicitly, and its practice may in fact be imbued with political and social concern.

The Ceremony of the Sweat lodge – History and Practice

When addressing the issue of ceremony, like religion, it is important to avoid establishing an orthodoxy or homogeneity that would not represent the heterogeneous nature of ceremonial practice (Bucko 1998). The sweat lodge ceremony is one ceremony among many, and while it may be the most widespread tradition, it exists in a variety of forms throughout the tribal communities of Native peoples. According to Joseph Bruchac, “The most widespread sweat lodge tradition today is that of the Lakota Sioux, who call it *inipi*. The Lakota people were tenacious in clinging to the *inipi* through a time when many other American Indian tribes were forced by the pressure of the missionaries and the Federal government to give up their sweat lodges” (2). Although the tenacity of the Lakota people may in fact be a significant contributing factor to the survival of the ceremony (and the Lakota might argue vice-versa), a brief review of the history of that practice may reveal other reasons as well.

Sweat lodge ceremonies have been a part of life for indigenous people for centuries, first written about by Europeans in the early sixteenth century when the Spanish missionaries went to Mexico (Bruchac 1997). According to Raymond Bucko, explorer Louis Hennepin recorded the earliest written account of a Dakota sweat lodge ritual in 1680 during his captivity by the Santee Dakotas. In this record Hennepin refers to the lodge as a “Stove,” skin-covered and probably dome shaped, which was used for its curative power and involved singing and the bringing of hot stones into the sweat.

Nineteenth century Dakota accounts describe a “hemispherical framework” made with pliable poles covered with skins or blankets within which water was poured over hot rocks to create a vapor. Observers acknowledged it as a religious and purification rite and the Dakotas themselves saw healing as part of a spiritual process. Missionaries, however, were quick to denounce the religious/spiritual dimensions of the ceremony yet remained tolerant and often accommodating to its medicinal and hygienic effects. As Bucko notes, “What concerned the missionaries in dealing with the sweat lodge was neither the physical cleansing in the bath nor its

salutary effects, but the spiritual power attributed to the Sioux divinities invoked and accessed through the ritual” (31).

Observers found great variation in practice as well as belief and early missionaries considered such heterogeneity indicative of religious degeneration, especially when compared to the rigidly defined and documented orthodoxy of their own systems (30). Such “degenerate” innovations included the variety of contexts in which the sweat was used: curing illness and purifying the body, causing illness for malicious purposes, finding lost items, counseling and consolation, asking for protection and preparing for other ceremonies, for success in endeavors, to communicate with spirits, to achieve ritual purity, and to prepare oneself for martial endeavors, just to name a few. The numbers of participants in each sweat varied as well and larger huts with “more ceremony” were erected to accommodate them when necessary. The Lakotas also were unique in incorporating the sweat lodge into the Ghost Dance from 1889 to 1890, where it served, like the Ghost Dance itself, as a “cultural” purification (cleansing them from alien cultural contact) and a return to the power of the past (41). As Bucko notes, “Early observers make it clear that the sweat lodge ritual was a flexible ceremony whose structure and usage depended on circumstance. Its goals were purification in preparation for contact with spirits, curing, and seeking aid for a multiplicity of needs” (31).

Nineteenth and twentieth century Lakota accounts are consistent with the above. “The shape of the lodge is round, willows tied together at the top form a frame, skin coverings are used, the rocks are heated outside and transported with special implements into the lodge, and prayers and songs are employed in the ceremony” (Bucko, 34). Different observers also note that a hole is dug in the center of the lodge to receive the rocks and the dirt removed from the hole is used to construct an altar in front of the door. A buffalo skull is placed on the altar facing into the lodge; a tall pole is erected in front of the lodge on which sacrificial offerings of brightly colored cloth, tobacco, and other materials are hung. Various herbs may be used in the lodge to draw certain spirits and repel others, a pipe may be brought in, and the lodge is often located outside of the camp circle (35).

Another consistency involved the importance of sacred stones both in the sweat lodge and in worship in general. Dakota missionaries indicated that stones were often considered the symbol for and sometimes the dwelling place of the gods (31, 33), and Lakota accounts variously report rock has a special prominence because it is the oldest and grandfather of all things (38),

and sweat lodge stones were often invoked for curing and marshaling spiritual powers (39). For the Lakota, stones are regarded as particularly powerful and enduring objects, and *Inyan* [stone] was one of the great powers from which all creation originated (Young 2002, Lee 1994). The kinship status of stone as “grandfather” emphasizes not only the way in which creation is related, but its particular place in relation to humans.

The lodge remained an important ceremony during the early missionization of the Dakotas and Lakotas with continuing adaptations in both its use and interpretations. One such adaptation that appears in the Lakota textual material in the early nineteenth hundreds involves a shift “from a more utilitarian understanding in the early period, when sweats were used to achieve concrete objectives, to a more spiritual and moral orientation” (Bucko, 46). For example, one prays for “good acts” and “straight doings” and for the ability to leave “the bad things I have done” behind. In addition, the role of the spirits in the ceremony seems to go “underground” as well. As Bucko notes,

Cleansing is directed toward moral behavior, and the role of healing is attributed directly to the actions of the sweat rather than to the spiritual powers working through the rocks and their breath. The role of the spirits is scarcely mentioned in these accounts; the power of the sweat is in the ceremony itself. (39)

The reasons for these changes remain vague, but it is important to note that this period of time included intense missionary movements among the Lakotas, vocal condemnations of Lakota spiritual reality by missionaries as well as native converts, and official governmental repression of Native religion. In 1873, sweat lodge ceremonies in particular were banned by the U.S. government, and most Native ceremonial practices were considered illegal until 1934 in the U.S. and 1950’s in Canada. Native Americans were denied the freedom to publicly congregate, the freedom of speech, and the free exercise of their religion. These laws were actively enforced, and many native people were fined and jailed simply because they took part in a sweat lodge (Bruchac 1997, Ross 1998, Kidwell et. al. 2001). As a result, generalized aspects of physical and moral cleansing continued to be stressed over spiritual interaction in the sweat lodge, and many rituals were performed discreetly if not secretly in order to protect them from critics (Bucko, 51). When references to the spirits were made, they were subsumed by the Great Spirit, “who is now addressed in the ceremony by the leader, retaining the tradition of accessing spiritual power

through the medium of the sweat, its content, and its procedures, while adapting the belief in diverse spirits to one more acceptable to an outside monotheistic world” (ibid).

In the 1950s, the world of the sweat lodge changed again. With the publication of *The Sacred Pipe* by Joseph Epes Brown and the newfound popularity of *Black Elk Speaks* by John Neihardt (originally published in 1932), the influential voice of Black Elk emerged. Although issues surrounding whose “voice” it “really is” abound (How much influence did Brown and Neihardt have on what was recorded? What about Black Elk’s involvement with the Catholic Church?),¹ descriptions and interpretations presented in these texts continue to influence practice today. In *God Is Red*, Vine Deloria, Jr. refers to these two books as “a kind of sacred national Indian religious canon by themselves,” not because they ought to be but because they have been elevated to that position by many non-Natives and Indians alike (36). In addition, Deloria Jr. contends that the Sioux teachings presented in these books were phrased in such a universal manner that “many Indian young people... believed them to be an accurate statement about Indian religions” (ibid). So it must be noted that the Black Elk materials are not the Authoritative Narrative for sweat lodge practitioners. The Black Elk materials present one perspective among many, as have all other interpretations to date. Yet it is still a part of a greater tradition with historical precedence and implications for contemporary interpretation and use. The fact that it has been widely read and embraced by many Natives and non-Natives may add significantly to its influence, however (Bucko, 58).

According to Bucko, Black Elk’s description of the lodge and its ceremonies continues the shift from personal physical regeneration and success to more universal, moral, and social regeneration. Bucko also credits Black Elk for being “the first detailed record of a symbolic interpretation of the lodge... it is the first narrative by a native person whose emphasis is the interpretation of symbols used in the ceremony rather than the efficacy of the lodge in obtaining favors from the spirits or in generalized healing and moral cleansing” (51-52). Black Elk said, “the power of a thing or an act is in the meaning and the understanding” (Brown 1953:32).

Bucko adds:

The belief in physical healing available through the sweat is never abandoned; neither is the belief that spirits that come into the sweat have power to act on the world. Black

¹ For a more in depth discussion concerning the ambiguities surrounding *The Sacred Pipe* and *Black Elk Speaks*, see Clyde Holler (1995) or Raymond DeMallie, ed. (1984).

Elk's material, however, universalizes the imagery of the sweat; the role of spirits is downplayed and a focus is placed on one God. (53).

Although traditional Lakota religion acknowledges the simultaneous oneness and many-ness of Wakan Tanka (Great Mystery), Bucko suggests here that the emphasis for Black Elk was the One. Black Elk's emphasis on the meaning and interpretation of symbols may lend itself to Bucko's interpretation of "universalizing" as well, as symbols can be easily separated from their source and power (the history and vision of the people), applicable everywhere to everyone. But this need not be the case.

My desire here is not to present Black Elk's symbolic interpretation of the sweat lodge, but to demonstrate the ways in which this tradition "draws on the past and the present to create acceptable forms of ritual behavior" (Bucko, 101). In all of these accounts, there remains a fundamental broad consistency at the level of structure and practice, yet expressed motivations and interpretations vary through time. But even these motivations and interpretations are grounded in a certain continuity as well, perhaps made most clear in the practice of the ceremony itself: the continuity of the communal affair. As Vine Deloria Jr. points out, Native religions are not sets of objective beliefs or interpretations but rather communal practices "in which the community participates but in which no individual claims exclusive franchise" (195). As such, motivations and interpretations are not matters of personal choice or objective belief, but are bound with the communities that enliven them through religious experiences and ceremony. As Bucko states, "the question of what constitutes legitimate practice in the sweat lodge is vital to the practice of individuals who participate... for they ultimately legitimate or disqualify practice by deciding whether or not a ceremony is traditional and therefore acceptable and effective" (14).

In the end, I am drawn back to Vine Deloria Jr.'s remarks concerning the revelation of knowledge through ceremony, specifically as this revelation is related to particular holy sites and land. He states, "The ceremonies enable humans to have continuing relationships with higher spiritual powers so that each bit of information is specific to the time, place, and circumstances of the people. No revelation can be regarded as universal because times and conditions change" (277). In addition, people must always be ready to experience new revelations at new locations, for the spirits are alive and continually revealing the sacred to us.

General History of the Sweat Lodge in Prison

In the U.S., religion in prison is regulated primarily by two governmental forces: judicial courts and correctional administrators. Although courts have held generally that the First Amendment guarantees inmates religious freedom, the realities of prison life necessitate government involvement in the application of policies and procedures for religious access. Prior to the 1960s, religious involvement in prison was often expected to conform to Protestant norms, and it wasn't until prisoners of minority faiths began demanding religious rights in the 1960s that courts and correctional administrators began to change that norm.

In 1978, the U.S. Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), which specifically states that Native American prisoners cannot be denied the right to practice their religion. Interpreted by the courts as only advisory in nature, it was an unenforceable policy. The Supreme Court ruled in 1988: "Nowhere in the law is there so much as a hint of any intent to create a cause of action or any judicially enforceable individual rights" (d'Errico, 491). So theoretically, it was a valiant policy. Practically speaking, however, there was no guidance as to how prisons were to accommodate Native traditions, and it was left primarily to the discretion of prison administrators, which resulted in varying policies and degrees of access to the traditions. Access to and availability of religious leaders and ceremonies remain inconsistent from state to state and prison to prison. In 1996 and 1997, death row inmate Darrell Young Elk Rich requested a sweat lodge ceremony at San Quentin State Prison before his death. His request was denied for "security reasons," although a similar request by Arizona death row inmate Darrick Gerlaugh was honored in 1999 (Thomson 2000). The state of Texas accommodates Native American practices except where they would violate prison rules (such as smoking tobacco) or pose security problems (such as sweat lodges, which would require the use of hot rocks, axes, and shovels) (Wall, 2002). Women inmates in particular often have less access to Native American religious leaders and ceremonies than their male counterparts (Ross 136, Grobsmith 117).

Winning protection as a "religion" has not been trouble free for Natives, either. Native communities have had to fashion their ceremonies into discrete "religious rituals" in order to present their traditions as "religious" and ensure that their inmates have at least some access to tradition. This results in a certain amount of compromising in the use of language and categories

that are not intrinsic to their traditions. It can also be seen as part of a continued imposition of dominant culture in interpreting and defining what is “religious.” This lends itself to continued misunderstanding and misrepresentation, for the practice of Christianity is often held as the norm for non-Christian religious activities in prison (another Euro-centric trend). As Waldram notes,

Such an approach, in addition to being culturally and morally repugnant, necessarily limits the availability of the Aboriginal services to those that have Christian parallels. Hence, “equality” is, in effect, inequality. Aboriginal spirituality cannot be practised (sic) for an hour on Sundays and Wednesdays, in one specific room within the prison. (17)

Issues concerning “reasonable access” to ceremonies and admission of native spiritual leaders in to prison continue to be litigated in the American court system.

In 1993 Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This act reset a standard of “compelling interest” and “least restrictive means” test when evaluating laws and regulations that substantially burden religious exercise. In other words, the government must demonstrate that they have a compelling interest in restricting or denying a religious claim, and that they are using the least restrictive means in regulating a religious practice. While seeming to be a step in the right direction, the period after RFRA did not produce any particular inmate-friendly trend in the courts – judges continued to defer to the asserted penological interests of correctional administrators. David Kurtzer (2002) remarks:

As the RFRA-era data indicate, courts did not use heightened scrutiny to bring about wholesale change in inmate religious liberties and have been disinclined to second-guess correctional officials. Rather, policy changes have come largely from correctional institutions, when institutional and inmate interests have aligned. In this respect, the most significant role for “strict scrutiny” may be in changing the internal calculus of prison administrators. (1914)

In other words, RFRA helped not so much in the courts, but in providing guidelines for prison administrators that helped keep biases and personal opinions out of the decision making process.

In any event, RFRA was struck down on grounds of federalism four years after its enactment, and in September of 2000 Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) in another effort to correct what it viewed as the High Court’s narrowing of the scope of free exercise protection. Like RFRA, RLUIPA provides that substantial burdens on religious exercise will only be sustained if they further a compelling state

interest in the least restrictive manner. Unlike RFRA, the RLUIPA expands protection to asserted religious beliefs and practices that are *not* central to or mandated by the inmate's asserted religion. In the spring of 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of RLUIPA. Its detractors argued that RLUIPA sends a message of government endorsement of religion by expanding the rights of religious inmates relative to identically-situated secular inmates and by encouraging inmates to become religious in order to enjoy greater rights. In his review of religious practice in prison, David Kurtzer (2002), as quoted above, concludes that significant changes in religious accommodation tend to come from the correctional administrators themselves, not from courts.

The effect of court cases is not limited to changes in the law, however. Elizabeth Grobsmith (1994) makes an interesting point concerning the impact that twenty years of litigation has had on the Native American community in prison. Not only have there been positive gains in the exercise of Native religious freedom and cultural rights, but there have been "subtle political consequences" as well, namely:

... a stronger Indian identification, a tremendous rise in group solidarity, the notion of native Americans being a political force to be reckoned with, and the pride they experience in being the only ethnic group in prison to have a special federal court order which dictates that the prison is compelled by law to allow their spiritual and cultural expression. (88)

The result is a strong, cohesive Native American inmate population united by "their culture, religious beliefs, and the struggle to remain native" (Ross, 125). "Regardless of tribal affiliation, family history, or place of origin, Native American prisoners become unified in prison by virtue of their unique cultural and religious activities during incarcerations" (Grobsmith, 38).

This unified Native American population tends to coalesce around a highly plains-influenced, pan-Indian religious community characterized by strong ethnic markers (particular ceremonies, sacred objects, and practices) as well as a desire to stand apart from other inmates (Grobsmith, 38). The sweat lodge itself seems to be the most common "universal" ceremony that has come to transcend tribal affiliations, especially in the prison setting. On one hand this would seem to perpetuate the assumed homogeneity of native tribes and hinder their cultural diversity. On the other, it opens up an effective avenue for cultural renewal and healing. The sweat lodge itself has a history of accommodating to the needs of its participants and being a

focal point for solidarity and identification. It also seems inherently tuned to concepts of interdependence and the notion of helping others (see Ross, 140). In addition, it provides opportunities for learning about native history, culture, and spirituality, recovering repressed heritage(s), building personal and communal identity, affirmation, and the opportunity for self-creation over-and-against prison culture as well as culture-at-large. Other benefits of participating in Native cultural and ceremonial practices that are commonly noted include catharsis, cleansing (physical, emotional, and spiritual), fostering pride and identity, strengthening social bonds, reviving the social world, moral and spiritual purity, and renewal (personal and cultural). Ceremonial participation also allows continuing relationships with higher spiritual powers, new revelations of the sacred, and a continuing connection with what Howard Harrod has termed “transcendent horizons of meaning” that constitute and deepen the dimensions of the shared, everyday world (Harrod 1987).

James Waldram contends that focusing on Native spirituality as “religion” obscures other dimensions of its practice, such as its therapeutic and healing dimensions. (This is an interesting turn of events considering that historically it has been the religious aspects of native ceremonies that were forced underground, whereas the healing dimensions were often branded as “okay.”) It remains difficult for prison authorities and parole boards to accept the idea that the sweat lodge offers an equally valuable method for addressing the nature of their crimes as prison rehabilitation programs (Grobsmith, 120), yet they remain popular treatment choices for Native American inmates.

Inmates claim that regular attendance at the sweat lodge is extremely important for their maintaining sobriety. By far the majority of imprisoned Native Americans believe such attendance is preferable to any prison programming... The sweat lodge is where answers to difficult questions are sought, where private prayer can be spoken and sung and supported by one’s brothers, where no ridicule or negative attitudes can prevail, and where ultimate communication with the spirits can be accomplished. This is the area where purification of body and spirit occurs, without which rehabilitation cannot occur. (Grobsmith, 118)

In Nebraska, Indian participants in therapeutic programs are encouraged to participate in the sweat lodge ceremonies and “some inmates do not wish to participate in any prison mental health counseling, preferring to address their addiction, family problems, personal difficulties, and offense commission in an entirely Indian fashion” (Grobsmith 117). Other such fashions include

personal prayer with or without the Sacred Pipe, attendance at healing ceremonies conducted by medicine men, and preparation for and attendance at the Vision Quest and Sun Dance ceremonies. It is important to remember that through these ceremonies, Native participants are experiencing more than just solidarity and healing. They are participating in the creation of conditions for religious experiences, fostering relationships with spiritual powers and experiencing new revelations of the sacred as well. Perhaps this accounts for some of our systemic distrust of these traditions, for some of their effects may be well beyond the intention or control of the “authorities.”

As long as correctional systems remain oriented toward assimilating inmates into Euro-American or Euro-Canadian cultures, the correctional system itself “acts as a mechanism to increase the urbanization, and possible assimilation, of Aboriginal peoples” (Waldram 26). Ross contends that Native American spirituality has helped Native people survive “the brutal dynamics of colonization and prisonization” (140). It is a continued means of resisting the domination and imposition of another culture. “By conserving a Native worldview within an oppressive institution, these women are truly activist... they are engaged in a struggle to transform a racist, sexist, and classist institution” (141). As long as correctional systems continue to have minimal understandings of inmate involvement in Native spirituality and practices, the rehabilitation of Native people will remain in jeopardy as well.

I now turn to the history of the sweat lodge at a particular prison in the Midwest.

Anamosa State Penitentiary

Anamosa State Penitentiary is a medium/maximum security adult male prison located in Anamosa, Iowa. Its design capacity is 840 single cells, but in the last few years it has housed a little over 1,000 inmates. Approximately 95 percent of those incarcerated at Anamosa will return to society, in many cases less than two years after their admission. As stated in their brochure published in 1997, “The primary objective is to release individuals from the institution who have learned to cope with their problems and live within the rules of society”(2). Treatment programs offered to this end include group and individual counseling, release planning, substance abuse treatment, job seeking skills, sex offender treatment, moral thinking, cognitive self-change, money management, anger management, psychological and psychiatric services, academic

education programs (high school and college credits), on-the-job training and work skills in on- and off-site industry programs, recreation opportunities, and religious activities. “The programs are designed to provide inmates with an opportunity to make personal adjustment changes which will serve them well in return to the community. It should be recognized that incarceration is only part of the rehabilitation process, and that the motivation and desire to change originate with the individual” (1).

The sweat lodge came to Anamosa in 1987 at the request of some inmates and under the direction and advising of the then current Native American Consultant, Ken Bordeaux. An employee of the State of Iowa, Bordeaux was contracted by the Department of Corrections and put into place as a consultant for Native American religious and cultural affairs in the penal system, a common practice for penal systems nation wide (Grobsmith 1994). It was his job (and still is the job of his successors) to make sure the Native American men and women in the penal system had what they needed. This included acting as an advocate on behalf of the Natives to the Department of Corrections as well as arranging occasional (although unpredictable and infrequent) visits from medicine men to the prison. Since many of the men know little about the tradition when they come to prison, it was (and is) often his job to teach them as well.²

The fact that the lodge is in prison is itself contested. Some Native American religious leaders object outright to the presence of religious instruments and grounds in prison. The idea of spirituality mediated and influenced by the institution, or that the sacred instruments, sacred grounds, or sacred ways may not be treated or respected as they should – these risks are viewed by some as common and great. In addition, prison policies usually require religious groups to allow anyone to join, whether Native or not, and Native spiritual leaders can be expected to work with non-Natives as well. Elders and spiritual leaders are occasionally harassed, subtly and overtly. Medicine bundles and pipe bundles can be searched without respect. Time limits and other restrictions placed on practices can be unreasonable, and elders who do agree to work in prisons are often overworked (Waldram 1997).

The men with whom I talked also reported some consternation among their peers concerning my interviews with them about the sweat lodge. Apparently there was and continues to be disagreement concerning the appropriateness of talking to “outsiders” about the ceremony of the lodge, especially a woman. Although the men did not talk in detail with me about these

² Today many of the men primarily learn from and teach each other.

disagreements, I find them to be understandable reactions by a people ensconced in a history of disrespect and exploitation by others. This can also be reflective of their desire to maintain social boundaries and authority. As Paul Johnson reports in his work *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods* (2002), traditions that transmit knowledge orally and ritually often contain and retain authority, prestige, and power through secrecy. Sharing knowledge can not only weaken the power of ceremony, it can weaken their resistance against cultural threats (colonization, globalization) and can undermine the sacred importance of revelation, membership, and authority. The men who were willing to talk with me expressed a desire to educate others so that misunderstandings and prejudices can be overcome.

The lodge itself is located in a section of the prison yard not usually trafficked by other inmates, a space that actually affords them a relative amount of privacy and seclusion. The grounds are about 50 ft x 14 ft, at one end of which is the lodge (which is about 10 ft in diameter), at the other a fire pit, and between the two an altar consisting of a buffalo skull and a staff painted black, white, red, and yellow (the Lakota directional colors). The lodge itself is circular and dome shaped with a frame made of willow saplings and a covering of blankets and tarps. The entrance faces west and in its center is a pit that holds the hot rocks brought in for the ceremony. In large plastic buckets nearby they keep extra rocks for the ceremony and kindling for the fire. The morning of the sweat, one of the brothers brings back firewood from the wagon gate of the prison. The pipe, herbs, feathers, prayer ties, and other instruments used in the ceremony are kept in a locked closet fairly close to the grounds but accessible only with permission – “for security reasons.” One inmate remarked that this is one reason why some medicine men and other natives on the outside may object to having this ceremony in prison – such sacred instruments, especially the pipe, are not to be treated this way.

Technically, the consultant has the authority over how the ceremony is run, but it is the inmates who actually run the ceremonies; they are planned, led, and carried through by the men who participate. As a result, each sweat may differ slightly from the others depending on who is leading it. It is also the job of the consultant to approve men to sweat. Exactly what his criteria are for approving men to sweat is unclear to me. It seems at one point one of the consultants required the men to have a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) number in order to sweat (a number which verifies that an individual is a member of a federally recognized tribe), but that was contested by inmates who did not register with the BIA and that criterion was rescinded. Since

then, inmates are expected to meet with the Consultant if they are interested in sweating and through some decision making process he grants or denies approval to sweat. There are differing opinions as to the effectiveness or sensibility of his policies, but regardless, he does have the final say. At the time of my interviews all Natives who were interested in sweating were allowed access to the lodge (in all about 25).

Security also factors in when making decisions regarding the sweat. Certain items and practices are restricted to the sweat lodge area, such as the use of sweet grass and other herbs, or the sacred pipe, and certain ones are kept out of the prison altogether. This is of course a not uncommon point of contention between the men and the prison administrators and the amount of restrictions placed on the men (regarding access to the lodge, access to sacred objects, etc.) can vary without warning “for security reasons.”³ Overall, however, the men report a fair amount of support from the administration as of late which they attribute to a growing knowledge, understanding, and respect by the administration for the ceremonies and spirituality of the Native American inmates, as well as a more serious attitude about the ceremonies by the Native Americans themselves than in the past.

The Natives at Anamosa run a sweat once a week on Saturday mornings, usually running into the early afternoon. The fire is started in the morning by one of the men, and the others come and join him according to their various responsibilities and roles throughout the ceremony. The sweat lodge ceremony itself progresses through four rounds of closing the door, pouring water on the rocks, praying and singing, and then opening the door to end the round. Many of the songs they sing are in Lakota, learned from each other, the Consultant, or medicine men who have visited them in the past. Use of the Lakota language is important both in its quality of expression and as a link to heritage, identity, and practices. As Bucko states, “the use of the Lakota language returns one verbally to the pre-contact world of presumed harmony and bliss, just as the structure of the sweat physically returns one to that same world” (143-44). Prayers are usually said in English with known Lakota words and phrases employed when appropriate. This whole process takes between 4 and 6 hours, depending on the leader and the needs of the group.

In talking with the men about the ceremony, I was continually reminded that each participant approaches the ceremony with different beliefs and understandings. As one inmate

³ See Grobsmith pp. 87-92 for further discussion regarding conflicts between “what inmates perceive as reasonable and what correctional authorities allow.” She continues: “It is almost as though no gains in privileges... or rights... occur without the inmates’ forcing the prison to comply, through litigation...” (87).

asserts, “Not everyone uses [the sweat] for the same reason... it means a lot of things to people, but every meaning is different. It might mean something to me, it might mean something else for him, and it might mean something else for you.” This personal variability may also account for differing reports of efficacy. One man may approach the lodge for healing, another for interaction with the spirits, another for affective connection with relatives, another “just because,” and another for a combination of these and more. How it affects them (its “success”), then, may depend on their intentions, beliefs, and understandings of the lodge, its symbols, and its ceremonies.

It is interesting to note that many of these men are not Lakota and most have never experienced a sweat lodge ceremony before they came to prison, yet they have managed to negotiate a working tradition that provides them with meaningful symbols and experiences within their “own culture.” In a sense, then, they seem to be participating in a sort of pan-Indian culture, albeit a heavily Sioux-influenced one, complete with highly visible symbols “that many offenders (like non-Aboriginal people in general) have come to view as being quintessentially “Indian”” (Waldram 79; c.f. Grobsmith, 47). I imagine this common ground developed through conversations with (and teachings from) the elders and the consultant, common readings (they make many references to Black Elk), and conversations among the inmates themselves. James Waldram makes a similar observation in his work in Canadian prisons. He writes,

Given this cultural heterogeneity, symbolic healing in the prison is predicated on the ability of the Elders and inmates to negotiate meaning and ritual, to establish a common cultural ground and understanding of the symbols to be used. The Elders develop this through education, both formal and informal, and through dialogue and counseling. (79)

The experiences of these men in prison, then, are not uncommon. Many Native Americans come to prison with little or no familiarity with traditional cultures and religions, and for many inmates prison affords them their first opportunity to learn about Native spirituality and participate in traditional ceremonies (Grobsmith 37, Waldram 136). United by their Indian identity, inmates from different backgrounds, spiritual traditions and cultural heritages are in a sense forced “to enhance common themes and symbols, and downplay the significance of differences, as a means of establishing the common world view necessary for healing to occur” (Waldram, 164). As a result, the majority of Native Americans in prison are followers of a Plains Indian practice and participation in the sweat lodge has become an immensely important

religious and cultural symbol of identification with Native American culture in prison. As Grobsmith states,

The sweat lodge is a Native American practice that has become a nationally recognized means of religious worship for Indians, regardless of tribal affiliation... Attending sweat ceremonies has become the single most important and widespread religious activity among native American prisoners in the United States; it provides a unity of cultural and religious expression in prison, despite the variability in tribal affiliation. (49)

For Indian prisoners, “commitment to the sweat lodge strengthens in prison as Indian inmates are drawn to its unifying and affirming effects. Sweat lodge ceremonies are uniquely theirs” (Grobsmith, 1999)⁴, and the community works together to develop an understanding of symbols and world-view that is meaningful (or more likely becomes meaningful) to them. They have engaged their historical past in ways meaningful for their present context and situation. And their tradition is continually validated in various communal and interpersonal ways – by the administration, the participants, and non-Indian inmates as well.

⁴ C.f. Sherkat “Rational Choice Theory and Religion” (1997) on the tendency of religious preferences to become stronger with consumption.

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE INSIDE

The purpose of this chapter is to present an “insiders view” into the spiritual practices of Native Americans in prison. The following analysis was developed from interviews conducted with ten inmates at a medium/maximum security penitentiary in the Midwest during the summer of 2002. In analyzing the data, I looked for concepts and categories of thought that were representative of the entire group, as well as variations within the group that evidence the diversity of experience and understanding. In presenting these concepts here, I use extensive quotations from my informants so that the reader can hear the voices of the incarcerated and so that my collaborators have an active voice in conveying the meanings, experiences, and interpretations of their lives.

My collaborators consist of ten men, ages 26-47, average age 32.4. Two of the men self-identify as Winnebago, two as Santee Sioux, one Mesquaquee, one Cheyenne, one Mexican, one Omaha, one Sioux, and one Hunkpapa Lakota (Sioux). All of the men had been in prison from 3-15 years, average 7.6 years. Eight of the men are serving their time consecutively; two have been in and out since ages 18 and 19.

As a group, the men commonly experienced alcohol and drug use and abuse in their homes and communities, and most experienced high levels of violence and crime in their homes and communities as well. Stories and comments about poverty on the reservations were common, as were problems in school ranging from fights, dropping out, getting kicked out, and attending a variety of schools while growing up. Families were often split up and all ten of my collaborators had family members involved in the criminal justice system. Most had participated in crime as juveniles themselves. One began serving time at age 14, one at 15, two at 18, and three at 19. Two of the men were raised by a grandparent or great-grandparent, two were raised by one parent, three were raised by both parents, and three did not identify by whom they were raised.

Of the ten men, four actively participated in a variety of Native American traditional spiritual practices while they were growing up. Six began participating only after coming to prison. While growing up, two of the men were raised Catholic, three were raised in both Western and Native American traditions (i.e., Episcopal/Indian boarding school, or Lutheran mother/Lakota

father), one was raised around Mesquaque traditions, one around both Mesquaque and Lakota traditions, and one around Native American Church ceremonies.

General Overview

The research method that I use involves analyzing data in a way that uncovers themes and issues therein (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Rather than imposing a theoretical framework to the data and finding ways in which my collaborators could confirm or deny it, my intention is to build theory based on concepts and categories that emerge from my collaborators. My goal, then, is not only to provide an accurate description of how the sweat lodge interacts with the lives of inmates, but also to explicate variations in meaning, impact, and affect as well.

In general, I found that participation in the sweat lodge ceremony is the central strategy by which these men create and maintain a sense of community and communal belonging within the prison system. It provides these men with avenues for engaging shared values, practices, and ideologies that seem to encourage personal healing, communal healing, and identity formation and/or reformation. Variables that influence the dynamics of this process, however, include tribal, ethnic, and/or religious identity, frequency or intensity of participation, internalization of community knowledge and values, relationships between fellow participants as well as other members of the prison community including prison staff and administration, personal qualities of sincerity, intention, and responsibility, and the physical and emotional conditions of life in prison, to name a few.

Concepts and Categories of Discussion

In the course of my discussions with the men, six primary categories of discussion emerged. Most prominent were the categories of Identity, Community, and Values. The other categories were Effects of Ceremonial Participation, Relationships, and Struggles and Conflict. Although I have separated these themes out for the purposes of discussion, they are deeply intertwined and co-creative with one another. Each is elaborated below.

Identity

The sweat lodge ceremony plays a central role in the experience of identity for Native American inmates. For them, the ceremony is intimately bound with “being Indian.” As the men said many times throughout our discussions, “the sweat lodge is all about being Indian,” “this is our way of life.”

“Being Indian” does not refer only to racial, ethnic, or tribal identity. It also reflects social and historical experiences that are unique to the Native American community. As one man said,

The sweat lodge is all about being Indian. It’s just us. It’s our way of life. And a lot of people, they can go home and they can eat steaks, they can walk to the store, they can be accepted, they can go into a grocery store and not (be) looked twice at. They can go to a job interview and be picked to be first. And us, it don’t matter where we’re at, we got to be Indian. We’ve got to eat commodities, we’ve got to be second looked at, we’ve got to be Indian. There ain’t no changing it, that’s the way we were born. That’s the way we’re gonna die.

Other comments were directed at the way in which the sweat lodge ceremony is connected to the history of the people, including the incarceration of Natives.

The first time I was incarcerated as a juvenile I was about 14 years old.... From the stories and from the things I was taught as a youngster in religion, it was no big deal getting locked up. It was natural because we practice a religion (that) they used to lock people up for practicing. So for me, it was like an experience that many people before me had already went down, but not for the crime, for different things.

It’s all about understanding the circle of life of Native American people. Our plight, where we’re at. You know, people died to preserve this way of life and that’s what I was taught in the beginning and that’s what aroused my curiosity, you know. Why would these people die? Why would these people give their lives for this? And not knowing anything about it (I thought) it’s just a pipe, it’s just a tent, it’s just rocks, you know. What’s the real purpose of all this? And as I got further into it and got a lot more educated, to me, you know, it’s all about freedom. Freedom of the mind, the heart, the spirit.

For this man, the sweat lodge ceremony is not only about the life of the people, but the freedom of the people as well. Why did his ancestors preserve the lodge? Because it helped them to live, it helped them transcend their immediate circumstances and experience something greater. In

prison, where life is strictly regulated and inmates are told where to go and what to do and when to do it and how to do it, the sweat lodge gives them access to ancestors and spirits that break through the profane and reveal deeper, more profound connections in life. The sweat lodge is bound to a particular people with particular historical and social circumstances, and the sweat lodge in prison embodies “being Indian” in very profound ways.

As a result, many discussions of identity occurred in the context of who is allowed to participate in sweat lodge ceremonies, particularly in a prison setting. Outside of prison, “anybody can go to the sweat lodge.” In prison, though, “it’s just totally different. It’s a totally different culture. It’s a penitentiary.”

If you’re not Indian you shouldn’t come over (to the sweat lodge). Even though that’s wrong to say that, you know, that’s just like saying (only) white people can go to Catholic Church. Well, that’s not right. You know, anybody can go to church, and just like anybody can go to the sweat lodge. You don’t have to be Native. But in here, in the penitentiary, if you’re going to the sweat lodge, you belong to a particular... you belong to us. And if you’re not Native, we don’t want you coming over.

It’s an unspoken rule out in the yard that you have to be Native to sweat. Everybody knows all the inmates out in the yard and all that, and so they don’t try. The ones that do try, the half-breeds that do come from other institutions and they’ve sweated there... they just get turned away. Some participate, but you know, the majority of them will get turned away. It’s just the way it is.

It’s almost like you have to prove that you’re Native American. You have to prove to me that you’re Native American; then I’ll let you come over. It’ll even go so far as to say, you know, show me some pictures of your family. But people will come over and claim that they’re Indian, you kind of got to keep a wary eye on them.

As these quotes demonstrate, there appears to be a very clear boundary demarcation as to who belongs and doesn’t belong at the sweat lodge in prison. This demarcation is complicated, though, by the contested nature of “who’s Indian.” Some Indian inmates grow up in reservation or community contexts. Others were raised in the city, “adopted out” of their tribal communities, or taught to hide their identity in various ways. Some were teased for being “too white” in one community or family, and “too Indian” in another. Then there’s the question of who “looks” Indian, as the “show me some pictures of your family” comment illustrates. Considering the connections to historical and social experiences, this sense of boundary demarcation may be amplified in prison because of the limited resources available to them. A sweat lodge ceremony

is not like a church service in which a hundred or more people can participate, and there are no other activities in which Natives have access to tribal traditions. For Native Americans in prison, this is it. To welcome others in would not only stretch their resources but could also displace those who “should” be there, those who have historical and social connections to the ceremony.

At first glance, statements such as these seem to communicate a sense of ownership of the lodge, as if the sweat lodge is “ours” and not “yours.” A closer look reveals a more nuanced relationship, however, in which it seems that it the lodge owns them. “Owns” is not the right word here, though. It’s more of a reciprocal relationship of belonging, not possession. And this belonging is not only a sense of “I belong here” (I belong at this ceremony, or in this space), but also “you belong to us” (you are a part of our family). In prison, the notion that “you belong to us” conjures fears of threat groups and gang-like activity to prison staff. In a positive light, though, it offers a space for identity to be shaped in the light of community. This will be discussed later.

My collaborators also communicated a sense that one’s identity can be changed through participating in the sweat lodge ceremonies, especially for people who “don’t know they’re Indian,” “don’t act Indian,” or “don’t know anything about who they are.” This is common. For these men, participating in the ceremony “gets them educated about these ways,” and “over time they start to change.” They learn about their tribe, about their history, and about the ways that Native people have survived over time. They learn how to pray “in a way that makes sense” to them. They become aware of who they are in positive ways.

In addition, there is a sense that others “want to be Indian.” As some of the men said,

It seems like everybody wants to have some Native American in them now.

They want to be a part of our circle. They want to be a part of us.

All Natives participate (in the sweat lodge ceremony), and those who think they’re Native, they want to participate.

Through participating in the sweat lodge, the men are identified with a limited-access, “desirable” community of which others want to be a part. This is an interesting reversal of social roles in which the minority community is more desirable (and has more to offer) than the dominant one, at least in the perspective of the minorities.

There is also tension between “full bloods” and “mixed bloods” in the community, again in regards to who belongs at the ceremony.

(Some of the full-bloods) accept (mixed-bloods), but not as good as they would if I was a full-blood, you know what I mean? Certain ones are different.

Those who want to be part of us, those who want to be part of our group and part of our circle, they want to come over and they want to try and participate, and that’s when probably some of the struggle comes in - half-breeds against the full bloods. (Later in the conversation, this man recounted stories from his childhood when kids would get teased and beat up because “they weren’t engine enough, they was white.”)

With me being a half-breed, I have to prove myself more than some of the full-bloods do. And it ain’t no big deal. It’s something I have to do, you know.” (When asked how he proves himself, he responded:) Show sincerity in the ways. Be accepted, be willing to learn something, not go against everything. Get to know each other, and let everybody know who’s who, or what’s up, or who you are as a person. Talk to them. If they see you’re going to hang out, talk to them a lot, or not disrespect them and stuff like that, then they’ll be more willing to let you in and talk to you and be your friend.

This quote points to the ways in which “being Indian” is more than a racial marker, it’s also about being a part of the community and interacting with others with respect and a willingness to learn. One participant recounted a story of one mixed blood who had a difficult time getting permission to participate in the sweat from both the full-bloods and the administration because he was “too white.” After a long struggle, he was allowed over.

After awhile, you know, everybody considered him one of us. And they didn’t doubt his sincerity and where he was coming from. It got to the point where he was so much a part of us, we’d talk about other white folks around him like he was one of us. And he felt reluctant as we did to bring just anybody over, because there’s a lot of people who want to come over to be a part of us. And that’s the way it is today yet.

Here is a good example of how participation in the sweat lodge ceremonies can, in effect, change one’s identity, at least in terms of how others identify a subject. It is also interesting to note that of the nine men who identified themselves with a Native American tribe, only six were considered full bloods. The others identified as Cheyenne/Greek, Sioux/Scandinavian, and Hispanic/Omaha. The latter three now identify with their Native heritage.

Overall, participation in the sweat lodge ceremony seems to confer upon participants' inclusion in the Native American community, although a significant amount of debate around who has the "legitimate" right to participate remains.

Community

Discussions of community overlap with all the other discussions in this study. Community is involved in the formation of identity, in relationships that inmates have with others, in values, in effects of ceremonial participation, and in struggles. The presence of a distinct community in prison is not necessarily unique since many inmates respond to prison life by finding solidarity in group relationships or subcultures (see Ross 1998: 152-177). The difference between communities and subcultures, however, is the degree to which these communities are considered "appropriate" by prison staff and administration, and under what conditions they are or are not allowed to formally or informally congregate, thereby affecting the cohesiveness (and perhaps viability) of the group. In light of this discussion, the Native American community in this study refers specifically to the inmates who participate in the sweat lodge ceremony. The uniqueness of this community, then, may be in the degree to which it is approved and sanctioned by staff and administration (in fact, it is the only community in prison with a federal mandate supporting its existence), as well its recognition by the general prison culture. It is interesting to note that in his study of Indigenous healing activity, sociologist Robert Ness (1980) found that religious groups that are well-integrated and accepted within the broader community are more likely to produce positive change in participants than those perceived as radical sects.

Since the category of community is pervasive with all the other categories of discussion, I will limit comments here to those that describe or express attributes of the community and/or members of it. This gives the reader a sense of how participants regard and experience their community.

Participants often described the group as a close-knit and supportive "circle" made up of inmates who are "not getting into trouble." On my return trip to the prison, however, two of the inmates were in protective custody because of trouble they were getting into. This trouble had "outcast-ed" them from the others, and they expressed much concern about how they were going

to “make it right” with the group. A few months later I heard that they were working with the consultant in this regard.

As seen earlier, the group offers a sense of belonging (people “belong to us”) and desirability (others want to be a part of our circle). They “look out for each other” and help each other out as much as they can. “If one of us needs something and the other one’s got it, we try to give it up and help them out.” In prison, one is expected to “do your own time,” and helping others can be risky, not only in the ways that helping the wrong person can turn into coercion or manipulation, but certain types of helping, such as sharing property or food, are against prison regulations. Helping each other out includes emotional and spiritual support as well .

Like if you got little problems, say something happens out in the yard, they help you out, you know. Not to make decisions for you, but they help you, give you a little different kinds of options that you really don’t know about. So that helps a lot.

The group also takes care to reach out to other Native Americans and bring people into the circle. They especially reach out to “those who don’t know anything about who they are and where they come from. And they’re just so uneducated.”

When they first come in, they don’t know anything about (the sweat lodge ceremony) and they don’t participate. But after awhile then they’re coming over, you know, we’re getting on them, “come in and pray with us, come in.” And gradually they start to come in. And then they’re coming in every week.

All of my collaborators described the group as “family,” and referred to each other as “brothers.” This family attribute is designated not as a result of tribal identity alone, but as a result of sweat together. As one man said, “when we sweat together, that represents our mother’s womb. Like we’re all being reborn and everything. And I consider everybody I sweat with my brother or my sister.” This idea of rebirth is common for sweat participants as a return to the beginning, to purity and spiritual energy, but also as an expression of brotherhood and family.

For people in prison who are separated from their families, the prison family plays an important role of sustenance and community. It also allows individuals to fold their story and their lives into a larger story with other lives.

Since I been locked up here for eight years, the only visits I got were two visits. Mail? I probably have about fifteen pieces of mail for the whole time I been here...

I know that's my real family out there, but all these people here are my family, too. So instead of worrying about what (my real family is doing), you're worried more about where a lot of these guys that will be coming in here, emotional problems, or abuses kids, or... you run into all different kinds of people here, and the sweat brings everybody a lot closer.

You can't go home, you know, you can't interact with your family. A lot of these guys maybe they're already holding up a long time. This is their family right here for their time, for their stay here.

The sweat lodge brings the family together, and brings people closer to each other.

We don't see each other a lot on the yard. We do our own thing. But when we go to the sweat we're all over there. It's like family. We can talk and all that stuff, joke around and stuff like that.

Participants described the group as self-regulating and self-determined, in which they teach each other the practices and traditions and hold each other accountable. There were many comments about learning from each other, keeping each other educated, keeping each other in line, and taking it seriously. This is also related to "who belongs," as one man said: "We're not going to allow anybody over there that don't belong over there. And (staff and administration) know that and they respect that." In this man's mind, it is the responsibility of the participants to keep the group on track. As a consequence, they build trust and respect with the staff and administration.

Participants also described the group as "One Nation," a unified group made up of men from different tribes and racial backgrounds who are "all related." "Everybody's one." This seems to transcend the tension experienced between full- and mixed-bloods, and even encompasses the non-Natives that participate regularly in the sweat. For some, this "Nation" is temporary, a consequence of being in prison. As one man said,

Regardless of what tribe you're from, in here we're in a place where we can't... like there is (no one from my tribe) in here. So we just kind of bond together as one Nation ourselves. And then when we get out, we'll go our own separate ways again.

For others, it's an extension of a universal Nation that transcends all tribes.

People in here, they teach you their ways. And so it's kind of a universal thing that you learn. It's all principally the same thing. Just different words.

It is also a part of the negotiation process in creating a ceremony that is meaningful to all of the brothers.

Some of the ways my grandfather taught me don't go along with what some of the ways we do in here. But in here, there's many tribes, so there's got to be a comfortable ground for all of us. So we do it a certain way to where everybody can understand it and accept it.

There are different tribes that come and their religion is different and they don't participate like the way the Lakota people participate. And if they want to participate then they can. But we don't tell another person that comes that well, because you're Mesquaque you can't sweat. We might offend you, (but) we don't mean it, that is our religion.

The sweat lodge originated from the Sioux. So a lot of the ceremonies and a lot of the songs are sung in Sioux. And the ceremonies are done in Sioux. And a lot of the different tribes that come in, they may have songs of their own, in their language. They may have their own way of doing things. They may have different things that are different from the sweat lodge from the Sioux... (and) we have a lot of respect for the other. If they want to say something, they say something.

The quotes above highlight the ways in which men from various backgrounds and tribes come together in prison and negotiate a common tradition of which they can all be a part. This begins to hint at the emergence of a common "Native American spirituality" that seems to transcend the spirituality of any particular nation and contributes to unity among incarcerated Natives. Some critics argue that this trend furthers the "homogenization" of Native Americans and dilutes tribal differences "into a generic pan-Indian culture almost as harmful as assimilation" (Smith and Warrior 1996: 279). By the testimony of my informants, however, participating in the sweat lodge does not make them all the same, but gives them access to a tradition that is capable of adjusting to the needs and identities of the various participants.

Values

The discussion of values is also related to the categories of community and identity. In her book *Real Indians*, Eva Marie Garroutte identifies "those old Indian values" as evidence of

membership in a tribal community (127). Values outline the way that individuals are expected to behave towards others, and in tribal social structures, certain behaviors can place you in the tribal circle or outside it (131). “Being Indian,” then, is also a matter of values. This aspect of tribal belonging will be discussed more in the following chapter. For now, I will present specific values that were expressed and experienced by my collaborators. This will give the reader a sense of what community members’ esteem and how they are expected to behave, as well as how these values are related to their participation in the ceremony.

Sincerity was mentioned most often in all of the interviews. It was described as having an open heart and open mind, being ready to learn and pray, and having good and true intentions. A sincere person will get the help they need and will be made strong by the ceremony. They will be accepted by the group, and they will contribute to keeping the ways strong. An insincere person weakens the group and can bring harm to themselves or to the group. As the men say,

You gotta go over there with an open mind and open heart. Remember why you’re over there at all times... and don’t get caught up in the storytelling about how much you used to use or whatever. Go over there and pray.

As long as your heart’s there, you now. As long as you’re sincere and you ain’t coming there out of curiosity. You gotta come over there out of sincerity. You gotta be sincere. If not, you know, you’re hurting us. You’re not only hurting yourself, you’re hurting us. That’s a circle over there, you know. And once you break that circle, it’s hard to mend.

A sincere heart also keeps one strong.

If I held it close out there, I know I’d be alright. If I had that same sincerity out on the streets, I wouldn’t be in trouble.

Sincerity also seems to be an important measure of “rightness.” Spirituality is related to sincerity, and the ceremony is done correctly if it is done sincerely. Although there are certain ways to pray and hold the pipe and proceed through the ceremony, the effectiveness of these tasks is measured not by their exactness in particular word or action, but by the genuineness of their intention. As one man said,

If you mistreat it, misuse things, then bad things can happen. You’ll get it taken away from you, or end up in lock-up or something like that. You just got to be very careful when you do things.

This “careful” attitude is not evidenced by exact replication of an act, but by an effort of candid, honest sincerity.

This sincerity, however, is also tied to having the *discipline* and *commitment* to do things in the “right way.” One man recounted a story in which the sweat lodge had no religious significance because it was being used in the wrong way. “They were swearing, they were cussing around inside it, and they were sitting there with the door open, kicking back like it was a sauna... there was no spirituality at all.” In this case, spirituality is related to adhering to the ritual, respecting the ceremony, and behaving in appropriate ways in and around the lodge.

Discipline and commitment are not limited to the activities at the lodge, however. It extends into the entirety of one’s life. The men often refer to their lives as “walking these ways,” and “walking the Red Road” when they are in line with their spiritual intentions and ways. These phrases convey an active, on-going relationship with spirituality that involves effort and intention. As one man said,

If I devote my life to it, I’d be able to be successful, because I know when I was younger I was always into the religion and always ready and doing the helping there, doing something that was involved with religion. I was off the street. But once I started drinking, smoking weed, then I went downhill. Straight down hill.

Sincerity and devotion to the ways means learning how to live in a right way, and carrying that way throughout one’s life.

Discipline and commitment are also related to one’s relationship with the community. If one is walking the Red Road, one is helping others learn about the ways as well. One is responsible to them as well, not just oneself.

Even if you feel like you don’t need it (because you’re doing good or you don’t have any problems today), it’s a lot bigger responsibility because at the same time you got guys who are over there that don’t really know what’s going on... (you need to) to speak out on some things, maybe to lead the song or to do different things over there. So you just can’t walk away and abandon everything over there, because you gotta figure at one time you were just like them.

Helping others and *supporting* one another is highly valued in this community, and the sweat lodge ceremony is a primary venue through which that help is given and received. It helps people “get back on track” and gives them a place to “talk about the things that are heavy on our

heart.” “It’s not like a church where you go to services and you’re preached to,” it’s more about sharing and supporting through learning and advice. Values of *trust*, *honesty*, and *confidence* were also mentioned in this regard, and “what is said here, stays here” in the lodge. Participants also stressed the importance of being able to *work out problems together* with openness and honesty and without aggression. Values of *loyalty* and *like-mindedness* were also expressed.

All of the above qualities are predicated on an attitude of *acceptance* and *unity* with one another. If you are participating in ceremony with someone, you are participating in a sacred relationship of mutuality and positive regard. Everyone in the circle is valued, and everyone is related. Different people “bring a certain something to the circle that has to be there in a way for the circle to keep going around and around the way it does. Without them, there’d be something else gone.” And these different people offer strength and power to the circle as well.

Everybody is accepted. If you’re white and you proved over the years that you’re sincere to this religion, we don’t have (any) prejudice against you. That’s one of the things that our religion teaches is not to be prejudiced, don’t be judgmental. Respect all religions, respect all people, no matter what color or race they’re in. Regardless of how they may view us, or how prejudiced they are against us, it’s not us to do what they do. This is the way we are, this is the way we’ll stay. So if you come over there and you’re half-breed, your white, if you’re black, if you’re Mexican, you know, if this is where you’re at, this is your religion, this is where you pray, this is the altar you pray to, then we accept you just as much of a brother as we are. Because through you, our prayers are being heard. Our family is being secure and safe because of you.”

This acceptance is mitigated, however, by a unity of purpose and sincerity. As one man said, “the sweats like everybody. It doesn’t matter what kind of people are over there, they just got to be going for the same thing.”

Some of the men also talked about acceptance in terms of accepting life, or rather accepting that their life is in the hands of the Creator. This is not an attitude of abdicating responsibility for one’s life, but of trusting that there’s a bigger force that might be working things out in a way that you cannot see, and that there is a bigger picture in which your life fits.

The creator knows the best way to take care of any problem. And so, if there’s any action at all, or if there was anything done about it at all, then that was they way he felt it needed to be taken care of. It (isn’t) up to me to argue about that. The Creator works the way he wants to work.

I've become a lot more willing to accept what's truly meant in life, and not the life that I wanted to make it. It ain't so much about me, it's the overall picture... . It ain't about what I have, or what I want. It's about what I can do for other people.

This last quote also reiterates the importance of helping others. Here, it is what is meant in life, the purpose of being alive. When this purpose is accepted, one becomes less selfish and more aware of the interconnection of all things. Many of the men mentioned that sweating "makes me see more of what's meant for life, and that "there's a better way to live." This better way is intimately tied to community.

Qualities of *humility* and *respect* are valued as well. Humility is often in reference to being aware of all that one does not know, and being humble with the Creator. One man said learning to be humble helped him in prison especially, because "you have to swallow your pride a lot." Respect is mentioned in reference to respecting each other, their differences, the community, the traditions, and the sacred grounds.

Suffering in the sweat is highly valued as well, primarily in the way that one suffers for the good of others. Because of the nature of the ceremony, a sweat provides both symbolic and actual suffering, and participation requires endurance and perseverance to get through. While it is not meant to be too harsh, and temperatures are regulated in various ways by participants (and anyone is free to exit the sweat if they need to), suffering is believed to intensify the strength of prayers and is a way to give back to the spirits and to each other. Suffering is also a form of sacrifice, purifying the body and making a person worthy of spiritual intervention. When my collaborators talk about suffering, they do so in ways that express the selflessness of suffering, the ways that suffering gets one out of oneself and centers one in community. This says much about the way that identity and community are formed through the ritual transformation of pain into suffering, of self-centeredness into community centeredness. This community is not limited to those that are sweating with you, but includes those that have come before and will come after. It reiterates the hardships of life and binds one to the struggle of staying alive (and keeping the ways alive). It enfolds one in a larger story.

Suffering for somebody else. That is a great and tremendous meaning. If somebody can go in there and suffer for me, for my health and for my well-being, and suffer for my family, well I'm gonna do it for you also... . You suffer through pain for somebody else. And that's very important. That's what we do every week. We suffer for one another. We suffer for our families.

And the purpose of them going in there for the sweat is that you suffer for people, the people that did things for you. Maybe not necessarily for you, but for things that... the different hardships that the Indian people did go through, you know. And for having sweat in the first place, just trying to keep the ways alive.

(The sweat lodge) represents the people. It represents suffering. We are here for the people. I am a representative of the people and I am here to pray for them, to suffer.”

Where there is suffering, there is prayer, and the two go hand-in-hand. It is as if suffering is one physical embodied of prayer. Perhaps suffering *is* prayer. So to, then, is being centered in the community, giving oneself for others, purification, hardship, and perseverance. One is back on the Red Road, the entirety of life, in which religion encompasses it all.

My collaborators also value *learning*, about themselves and about “these ways.” The sweat lodge ceremony offers them a chance to “experience my culture” and to learn about “who you are, self-respect, and how you see others.” While they learn about how to set the fire, the meaning of the four directions, how to fill the Pipe, how to put the lodge together and take it down, the songs, the colors, and the prayers, they also learn who they are and how they are related to each other, to the world around them, and to the spirits beyond. This learning is an on-going activity as well. As one man said,

I’ve been sweating and praying this religion all my life. I’ve learned a lot. I’ve talked to a lot of people. But there’s people out there in the yard that know way more than me. And if you fill a bucket up with water and you took a drop of water out of there and you dumped on the ground, that’s about where I’m at as far as knowing everything about Native American religion, or the sweat lodge... This is what I need to learn, this is where I gotta go. And there’s no way we’ll ever learn everything there is to know about this way of life. But our job is to try and see how far we can get.

This again reflects the need for commitment and devotion, and it is very important to these men that they “*keep the ways alive.*”

Our existence and our continuation of our existence relies on us remembering those things. Remembering our people, remembering our songs, and these ways, so that it continues on.

A lot of ceremonies were lost, are lost, because in a new generation of individuals that don’t want to speak Lakota, they want to speak English. Hip-hop music, everybody wants to be a rapper now or something. The people are losing their heritage, a lot of them.

When they lose their heritage, they lose themselves, and they lose their connections to their past, their communities, their traditions, their values, and their lives. Remember, the sweat lodge is all about “Being Indian.”

All of these values reveal an ethic for living that is grounded in the importance of community and communal involvement. Of course these values are not always lived out in smooth or perfect ways. The men who participate come to the lodge with varying degrees of sincerity and commitment. Tensions around belonging and right practice exist, confidences are broken, people get selfish, and personalities clash. Yet the values remain, a persistent current of importance and consideration. They herald expectations for behavior and call people in and out of relationship with one another. They are about “being Indian.”

Relationships

This category of discussion refers to the relationships that extend beyond the immediate circle of the sweat lodge participants, such as relationships with staff and other inmates. The men also talked frequently about relationships that extend beyond the prison walls, such as with their families or tribal communities on the outs, and with history. What emerged was a sense not only of how these men get along with or think about others, but also how they engage their relationships in understanding and interpreting their lives.

My collaborators made very few comments about Native American inmates who do not participate in sweat lodge ceremonies. “Maybe they are Christian now, or maybe it’s their upbringing” sums up the general consensus on the matter. Remarks such as “all the Natives in here sweat” and “some Native brothers don’t participate” were commonly made in the same interview. This suggests some ambiguity about the relationships between Native American inmates who participate in the ceremony and those who don’t. It was noted that they are still “family,” still “brothers,” although they may or may not be as close as those who participate in the circle.

Comments regarding their relationship with staff and administration were also ambiguous. At times, the men express dismay at the lack of knowledge and understanding among some staff, which usually resulted in episodes of disrespect on the part of staff. At other times, they acknowledged that staff were learning, that some staff were more educated than

others, and that although “they kind of look at us a little different,” the administration was generally supportive of their programming (although programming is limited and they expressed a desire for greater access to cultural and religious items and ceremonies). Participants perceived that staff and administration can “take the sweat away at any time for any reason,” and they express a certain amount of distrust as a result.

Some participants expressed distrust of me, the interviewer, as well. They expressed concerns that I might “give some secrets away about the lodge” or “steal information” from them that would be used against them in the future. This fear may be reflective of a traditional relationship between knowledge and practice, within which knowledge should not be separated from its community of practice, and revealing such knowledge can in fact lessen its power, status, and authenticity. Preserving secrets is also a means of reinforcing identities and fortifying social boundaries, and can be a form of resistance and defense against cultural threats of assimilation and colonization (Johnson 2002). In the prison setting, where “there are no secrets,” the sanctity of secrets may be amplified as a means to enforce their social identity as well as to protect their authority as carriers of the tradition (“the truth of things” is not inscribed as “correct” in some book, but is carried in the practices of the people).

Participants were also concerned that I may be connected to the prison administration and my interviews would be used to sanction their practices. Others expressed concern that I would get “bad information” and contribute to “creating myths or spreading untruths about the ways of the people.” There were even concerns expressed regarding who it was that agreed to come and talk with me, some expressing concern that “all the half-breeds are gonna come up here and give you bad information.” One man even identified himself as “chosen” by some of the “full-bloods” to come and talk with me so that I would get the “right information.” In my estimation, these comments reflect a history of negative encounters between Native people and (usually) white ethnographers, anthropologists, and religious representatives. The prison context adds a dimension of wariness as well, since inmates have to be careful about “who you share what with.” There is also a clear desire to protect their ceremonies and traditions from an institutional standpoint as well as a cultural one.

My collaborators made few comments about other racial or ethnic groups in prison, with the exception of those who were or could be members of another group. For example, one man recounted how he had “the choice to pick” which group he would hang out with, the Mexicans or

the Indians. Although he attributes his association with the former as getting him into a lot of trouble with fighting and other business, his association with the Indians has not been trouble free. The difference seems to be the degree to which the first group expected him to “prove himself” through fighting, and the second did not. Others expressed an ability to “float” between groups or to be alone. For all of them, though, the Native community was their primary identity at this time.

My collaborators generally perceived a sense of respect for, disinterest in, or uneducated stereotypes of their community from the general population, and they did not have much of an interest in what the general population thought of them. Some told stories of uneducated stereotypes or fear (“they think we’re getting high when we smoke the pipe,” for example), but in general they felt respected over time.

Their relationships with their community and family outside of prison is very important to them, and participating in the sweat lodge ceremony “keeps us connected to that world, to reality, to the world outside these walls.” One remembers one’s relatives and families and people in the lodge, past, present, and future. One man talked of being in the lodge as being in two different places at once, in prison and at home. Another talked about being transported back in history with his ancestors and the old ways. The ceremony provides unique experiences of space and time to these men in prison. When they go “over there” to the lodge, they are also going home, going to be with their families, their tribes, their ancestors, their spirits, and their worlds beyond the walls of the prison. This is a powerful experience indeed.

The men also expressed a unique relationship with history, not only by seeing their lives in a larger, historical context but also seeing the events of their lives parallel the historical events of their people. This includes being in prison, being abused, being ridiculed for your beliefs or the color of your skin, being forced underground and emerging again with strength and vitality and hope. They have not only been affected by the history of their people, but they see their lives as a continuance of that history, folding their stories into a larger story of sustenance, perseverance, and hope. As one man said, “the way we’re sweating today is the way my ancestors sweated long ago. The same way. The same way we load a pipe, same way we go in the sweat, everything the same way.” This “same way” is more than ritual action; it is location and intention as well, a community practicing traditions of power and identity that enliven the world.

In sum, the Native community in prison is a distinct community with unique relationships to staff and administration as well as to one another. Participation in the sweat lodge creates and recreates experiences and relationship with those beyond the prison walls, in the present as well as the past. All of these relationships have varying effects on understanding, locating, and interpreting the lives of Native American inmates.

Effects of Ceremonial Participation

This category of discussion centers on comments that participants made in regards to how participation in the sweat lodge ceremony affects them and their lives. My collaborators expressed some very particular ways they feel they have changed because of their participation while they've been incarcerated. These changes include personal healing, gaining a sense of belonging, growing in faith, discovering inner peace, gaining a positive self-perception and identity, gaining perspectives on life that are bigger and more helpful, being more trusting and more calm, being less depressed, restoring a sense of balance and "getting my mind right," gaining an ability to accept life and finding purpose and meaning in life, becoming less selfish and gaining an ability to care for and about others, learning acceptance and tolerance, understanding people better, growing in strength and humility, growing in abilities to deal with anger and rage, staying out of trouble, and adjusting to being in prison.

All of the men expressed sentiments of not being the same person that they used to be and "growing up" as a person. The most common change for them was an ability to recognize the lives of other people and treat others with respect, tolerance, understanding, and care.

I've come a long way from where I was... (in) understanding community, and people, and what they say, and how I interact with them, and how I interact spiritually with what I've come to believe, or think I know. I've grown as a person.

I'm in here for murder, and part of my problem was not recognizing other people, not understanding other people, or myself really. So I think the lodge and our spirituality has shown me a lot about understanding other people.

The men also talk frequently of getting more in touch with themselves, of figuring out who they are, and why they are here (in prison as well as in life), and learning about their heritage and their past. As one man said, "I'm finally finding out who I am and what being

Native American is all about through this way.” And another, “I learn through the sweat lodge. I learn how to raise my kids, how to be a brother, or son, or uncle, or nephew. I learn how to be a man, really.”

As stated earlier, an essential part of this learning is in being a part of the community and connecting with other people. Participating in the ceremony gives them a new way to experience themselves, a new way to interpret who they are and who they want to be in connection with others.

When I go over there, it makes me see that I can be a community person, and not looked at like an outlaw all my life, you know. And that’s my goal. I’m tired of doing prison time. I’m tired of sitting here, and it helps me find my true path.

The lodge also accesses new ways to cope with life and the problems and hardships that they go through. For one inmate, the lodge was essential in his own process of personal healing.

When somebody is in need of healing, you have to go inside, inside yourself to find the healing that is there. The pain and suffering is inside you, and the more you try to hide it, the more you try to cover it up, the more control it has over your life. And I think the lodge has a lot to do with that, going into your mother’s womb again. And when you sit in the lodge, you’re there with six or ten other people, but you’re there by yourself, within yourself. You’re going through your own struggles, your own suffering, all those thoughts coming up, and if you really look inside yourself and see the things that you need to work on, then you’ll find the answers to your problem. The more you think about it and work with it and pray about it, then you can let it go.

The notion of rebirth surfaced here as an aspect of the creative quality of the lodge, the ability to be changed and born anew with fresh insight and experience and growth. Many of the men attributed their ability to stay out of trouble to their participation in the sweat lodge.

(The sweat lodge) just opened my mind up to a broader spectrum of life.... I learned to love. I learned to feel emotions. I learned to give love. I’ve learned to help cope with problems, you know, like death, things like that. Whereas if I didn’t have this, my first instinct would be to go to the easiest way to get rid of it, and that’d be drugs or alcohol, or (going out) and punching somebody, or I’d just get in a fight or do something crazy.

It’s opened up my mind a lot. It’s given me a bigger perspective on life. It’s helped me deal with my anger and my rage. It’s help me deal with the way I solve problems.

To me, without it, I would be nothing. I would be nowhere. I would be a drug addict. I’d probably be doing a life sentence here somewhere. And over the years I struggled

with the drugs and alcohol and stuff like that. And I stepped off the Red Road into the Black Road, and I ended up here. But it's all about freedom, it's about being free, being happy, being secure. It's family, it's tradition, it's belief, it's everything.

Comments about freedom were common. The idea of freedom extends beyond freedom from prison, though, as if the men have been given freedom to be accepted and to belong to other people, freedom to believe and to trust and be secure. They've achieved freedom from being isolated inmates who are all about survival to being about something greater, about reciprocity and care. And it is a freedom that helps keep them sane and connected to "the real world." This "real world" can mean various things from life outside of prison to a spiritual world beyond one's immediate surroundings.

When you go to practice your religion, you get this sense of freedom. When you get inside that circle, when you get into the sweat, you're free. Maybe only for two hours, it may only be a state of mind, you know, but you get a sense of freedom. And that freedom keeps you locked in with sanity.

It seems like once you're institutionalized, it seems like you get more spiritual and you participate more than you would if you were out in the street. (I asked him why do you suppose that is?) I believe that people are looking for something, you know. (What are they looking for?) Freedom in themselves.

It allows me to be comfortable and free with myself. I know that we're in prison, and it seems like I can go over there and everything, and for that moment of time that I'm allowed to be over there, it seems like I'm free. There ain't no bars around me. There ain't no guards, you know. Just free to be.

There is also the freedom to connect, to be in relation with your family, your people, your history, and the spirit world.

You can talk to the spirits and say a prayer, it'll reach your family.

It's like church, but instead of going somewhere talking to a Father and all this, you're talking to the past people. People in the past. Or who knows, you might be just talking directly to the people who help. Or both.

Over there, you can hear the birds, the fire, it's quiet. You ain't gotta worry about nothing. The time don't mean nothing over there. We're jumping back over there about 150 years. You go back to an era and that's just magic.

It's like being somewhere else, you know, being in two places at one time. And sometimes being at the sweat, you feel that way. Being in two places at one time... We know physically we're here, but spiritually we're in both places.

I've experienced things that give me the faith while participating. That let me know that there is something above and beyond this right here. And I can't really explain it, it just gives me the faith. I know there's something else.

So not only have the men experienced freedom, but they've connected to each other, to the past, to people outside of prison, and to the spirit world. For most, these connections are new, and they all contribute to experiencing life, others, and one's self in new and meaningful ways.

My collaborators also talked extensively about the ways in which participating in the sweat lodge helped them deal with prison life. Not only does it help them stay out of trouble and stay on the Red Road, or offer belonging, or help them cope, but it gives them strength and inspiration to keep going. One man described it "like being baptized every week, being reborn," helping them start clean and fresh every week, with renewed vigor and a more energized life. And it gives them a break from the prison yard. As one man said,

It's not very hard to jump into insanity out there, you know what I'm saying? It's not very hard to lose your mind. When they lock you up in the cell and leave you locked up for six month, you know, sometimes a year, even five days, you start getting a little crazy. You get into that realm between insanity and sanity, and it only takes one little push to shove you either way, you know... . (When you're surrounded by other inmates) and the way they talk and the way they act, you know what I mean? That alone just drives you crazy. You get tired of listening to the same old things every day. It just gets to you. And when you step into your religion, especially the Native American religion, it helps you to grasp that sanity. It reminds you... it keeps you in touch with reality and where you're supposed to be at, as far as life.

Having a lodge in prison also helps Native Americans adjust to prison life by offering a sense of family, a familiar place for prayer and connecting to others, a place to connect with themselves and the Creator. As one inmate said, "If it wasn't there, it'd be like a part of me was missing."

If I didn't have that sweat here, it ain't no telling what I'd be here. I'd probably be in lock up, who knows where I'd be, you know? That's like the one best day out of the whole week right there. You get - forget about cell lines. Forget about counts. You forget about everything for just that one afternoon, and it makes... I think it does make it easier.

All of these men attribute the changes in their lives to their participation in the sweat lodge ceremony. Although many have participated in state mandated programs as well, such as addictions therapy or cognitive restructuring, it is in the sweat that they found their greatest help and hope. As one man said, “I’ve been through just about every (program) the state has to offer and it’s never done nothing for me other than make me rebellious or angry because they want me to be one way I ain’t.” For this man, state programs encourage a type of thinking or understanding that doesn’t fit with who he is or who he wants to be. They use language he’s unfamiliar and uncomfortable with, and promote worldviews that don’t mesh with his own. The sweat lodge ceremony gives these men a culturally relevant and significant way to deal with their lives and to begin experiencing their lives in new ways. It allows them to be reborn, to be transformed, and to begin anew with community and connection.

Struggles and Conflict

This discussion highlights some of the conflicts that arise around issues of Native American spiritual traditions in prison. Many of these struggles have already been highlighted, such as the tension between full-bloods and mixed-bloods and struggles around who is allowed to participate in the ceremony, so I will only mention them here. Other conflicts include uneducated stereotypes or comments from staff and sometimes administration that get directed at Native American inmates and their traditions. Most of the men credited these experiences to personal attitudes and lack of education on the part of staff. In the arena of inmate and staff relations, however, inmates have little if any recourse to such disrespect.

Participants also expressed concern over staff searches of sacred items, such as medicine bags and prayer feathers, that result in disrespectful handling or the desecration of sacred objects. A common concern was having the sweat lodge ceremony or area overseen or searched by a female staff member who may be on her period. In most Native traditions, the menstruation period of women is a very powerful time of natural purification, and their presence around sacred areas, especially if they touch sacred objects, can mitigate the power of the object or space, “overriding” it, in a way. From the prison’s perspective of safety and security, every item in the prison is subject to search and possible confiscation, and every place is subject to area searches

by staff. Without policies in place that direct these searches to be handled in ways that respect the needs of the inmates as well as the needs of the institution, inmate's religious sensibilities continue to be violated.

The men also expressed concerns over the differences between institutions regarding what is allowed as personal property as well as at the ceremony, and who is allowed to participate in ceremonies. This creates conflict when men get transferred from other institutions and expect to have certain privileges or access to the lodge. The latter is especially frustrating to Native Americans. As government institutions, prison staff cannot control who gets to attend which religious services except on the basis of safety or security concerns. In prison, everyone is theoretically allowed access to the religion of their choice. Volunteers, however, have the right to say "I am providing communion for Catholics only," or "this prayer time is for Muslims only," and Baptists are not expected to baptize anyone who does not meet their theological or liturgical requirements. When ceremonies are run by volunteers then, volunteers have the opportunity to set guidelines around who participates in the ceremony. In the case of the sweat lodge at Anamosa, the Native American Consultant has that job. Limiting access to ceremonies is not understood by most administrations, however, given that in Christian practices – the "norm" – everyone is invited to services in the hopes of sharing the Gospel and saving more souls. In other prisons, however, especially those who don't have regular volunteers or consultants, these decisions are much more delicate. Prisons don't want to get sued for not allowing someone access to the religion of their choice, and Native Americans don't want their ceremonies to be disrespected by curiosity seekers or the uneducated. Prison staff also generally do not want inmates in the position of deciding who gets to attend ceremonies, as that practice can easily lead to power and control issues within the population.

The other large concern that was often mentioned by the men is the degree of power that the administration has over the ceremony in deciding what is allowed and "telling us what we can do and what we can't." Prisons control which herbs and medicines are allowed and how much, how often they can practice, what types of activities are allowed, and more. For participants, this can feel like a "codifying" of tradition that takes the authority of knowledge and practice out of the hands of the participants. It also leaves little room for the variances of religious expression. The men perceive their access to traditional practice is "at the whim" of the administration, and that access can be taken away "at any time for any reason, just like that."

The lodge can also be shut down if there are suspicions or realities of inappropriate or illegal activity, such as talk of an escape or swapping of inmate property.

It is important to remember that at the time of my interviews, the men expressed an overall sense of having a good relationship with the present prison administration. There was mutual communication and learning, and the men overall felt that their practices were respected and supported. Although the men wished they could have “more,” the general consensus was positive. This says much about the abilities of the staff and administration at Anamosa to work with the inmates in building relationships of positive regard and mutual understanding. This kind of work is irreplaceable in managing issues of conflict and potential struggle.

Another Look: The Process of Interaction

All of the discussions above interact with each other – Community, Identity, Values, Effects of Ceremonial Participation, Relationships, and Struggles and Conflict. They are all related, and when one changes, some of the others may change as well. For example, an individual’s Identity will influence his involvement with Community. And if his Identity changes or develops, or his bonds with the Community strengthen or lessen, then the Effects of Ceremonial Participation will likely change as well. To conceptualize this interaction, I have used the paradigm model of axial coding as presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The model of axial coding aims to identify the specific ways in which categories of discussion are linked and how they interact. For the purposes of this paper, I have developed the category of Community in terms of the *conditions* that give rise to it, the *context* (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded, the action/interactional *strategies* by which it is handled, managed, and carried out; and the *consequences* of those strategies. I chose the category of Community because it was pervasive throughout my interviews and appears to be the primary phenomenon to which all the other categories relate.

The Paradigm

Causal Conditions (lead to occurrence or development of Community):

- Incarceration
- Identity (self, family, friends)
- Personal qualities (stressed out, problems, desiring community, desire to pray)
- Relationships

Context (properties of Community)

- Desirability
- Supportive/close knit
- Belonging
- Caring-reaching out
- “Family”
- “One Nation”
- Values/ideologies

Intervening conditions (set of conditions within which action strategies take place):

- time/space for participation
- frequency of participation
- level of cultural identity
- knowledge of tradition or ceremony
- mental/emotional/physical constraints of prison life (described as “mind-warping” and “degrading”, prison emphasis on individualism, far away from family and home, restricted and controlled environment)

Central Action Strategy – participation in sweat lodge ceremony.

Properties of participation (to be “successful”) include:

- Frequency
- Intention
- Sincerity
- Discipline/devotion
- Responsibility
- Commitment
- Internalization
- Time involved

Actions that take place during participation:

- Praying
- Singing
- Teaching
- Talking
- Listening
- Practicing/experiencing Values
- Taking care of grounds

Consequences:

- Identity
- Community (connected to past, present, and future, both inside and out)
- Personal Change
- Relief

It is clear through the comments of my collaborators that sweat lodge participation plays a vital role in the creation and maintenance of their community in prison. It is also clear that this

participation plays a role in their personal development and healing. What this study shows is that it is not the ceremonial action alone that produces that development, but *the ways in which the ceremony engages the individual with the community*. Here, it is important to remember that their community extends beyond the walls of the prison and includes family and tribal connections on the outside as well as the community of spirits and all things. It is the *engagement with community* that creates the possibility of change and transformation, and the sweat lodge ceremony is the primary ceremony through which community is engaged.

The quality of this engagement is affected not only by the quality of the community (supportive, desirable, unified), but by the quality of the participants (identity, desires, relationships, knowledge base) as well as the quality of sweat lodge participation (frequency, intention, amount of sharing). And as these qualities change, the outcomes of ceremonial participation change as well. It is a dynamic process of interaction that circles back on itself over and over again, as identity and community continue to be experienced, formed, and transformed through sweat lodge practice. Some points to remember are:

- Conditions and Consequences are directly linked to action/interaction.
- Consequences may be actual or potential, and may become part of conditions in another sequence.
- Consequences are influenced by conditions, and as conditions change, action changes, and different consequences are produced.

It's all a process – with change comes change.

Further Discussion

The community of Native Americans in prison is observable on two fronts: 1) as a community in prison distinct from the general population, and 2) as a community that extends beyond the prison walls and includes families, tribes, and Native nations (and possibly “all people,” depending on the emphasis of the practitioners or the interpretation of the ceremony). It

is evident in this study that the practice of the sweat lodge ceremony has been and is a focal point in the creation and maintenance of both of these communities. The fact that participation in the ceremony is limited to those who can demonstrate Native American heritage or familiarity with or by a Native American community seems to set the stage. The sweat lodge ceremony is the most visible Native American activity within the prison walls and provides the community with an effective social venue for group solidarity, identification, and distinction. It presents collective values, images, and beliefs that are experienced by the group socially and ceremonially, thereby fostering social integration and strengthening social bonds. It even provides a means for incorporation into community itself, and issues of difference and background become nominal compared to securing one's self a place in a relatively high profile and clearly demarcated community. Although the sweat lodge ceremony itself is tied historically to the Lakota people, it becomes in prison a tie to Native American history and identity in general. Participation then ties the participant to that history and identity, connecting him to the past as well as the present (and perhaps the future), continually building a sense of tradition and belonging. Beliefs and values associated with the ceremony further inform this perspective.

The sweat lodge ceremony also provides opportunity for personal as well as cultural renewal and healing. As seen in this study, Native Americans in prison tend to have histories of trauma, violence, and abuse, and for most their uses of drugs and alcohol have been problematic. The sweat lodge ceremony offers access to resources which aid them in difficult times, including people, objects, events, and ideas. Its connection to and invocation of sacred power and a larger, transcendent community further enhances this ability and lends authority to its directives. It provides new ways of interpreting situations or events in one's life, and offers practices that transfer to life beyond the ceremony as well (such as humility or trust or concern for others). It provides idioms of reflection and understanding that manipulate personal and social identity (e.g., a "social deviant" becomes a "community member") and that act as vehicles of agency through which people gain power over their lives and transform both themselves and their social world in a positive way. For example, the men credited effects of the sweat ceremony based on outward signs such as whether or not they continued to drink or use drugs, how well they were getting along with others, how well they were able to maintain employment or schooling, and how often they were (or were not) getting in trouble, as well as inward signs such as personal growth and maturity and learning about one's self and these ways. As such, the ceremony

becomes a tool for empowerment and change, creating the possibility for creative definitions of life, interpretations of life, and experiences of life that may otherwise be left unemployed, as it were. In addition, effects of healing are reinforced by the ongoing interpersonal milieu of the participant, providing reinforcement as well as a sense of communal responsibility and accountability.

Other important observations include the correlation between length of participation and commitment. The longer they are involved with the sweat, the more they learn and the more committed they are to its continuance and use. The more responsibility they have within the circle, as a fire starter or a leader of a ceremony, for example, the more committed they are to keeping the circle strong and passing the ways on. Men whose identity is closely associated with the circle tend to be more protective of it as well. Feelings of acceptance from and belonging with others, as well as a sense of satisfaction with the way that the community is running at the moment, will also influence the level of one's involvement in the ceremony.

None of these conclusions are static, however. The greatest variable in efficacy seems to be sincerity, followed closely by intention, devotion, and knowledge. Other personal variables include the quality of one's relationships with those in the circle (based on trust, acceptance, and mutual care and concern), motivations for participation (someone interested in praying will be more interactive with the circle than someone who is curious about "what goes on over there," for example), the amount and length of participation, the length of incarceration (longer time in means more time for involvement and perhaps a greater need for the community), and identity (by one's self as well as by others). Properties of the community may vary as well, depending on who is participating and the level of contention or conflict that may be present in the group. These properties are laid out in the axial paradigm above (under Context), and can affect the mood of the group itself as well as its attraction to and influence on new and regular participants. Such properties include desirability, level of supportiveness/close knit, belonging, caring, sense of family, sense of unity, and shared values/ideologies. As one participates in terms of these variables, outcomes vary as well, and may in turn become conditions of future participation (i.e., as one experiences a shift in identity as a consequence of participation, then that consequence becomes a condition of later participation). The process is dynamic and interactive.

Summary

As seen above, sweat lodge participation is the primary activity around which Native Americans in prison create and maintain a sense of community and communal belonging in the prison setting. Being the only distinctive activity in which these men can participate on a regular basis in such a way that distinguishes them as Native Americans, the sweat lodge ceremony may have a greater amount of influence in cultural fashioning and communal and personal identity than may otherwise be. (As such its role may be magnified, from our perspective as well as from theirs.) When done with sincerity and knowledge, sweat lodge participation can lead to personal transformation and cultural renewal, but such outcomes are not guaranteed. The nature of the individual as well as the group will greatly affect the quality and outcomes of ones experience.

Unique issues of the sweat lodge in prison include the negotiation between inmates, elders, and staff of “reasonable” access to objects, leaders, and ceremonies, education of staff and administrators concerning Native American practices and belief, (re-)education of Native American inmates about the same, and the possible effects of pan-Indian practice on the greater Native American community at large. The latter is problematic to the degree to which Lakota practices and traditions are becoming the norm in prison settings, imposing a degree of homogeneity onto/into an otherwise diverse community of participants with otherwise diverse ways of expressing and experiencing their spirituality. What does a Mesquaquee learn about himself and his culture by participating in Lakota ceremonies? Or a Cheyenne? This is problematic, for he may be further disconnected from his family and heritage and roots. As the only Native American ceremony generally recognized and allowed by prison systems and administrations, the sweat lodge continues to become a primary, popular image of what it means to be Indian. We may be, in fact, missing the bigger picture.

Furthermore, sweat lodge participation is not just a matter of cultural shaping but positioning as well, for social relationships have political dimensions, especially with regard to how positions of domination and subordination are variously constituted, manipulated, or resisted. This dimension will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which different ritual, psychological, social, and Indigenous theories evaluate issues of personal and social development through spiritual practice, specifically by inmates in prison. This discussion is problematic in the degree to which Western constructs and theories are being used to interpret or understand Native American experiences. In the final chapter of *Ritual* (1997), Catherine Bell addresses the tendency of ritual studies to approach ritual as an abstract, universal medium of symbolic expression. As such, scholars have effectively wielded authoritative categories for understanding behavior that may actually be meaningless to those who are “behaving.” Our understandings, then, become easily tuned towards this “universal” and may overlook the particularities of cultural and historical understandings. As a result, “our use of the notion of ritual can influence our understanding of people who do not abstract the same experiences in the same ways” (265). Our interpretations of other peoples’ behavior may make sense to us, but these analyses do not necessarily help us understand how these activities figure into the lives of their practitioners, and may even distort them. It may even be inappropriate to call what they are doing “ritual.”

Likewise, standard treatments of religion in prison by administrators and scholars tend to assume some kind of essential “tradition” that gets expressed or performed in “ritual” by specialists who are “competent” in the ritual. Certain rites become “approved” and accepted, and deviance from these “norms” are discouraged at best and usually not allowed. For Native American traditions, the classification of their traditions as “religion” is in itself problematic, a category arising from Euro-Americans and not particularly applicable to the traditions of the people. Such classifications and interpretations of experience impoverish our understanding of how people genuinely engage in their lives.

In addition, Bell contends that such universal attitudes may also influence the behavior itself by “subordinating, relativizing, and ultimately undermining many aspects of ritual practice” that are otherwise culturally and historically determined and relative (263). Rather than approaching religion as related to a distinct people with a distinct past, the tendency is to apply

terms and categories cross-culturally as if they are relevant to any society, as if “real traditions” are unchanging, monolithic, repetitive, and normative. The abstract notion of “ritual” is often used to authenticate and legitimate rites as being effective and useful, regardless of their social or historical underpinnings. A belief in ritual and its affects subsumes belief in a particular liturgical tradition or historical practice. People may begin to define their lives differently, using categories not traditional to their lives and restructuring practice in ways that hinder ours and others’ understanding.

In her critique of inappropriate categorization, Bell is joined by anthropologist Talal Asad, “who suggests that the category of ritual may not be appropriate to other, non-Christian cultural milieus, such as Islam, which involves very different ‘technologies of power’ and ‘moral economies of the self’” (265). Asad directly criticizes the notion of personal agency in a 1996 interview.

I must confess I'm really unsympathetic toward the constant celebration of agency in contemporary social science. Agency has become a catch word. In a way, this intoxication with "agency" is the product of liberal individualism. The ability of individuals to fashion themselves, to change their lives, is given ideological priority over the relations within which they themselves are actually formed, situated, and sustained. The vulgar saying with which we are all familiar--which ignores this fact--is: "You can (re-)make yourself if you really want to." All you need is a strong enough will.

Here, Asad addresses the assumed priority of an individual subject over the social and historical individuals, experiences, and histories that envelop him or her. In Asad’s view, the consequences of certain actions are not so much the result of a particular agent, but the result of certain practices, sustained by certain social groups (or positions), that have social and moral consequences. It is the practices that are the objects of political intervention, not the agents.

So, our notion of ritual and its concomitant categories of self and other understanding may do more to tell us what we want to know than to genuinely explain behavior. One of the dangers here, then, lies in subordinating and diminishing the diversity of human experience under our Western tools of explanative power. As Bell states later, while such emphasis on underlying universal phenomenon may work to promote a sense of common humanity and cross-cultural respect, “it is clear that this discourse is being constructed not without violence, loss, and deeply rooted assumptions of cultural hegemony”(266).

To avoid these mistakes, Bell asserts that we need revised methodologies that approach ritual not as “some transparent phenomenon out there in the world waiting to be analyzed and explained. It exists only in sets of complex interactions that we are just beginning to try to map” (266). As she describes it, such a methodology would resist preliminary categories such as ritual, religion, technology, ideology, etc, and may also be served well by including the scholar and the conditions of the scholarly project itself as part of the total phenomenon under scrutiny.

In her book *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*, Eva Marie Garrouette identifies a methodological approach that she calls Radical Indigenism, a “distinctly American Indian scholarship” that argues “for the reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles” (101). Like Bell, Garrouette asserts that American Indian intellectual traditions are often misunderstood and subordinated by Western categories of knowledge and scholarship. For example, Garrouette points out that much of the literature found in the social scientific study of ritual activity is concerned with the functions of ritual, particularly in its role in reducing or channeling anxiety. In this understanding, participation in ritual relationships is motivated out of a lack of personal power or a shortcoming on the part of the participant (133). In contrast, Garrouette contends that tribal philosophies characterize these relationships in much more positive ways. “In particular,” she states, “many indigenous people speak of ritual reciprocation as a means of enjoying and expressing loving communion” (ibid.). In this understanding, ritual relationships are vehicles which “enable people to experience the sheer joy of connectedness, the pleasure that comes from making and having relatives, the satisfaction of acting like a relative oneself. It is a perspective that makes the social scientific reduction of ritual behavior to a means to channel anxiety feel considerably less satisfying, or at least less complete” (134). The importance of community in the reports of my collaborators reflect this perspective as well.

Garrouette critiques the scientific method of inquiry not only for narrowly defining information and knowledge, but also for “sanitizing” the spiritual and personal elements of indigenous knowledge so that they fit neatly into packages of “factual knowledge” explained in terms of material, rather than personal, force. As she states,

“Radical Indigenism suggests resistance to the pressure upon indigenous scholars to participate in academic discourses that strip Native intellectual traditions of their spiritual and sacred elements. It takes this stand on the grounds that sacred elements are

absolutely central to the coherence of our knowledge traditions and that if we surrender them, there is little left in our philosophies that makes any sense” (103-104).

In sum, if we can acknowledge the ways that Indian cultures create knowledge and understand the world, we will be more open to truly new perspectives rather than interpretations that fit their perspectives into our own. Radical Indigenism “dare[s] to suggest that American Indian cultures contain tools of inquiry that create *knowledge*. By this construction of Native cultures, one would draw upon them as part of a process of learning about the world, and one would do so without leaving the proper domain of scholarship” (107).

Radical Indigenism as Method

Radical Indigenism requires two specific things of the researcher: 1) to enter tribal philosophies, and 2) to enter tribal relations. Garroutte states,

By asking scholars to enter (rather than merely study) tribal philosophies, Radical Indigenism asks them to abandon any notion that mainstream academic philosophies, interpretations, and approaches based upon them are, in principle, superior. It asks them, instead, to accept tribal philosophies as containing articulable rationalities alternative to those of the conventional academic disciplines. It asks them to seek the assumptions upon which Native philosophies are grounded and to understand how such assumptions allow for coherent reasoning and defensible conclusions...it requires that researchers also honor the *methods* and the *goals of inquiry* toward which indigenous philosophical assumptions direct us. (107-108)

In essence, this requires scholars to “look through the lens of our traditional ways of knowing.” Garroutte continues:

They must be willing to look for answers where tribal philosophies direct them to look, and how those philosophies direct them to look. Thus, for instance, if those philosophies understand ceremony as a means of gaining knowledge of the world (and many of them do just that), then those who would learn through this means must surrender themselves to its requirements. It will not suffice to *read about* or *think about* such means of inquiry; one must trust them, practice them, live with them. (108)

In my own interviews I was often asked if I had ever participated in a sweat lodge ceremony myself. When I said “no,” I commonly heard “well if you really want to know about it, you’ve got to experience it yourself.” When I was able to return with the answer of “yes,” and after clarifying when and where and with whom, I was met with a nod of... almost acceptance, as if

my participation lent credibility to my sincerity of interest. It also engendered a mutual sharing of experience, as I was sometimes asked not only what my experience was like, but also “what was it like to sweat with both women and men?” And I do believe that my conversations improved as well, perhaps because of my increased sensitivity to what is important.

Garrouette’s second caveat requires researchers to enter tribal relations.

If the adoption of those philosophies is to be something more than mere appropriation and exploitation of Native cultures, it must be accompanied by the second requirement of Radical Indigenism stated earlier – that researchers must enter tribal relations. Entering tribal relations implies maintaining respect for community values in the search for knowledge. This respect is much more than an attitude; it requires real commitments and real sacrifices on the part of those who practice it. (108)

Such values include a willingness to surrender the role of “expert authority” and embrace one’s role instead as a contributor to collective deliberations and projects that have been defined as useful and appropriate by Native communities (108-109). Even more challenging to conventional social scientific values is a willingness to respect the ways in which Native communities often regulate the circulation of certain kinds of knowledge outside the community, thereby prohibiting the scholar from researching or writing about some subjects. From a Western standpoint, this may be considered a “strangulation of free inquiry,” but as Garrouette points out,

One who genuinely enters into tribal relations and philosophies, accepting the responsibilities and orientations that accompany these, will be able to write well and responsibly on a range of topics. If the price of this accomplishment is to forbear writing about certain other topics, the cost is justified. (109)

As Garrouette notes, the benefits of this methodological approach – Radical Indigenism – include a greater awareness of different assumptions, values, and strategies for knowing and thinking about the world than those which exist in current Western scholarship, and it also can build bridges between Native communities and the academy. She states,

By insisting upon the legitimacy of tribal philosophies of knowledge, it puts in place the fundamental principles that allow for actual *exchanges* between Indian people and the academy. This is different from the simple transfer of knowledge from communities to scholars, who then recast that knowledge and exploit it for their own purposes... It is different because it makes indigenous communities that have retained distinctive philosophies of knowledge the central reference group for scholars. This means that the

self-defined needs of indigenous communities will generate questions for study, that *their* philosophies of knowledge will inform the conduct of research and judge the legitimacy of conclusions, and that *their* norms will regulate the dissemination of knowledge. (111-112)

In an attempt to follow a method of Radical Indigenism, I have constructed this chapter around the ideas and philosophies that were expressed by my collaborators. I begin with an exploration of community and identity, specifically focusing on how ceremonial participation interacts with the experience of Native American community and identity formation in prison. I then explore the aspects of Personal Change and Healing as they may relate to sweat lodge participation as well. It is important to note that these personal changes take place in and are accredited to the communal relationships and participations of these men. My third arena of interest is that of Resistance. Although this is not a category specifically mentioned by my informants, it is a category, and perhaps a consequence, that underlies all of the above. As inmates practice identities and communities, they are resisting acculturation, resisting identities that are constituted by the Other. I offer the following not as the “final word,” but as one voice contributing to a larger discussion of Native American experiences in prison.

Community & Identity

In the previous chapter, I identified community and identity as two of the conditions for and consequences of sweat lodge participation in prison. As conditions, they inform whether or not a person would get involved in the ceremony, as well as the intentions, perceptions, knowledge levels, and commitment levels that they may experience or express. As outcomes, community and identity are experienced and shaped dynamically through participation in the sweat lodge. In prison, the sweat lodge ceremony is a focal point for the creation and maintenance of community, tradition, and belonging, complete with beliefs and values that support personal and social identification and distinction. Neither community nor identity are static, however, but are continually being negotiated in ceremonial and non-ceremonial contexts.

In formulating her understanding of Native identity and community, Garrouette points out that it is necessary for each community *as* a community to deliberate together, within its own knowledge traditions, what identity is about (117-118). This deliberation is clearly taking place in the context of Native Americans in prison. Who is allowed to participate in the ceremonies?

What do the elders and traditions say about it? How is one related to others? At first glance, Native American identity in prison seems to be primarily prescribed along generic racial or ethnic lines (the all-embracing term of “Native American”). A closer look reveals members from many different tribes with different corresponding elders and traditions to whom and to which they may look for guidance. This again emphasizes the homogenizing role that the sweat lodge ceremony, as the only physically accessible ceremony for many Native Americans in prison, may have on the community. Of course there are also those in the circle from other ethnic backgrounds as well who have become respected members of the community. In addition, there are Native Americans who do not participate in ceremonial tradition, so how do they relate with the community? What kind of community identity are we now talking about, tribal or ceremonial or ethnic or something else altogether?

Garrouette proposes a definition of identity that may help us consider these “problems” in a way that I believe is also mirrored in the responses of my collaborators in this study. Her proposal for determining inclusion in Native communities relies on two principles of kinship: *relationship to ancestry* and *responsibility to reciprocity* (118-134). As such, tribal identity is not only determined by one’s lineage, but also by one’s behavior.

Relationship to Ancestry

The first kinship principle emphasizes the importance of ancestry and a genealogical, blood connection with the people. The significance of this ancestral relationship is evidenced in this study through comments such as “... you have to be Native to sweat,” “show me some pictures of your family,” and “It seems like everybody wants to have some Native American in them now.” It is also apparent in the tensions of the community around full- and mixed-blood lines.

In scholarly literature such statements are often dismissed as “essentialist,” “racist,” and “colonial artifacts.” In Garrouette’s review of sacred stories and tribal traditions, the existence of essentialist themes do in fact exist, but within a different philosophical and logical framework than the dominant, social-scientific thinking about kinship. The difference between tribal essentialism and social scientific understandings of essentialism lie in the extent to which genealogical distance and blood quantum are foreign and irrelevant ideas to Natives, and a

number of Native philosophies include the possibility of blood relationships being created ceremonially, such as through adoption ceremonies. The substance of kinship, then, “has attributes of both the physical and the more-than-physical” (127). As Garrouette states,

The essentialisms explored here have nothing to do with the idea of race, a concept rooted in the same biologicistic assumptions that have driven social scientific studies of kinship. Instead, the identity definitions that I have explored emphasize the unique importance of genealogical relatedness to tribal communities while also allowing, at least in principle, for people of *any* race to be brought into kinship relations through the transformative mechanism of ceremony. (127)

Indigenous philosophies of ancestral relationship, then, are not limited to physical, blood relationship, but can also be constituted by a ceremonial “adoption” of people into the tribal community. In the context of prison, these relationships are seen not only in the cooperation and bonding of members of different tribes to “the circle,”⁵ but also in the incorporation of non-Natives into the community, to the point where they become “one of us.” Although different tribes may have specific practices and ceremonies that facilitate or validate this kind of incorporation, people in prison have access only to the sweat. Sweat lodge participation, then, becomes the primary means through which non-Natives access ancestral bonds. The continued degree of tension around issues of full-and mixed-bloods and the presence of non-Natives at ceremony belies the complexity of this issue, however. The men at Anamosa continue to deliberate what community and identity are really all about.

Responsibility to Reciprocity

Garrouette’s second kinship principle involves the way that individuals behave toward others, what she terms “responsibility to reciprocity.” “The People – those who understand themselves as bound together in spiritually faithful community – are responsible for living with each other in particular ways” (129). As such, Native American identity is determined not only by your relations, but by how you *act*. Garrouette quotes one of her interview respondents as saying “To me, having a [CDIB] card doesn’t necessarily make you an Indian.... As far as

⁵ “Other Native peoples, separated from their communities of origin, express a sense of responsibility for finding new ways to contribute to tribal survival. For some, this means aligning themselves with tribes other than their own.” (Garrouette, 128)

acting like one – a card don't make you do that... If he's an Indian, he will help his brother." Similar sentiments were expressed by my collaborators when they talked about "Indians who don't act Indian" as well as how individuals will "act differently" when they start "learning more about these ways." As one man said, "When they come in, it's kind of sickening how they act... You know, why try to be something you're not?... And over time they start to change, you know, they get educated about these ways... and that's good."

Another of Garrouette's respondents, a Hopi elder, comments that "those old Indian values" are what function as evidence of membership in a tribal community. As Garrouette, notes,

These include "sharing, helping, assisting, and then those other values of hard work, decency, honesty, and respect." Also important, he thinks, is "the spiritual part – how they [Indian people] treat themselves, how they treat each other, how they treat Mother Earth, from a spiritual perspective." For him, Indian identity is "not just the ceremonies, but daily living. How we get along, and how we treat each other. And of course, the ceremonies tie it all together." (127-128)

Garrouette notes a similar suggestion by Christopher Jocks when he writes of the "ability to *participate* in kinship," specifically the ability to participate in an active, ongoing practice of relationship that is maintained through values such as "generosity of time and spirit, respect and politeness, willingness to help out, and openness to learn" (129). My collaborators expressed the same values. Such values include respect and acceptance, helping others, learning, sincerity, humility, commitment, and honesty, just to name a few. Demonstrating these values or experiencing these values was often equated with experiencing the "culture" and acting "like an Indian." For example, "If he's walking (the Red Road) he's not getting into trouble." "He was accepted because they seen his sincerity." "In order to sit in the circle and smoke the pipe, and then pass the pipe, they had to accept me for who I am." And the sweat lodge ceremony is identified as a place where they learn and practice these values, perhaps the primary place, given the prison culture and setting in which they live. As one man said, "When I go over there, it makes me see that I can be a community person, and not looked at like an outlaw all my life, you know... it helps me to find my true path."

As Jocks notes, the logic of kinship through participation in relationship also works in reverse: "There are full-blood Indians who have lost this ability to participate in kinship" (Garrouette, 129). In other words, they've lost the ability to behave "like Indians," according to

the values of the elders and their communities. For example, Garrouette briefly discusses the great importance of generosity among Lakota people, to the extent that those who were not generous were considered “not quite human” (132). This is similar to remarks made by my collaborators about “Indians who don’t know they’re Indian.” As one man states, “They don’t know anything about who they are. They don’t know anything about their Tribe. They’re City Indians. I like to call them City Indians. They don’t know anything.” Of course participation in the sweat lodge ceremonies can change that. “You can see in a big way the way people who didn’t grow up this way [are] re-learning, you can see them change in a better way... After they sweat and stuff, they realize hey, this is what I’ve been missing. This is me. I’m finally finding out who I am and what being Native American is all about through this way.”

Within tribal philosophies, relationship and reciprocity are not limited to human beings. As Garrouette states, indigenous philosophies identify people

within a kinship network that includes not only other humans but also animals, plants, minerals, geographic features, the earth itself, celestial bodies, and spirit beings.... Acts of reciprocity in this extended community are not solely – perhaps not even *primarily* – for the benefit of humans.... Humans are simply one set of participants in the vast cycles of giving and receiving, of covenant and celebration, that constitute relationship to a tribal kinship community. (132)

To reiterate, this relationship is not only constituted by being a relative but by behaving in ways that are consistent with tribal values and philosophies of reciprocity. This understanding of identity provides a more dynamic and vibrant experience of what it means to “be Indian.” In the context of this study, it expands our concern from “who can participate in ceremony” to “how does ceremonial participation bind one to ancestral and reciprocal relationships, and how does this affect the participants?” It is to these questions that I now turn.

Considering the Ceremony

Following Garrouette’s lead, both community and identity are predicated on relationships to ancestry and responsibility to reciprocity. The relationship between ceremony, community, and identity, then, depends on the extent to which ceremonial participation establishes and nurtures these two kinship principles.

In his work on Aboriginal spirituality in Canadian prisons, James Waldram notes that inmates initially become involved in Aboriginal spirituality programs not for their beliefs or healing properties, but because of their identity as First Peoples. He says,

Inmates are most likely to be interested in sorting out identity conflicts and learning more about Aboriginal cultures and histories. There is also a need to demonstrate solidarity with the other Aboriginal “brothers” within the institution; the aboriginal programs in general, and the work of the Elders in specific, are among the best markers of this solidarity. (79)

Catherine Bell makes an analogous observation in her 1997 book *Ritual*, observing that many participants don’t join groups for their belief systems but for their social and communal bonds. As she says, “the decision to join a highly ritualized community is often based on an interest in ethnicity as a framework for community, identity, and a sense of tradition and belonging” (256). For many, it is a form of resistance – to either secularization, modernization, or assimilation. As such, it is not the belief system itself that is most important to the participants (at first, anyway) so much as the network of people who share the beliefs.

In a 1988 article titled “Religion and the Persistence of Identity,” Phillip Hammond asserts that the stronger a person’s ethnic ties are, the more they will remain loyal to the religious organization associated with their ethnic group. In other words, if religion is associated with a primary group tie, that primary group tie will have a greater influence on religious identity than if it were a voluntary secondary group activity.

In a 1997 article on the individual preferences of religious choice, Darren Sherkat argues that traditional socialization factors have a dominant influence on future religious beliefs and participation. These factors include the religious options favored and promoted by trusted others such as parents. Primary socialization will thus have a significant impact on religious choice and participation. As such, the consumption of religious goods is not necessarily the result of desire for those goods themselves, but often is the desire for the social outcomes of such consumption. Although individual preferences do play a role in the choices that people make regarding religious participation, non-religious benefits and costs (such as status and family influence) play a role, too. As noted by Hammond above, the more intense one’s social relations are, the more likely they will influence one’s preference as well.

The importance of social bonds is relevant to the prevention of crime and delinquency as well. In an article titled “Crime, Delinquency, and Religion,” William Bainbridge discusses the possible role that religion may play in deterring delinquency and crime. In reality, words and deeds are often not congruent and often people perform actions logically at variance with their verbally expressed values, beliefs and attitudes (201). The missing link: community. Religious beliefs must be made salient for behavior through social process, through social attachments informed by common sets of values and norms that guide behavior. As he states, “[r]eligion is not merely a psychological variable, conferring a particular kind of personality pattern on an individual... religious beliefs have the power to deter some very important delinquent and criminal acts only when supported by social bonds” (208).⁶ In other words, moral and social integration go hand in hand, and religion must be brought into the private lives of practitioners by practitioners through the process of social bonds.

It is important to note that these social bonds and community ties cannot remain on a superficial level if they are to impact individuals beyond the initial motivation to “get involved.” The more integrated a community is or becomes in the personal, *internal* lives of their practitioners, the more of a role that community will have on the orienting value system or world view of the practitioners. It is almost as if the individual must not only be a part of the community, but the community must be a part of the individual. This echoes Native American understandings of tribal kinship in which the individual is recognized in relationship to the community and the spirit world, not alone. (Kidwell *et.al.* 2001, Deloria 1994). In the words of Harvey Cox: “Tribal man is hardly a personal ‘self’ in our modern sense of the word. He does not so much live in a tribe; the tribe lives in him. He is the tribe’s subjective expression” (Deloria, 195).

Ceremonial participation can provide an effective means for experiencing and building social bonds and community identity, especially in the prison setting. In tribal life, ceremonies are indivisible from cultural life, an extension of community, a manifestation of communal existence. Ritual theorists such as Durkheim (1915) and Radcliffe-Brown (1968) credit collective ceremonies with generating solidarity by providing opportunity for collective action and social experiences of meaning and order. Indigenous perspectives recognize that these

⁶ Evidence indicates that hedonistic deviance may be deterred even without the influence of religious community, yet larceny and similar crimes seem more responsive to such communities (Bainbridge, 203).

ceremonies *create* meaning and order as well, create knowledge and new revelations of practice that enliven and recreate the world. For Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, collective actions teach collective beliefs and provide opportunities for these beliefs to be internalized by their actors. For indigenous people, collective actions do more than teach, they embody the experience of relations, they manifest community in life. As such, collective actions not only provide meaning and explanations for life, but integrate individuals into a community of experience and knowledge through ceremony, thereby fostering social integration, strengthening social bonds, and strengthening individual experiences of the community.

In *Ritual* (1997), Catherine Bell gives a brief overview of practice theory and ritual in which she mentions the work of Marshall Sahlins, Maurice Bloch, Pierre Bourdieu, and Sherry Ortner (76-83). For each, ritual is central to cultural life in its ability to reproduce and shape the environment and cultural structures. It acts as a paradigmatic community, as a “model of” and a “model for” community action and participation. It produces distinctly ideological forms of knowledge that are often in tension with the more purely cognitive forms rooted in day-to-day behavior. If one understands ceremony to be an expression of community, however, or an extension of day-to-day existence, the qualitative “tension” between ideological “models” and the day-to-day world are dissolved. Although ceremonies may play a role in reminding or reconnecting one to the ideals of community, the emphasis here is different, for ceremony is not a separate part of or category of existence in indigenous communities. It is an extension of everyday life, a manifestation of community.

In prison, however, perhaps ceremony is more distinct from everyday life than it would be elsewhere. Perhaps there is a level of “tension” between every-day life in prison and the experience of the sweat lodge ceremony. Ceremony provides these men with a freedom from prison, a reconnection with the past and the present, relationships that are otherwise inaccessible in the routines of prison living. If true, then perhaps ceremonies in prison evidence more of the paradigmatic, ideological traits of ritual. The sweat lodge is set apart from daily prison life, distinctive by space (“over there”) and time (which is specifically and strictly allotted for ceremony) and practice. In a way, sweat lodge ceremonies provide an experience of “*communitas*” and anti-structure in prison that also helps build a sense of belonging, group solidarity, identity, and pride (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969). They create an over-and-against atmosphere of power and authority that may transfer spiritually but does not transfer politically

back into everyday life. The sweat lodge experience is further legitimized by its religious significance, or by what Peter Berger refers to as “an ultimately valid ontological status” (1967, 33). Although the whole of Indian life is religious and Native cultures do not differentiate sacred from non-sacred space, prison life clearly does, and the distinctive place and time for “religion” may amplify experiences of community, authority, values, and the like. By locating the ceremony within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference, not only historically as it relates to tribal life but presently as it relates to prison life, it is given the weight of ultimate reality. That which we participate in ultimately may deepen our experiences of meaning, legitimization, identity, and cohesion even further.

In sum, the efficacy of Native American ceremony in prison seems to come in large part through its ability to connect individuals to one another. For the men who participate, it is important to remember that this connection takes place not only with those in the immediate circle of participation, but also with those families, tribes, and Native nations beyond the limits of the prison walls, not to mention the animals, spirits, plants, earth and all other beings within which tribal kinship is experienced. These connections confer social bonds as well as social, personal, and spiritual activity in regards to the ideals, perspectives, and practices of behavior that are distinct from the everyday activities of prison life. In the context of prison, ceremonial participation is critical in establishing tribal belonging as a relative both in being and action.

Personal Change and Healing

The men I interviewed for this study spent a lot of time talking about how the sweat lodge has changed them for the better.

If you know me now and you knew me after a ceremony, I’m two different people.

I’ve come a long way from where I was... (in) understanding community, and people, and what they say, and how I interact with them, and how I interact spiritually with what I’ve come to believe, or think I know. I’ve grown as a person.

It’s opened my mind up a lot. It’s given me a bigger perspective on life. It’s helped me deal with my anger and my rage. It’s helped me deal with the way I problem solve.

According to them, this change has come about through learning and practicing the values of the ceremony, learning about who they are and how they fit into the bigger pictures of life, and

helping them negotiate life in prison with a sense of meaning and hope. The purpose of this section is to explore more exactly how that change might happen. I will begin by presenting the work of James Waldram and his research working with Aboriginal people in Canadian prisons. He asserts that Native spiritual practices are elementally and inherently practices of healing, and he presents some theoretical considerations as to how that may be so. I will also introduce the concept of coping theory and how it is often used in considering the ways in which religious participation and ideology helps or hinders one's satisfactions and behaviors in life. In the end I will show that sweat lodge participation can be a particularly effective facilitator of personal growth and rehabilitation for Native American inmates.

In the course of this discussion, I will be referencing scholars that use "ritual," "religion," and other interpretive frameworks that I have previously criticized as insufficient. I at times use them myself. This is not to prioritize these categories, but to enable the conversations between theorists and experience to take place. The heading "Personal Change and Healing" suggests a priority of agency over community which I do not wish to communicate. As a heading, it is second to that of Community, and as a phenomenon, it does not happen outside of the communal, social, and historical contexts of experience. If anything, I hope to demonstrate that personal and communal healing go hand-in-hand, that they are not separate experiences.

The theories I present here at times smack of universalism as well. It is important to remember that universal claims are not universal truths, however, and theories do not outweigh the realities of experience. The following theories are drawn from sources that I believe reflect the historical experiences of my collaborators, although incompletely so. It is true that the participants themselves identified personal changes as one of the results of ceremonial participation. Explaining "how" that happens may in fact be a frivolous pursuit, for we are dealing with the world of the spirits here. The following ideas are considerations only, possibilities that may be relevant but need not be dominant in the discussion of how change and healing takes place. Personal change and healing must be contextualized in the greater realities of experience, in the real social and historical dimensions of life that form, situate, and sustain people and their communities.

James Waldram and Symbolic Healing

In “*The Way of the Pipe: Aboriginal Spirituality and Symbolic Healing in Canadian Prisons*,” James Waldram asserts that Aboriginal spirituality is more than just “religion” – it is a unique form of therapy and treatment, specifically related to “symbolic healing” that may be “tailor-made for helping many Aboriginal inmates deal with their problems both within and beyond the prison walls” (18).

As Waldram notes,

Aboriginal spirituality presents a variety of prescribed, positive values and behaviours that are very much the opposites of...“criminal” behaviours. Insofar as individuals come to understand these values and behaviours, the symbols and their meanings, they may begin to change their own behaviours and attitudes. To embrace the meaning of these symbols becomes itself a symbol of a new, emerging Aboriginality for many inmates. Viewed within the context of over a century of repressive, assimilationist government policies, Aboriginal spirituality has become central to this re-emergence of Aboriginal cultural identity. (98)

In other words, Native cultural and ceremonial practices may provide values and ideologies that many would argue are antithetical to the values and ideologies that landed these men and women in prison in the first place. (c.f. Deloria 1994)

Waldram also points out that participating in Native culture and spirituality allows individuals to experience their lives in the context of a greater historical process in which personal and cultural loss and restoration go hand in hand. As such, Native spiritual traditions may be inherently therapeutic. Drawing heavily on the work of Levi-Strauss and James Dow, Waldram takes a “symbolic healing” approach in which personal transformation is effected through the employment of transactional symbols that allow for the transference of emotion (and intellect, I would say) and demonstrate and foster healing and growth. He states,

In the process of symbolic healing, the individual’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are interpreted in terms of historical processes of loss of culture and spirituality. Through the use of healing symbols, the individual is brought to understand his own predicament in terms of these historical forces, and in so doing comes to see the possibility for change. Behavioural change comes through an understanding and acceptance of the symbols of Aboriginal spirituality, providing both an explanation for how he came to be in prison and a plan for life that will show him how to be a good person. (215)

In the process of symbolic healing, personal transformation is effected through the employment of transactional symbols that allow for the transference of emotion and cognition and demonstrate and foster healing and growth (Levi-Strauss, James Dow). In effect, emotions and cognitions are transferred from an individual to a symbol, providing a certain “distance” between the individual and his or her emotions and thoughts. This symbol is then invested with cultural and historical considerations (or truths) that interact with the individual’s considerations in ways that provide greater contexts for experience and understanding. The symbol, newly invested and understood, is then integrated back into the individual’s cognitive and emotive disposition, effecting transformation and growth accordingly.

Underlying this process is an understanding that there are no fundamental boundaries between the mental and the physical; thought is action and action is thought. As a consequence, Moermann (1979) asserts that the system of meaning, the metaphorical structure of a healing discipline, is of significant importance to the healing process; healing is an aspect of social meaning, ascribed meanings, which participate in a complex human semiotic interaction. As such, “responding to symbols can easily and naturally influence physiological process as might responding to a chilling breeze” (66). Culturally constructed metaphors and symbols are thus used to bridge compelling cultural myths and beliefs and the immediacy of bodily experience (Kirmayer 1993), and transformation is enacted through rhetorical devices of ritual that persuade the participants to attend to his or her environment in a new, coherent way. As an example, Waldram points to the characterization of the sweat lodge as a woman’s womb from which one can be “reborn” (74). This rebirth has meaning not only through words, but also through the images and gestures that carry and embody meaning as well. Through physically, cognitively, and emotionally using these metaphors and symbols, behavioral transformation can result within individuals.

In ritual studies the quality of subjectively appropriating experience is referred to as embodiment. For example, in an article titled *On Ritual Knowledge*, Theodore W. Jennings considers ritual as a primary, engaged, bodily way of knowing. As one of many ways to construe and construct the world, ritual performs noetic functions peculiar itself. Ritual action is a way of gaining knowledge, transmitting knowledge, and displaying knowledge. It is important to note that Jennings’ comments are aimed toward ritual *acting*, not thinking or feeling or conceptualizing but rather the physical embodiment of ritual thoughts, feelings, and concepts. It

is through the activity of ritual, the embodiment, that one comes to know in a unique way. It is an embodied experience of understanding the world, an embodied mode of inquiry and discovery.

This is much akin to schema theory as proposed by some socio-cultural anthropologists such as Maurice Bloch (1994) and Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1994). Therein, concepts are acquired and stored through prototypical references. These concepts in turn create networks of meanings that are learned through imitation and participation – through the embodiedness of cultural experience. To take the idea of embodiedness one step further we can turn to the work of Roger Keesing (1994). Since we experience the world in and through our bodies, Keesing suggests, embodiedness becomes the model for cultural conceptualization of spatial orientation, agency, perception, emotion, and thought. In other words, experiences become the model for cultural conceptions – and these include conceptions of the self.

Ritual as embodiment then implies that through acting, through the bodily experience of ritual, people appropriate values, ideals, and schemas that in turn affect their world. Bell says it thus: “In effect, real principles of ritual practice are nothing other than the flexible sets of schemes and strategies acquired and deployed by an agent who has embodied them.” In creating and participating in ritual space and action, “the agent acquires and instinctive knowledge of schemes that can be used to order his or her experience so as to render it more or less coherent with these ritual values concerning the sacred” (82). Thus ritual action provides us not only with a different point of view, but also with a different pattern of doing. As Jennings remarks, “Ritual action does not primarily teach us to see differently but to act differently” (328). And this acting extends beyond ritual space. “The performance of ritual, then, teaches one not only how to conduct the ritual itself, but how to conduct oneself outside the ritual space – in the world epitomized by or founded or renewed in and through the ritual itself” (329).

Csordas (1983) refers to this process of symbolic or rhetorical healing the “holy” substrate of illness and healing, the substrate that provides reference to a system of moral and cosmological forces that constitute a radically different universe of discourse (343). Through this discourse, supplicants are “rhetorically ‘moved’ into a state dissimilar from both pre-illness and illness reality” (346). As he asserts, effective therapies are mitigated primarily by three things: the emotional support of the individual, reaffirmation of his worth in a community, and a reorganization of his or her orientation to experience (affective and cognitive restructuring).

What is regarded as healing, then, “does not necessarily include removal of symptoms, but change in the meaning the patient attributes to the illness, or an alteration of the patient’s lifestyle” (334). Implicit in this change is the effective integration of the individual into the community. For the purposes of Native Americans in prison, such a change is also dependent on the ability of the Elders and inmates to negotiate common cultural ground of symbol and meaning.

Laurence Kirmayer (1993) also focuses on the importance of rhetoric in healing. His intention is “to show how therapeutic rhetoric uses metaphor to first evoke and then bridge the compelling narratives of cultural myths and the bodily-felt immediacy of experience” (163). Kirmayer’s metaphor theory insists on three levels of action and discourse: the mythic level of atemporal, socially constructed coherent narratives or templates, the archetypal level of bodily-givens (including structure and motor-system patterns and such), and the metaphoric level of tentative, temporary constructions (thinking of one thing in terms of another by an interaction with the sensory, affective, and cognitive aspects of juxtaposed concepts). “Metaphor theory is presented here as the play of tropes in the intermediate realm between body and society – always in contact with, constrained by, responding to, coordinating and provoking, the upper and lower realms of myth (the socially constructed) and archetype (the bodily-given)” (170). In the intermediate realm of symbol, metaphor transforms its topic “by an interaction with the sensory, affective and cognitive aspects of juxtaposed concepts” (172). Truth emerges in this transaction, but it is a tentative truth dependent on sensory-affective processing as well as mental representations.

One of the consequences of this multi-level interaction and conceptual reshaping is the conveyance of surplus meanings (172). Through metaphor, meaning is expressed not only through words, but also through gestures and images and the like. In order to remain meaningful, Kirmayer asserts that the metaphor must remain dependent on context “at both ends of the metaphoric process,” myth and archetype (173). John McCreery makes a similar distinction between potential meaning and effective meaning. In his 1979 article, McCreery asserts that most studies of therapeutic ritual spend their time exploring the institutional, cultural levels of meaning without giving much attention to what rituals may mean to particular individuals. In reality, it is this particular meaning, the effective meaning, dependent on the individual’s perspective and background, that is therapeutic. And the only real way of determining the

effective meaning of a ritual is to get to know the people involved in the ritual – what they think about it, how they experience it and interpret it, etc.. Once again, it is not what the symbols mean “officially” that is important but how they direct attention, or how they effect meaning in particular individuals.

According to Waldram, there is a built-in flexibility and adaptability of Aboriginal spirituality for this very reason - it is accommodating to the specific needs of the practitioner while grounding him or her in a larger system of healing and growth. As Waldram states, “the symbols are particularized to each individual in a unique way; a given symbol likely exists within fairly broad parameters of possible meaning, and may mean somewhat different things to different individuals” (215). As an example, Waldram presents the perspective of one Elder in Western Canada who has developed teachings geared specifically toward the needs of the men he works with yet are still grounded in the traditions of the people. For example, one particular teaching about the sacred pipe “pertains to the value of proper sexuality and is used particularly when working with sexual offenders” (94).

Imprisoned Native Americans are not all equally touched by Native spirituality, however, nor do they all pursue their culture or religion “as a method of rehabilitation of as a way to resist being broken and thus survive the prison experience” (Waldram, 141). Waldram argues that therapeutic effectiveness of spiritual and cultural participation may be determined by “the extent to which an offender first learns the meaning of the symbols, then accepts the basic principles behind them as a code of living” (98). An equally important factor may be the extent to which individuals identify with their communities (Hammond 1988).

Regardless, indigenous healing practices are not *ipso facto* successful for indigenous participants. As Weibel-Orlando notes in her study of Native Americans and alcohol treatment programs, there is a tendency in anthropological research to optimistically appraise the use of indigenous curing practices in the treatment of alcohol and substance abuse for indigenous peoples. In reality, success rates are much more ambiguous. As Grobsmith recounts, “some followers of the sweat lodge and Sacred Pipe have failed their efforts at sobriety, just as some followers of AA or medical approaches have failed. Conversely, some adherents of the sweat lodge have succeeded both in maintaining sobriety and in staying free of law enforcement contact, just as adherents of more conventional approaches have likewise succeeded” (132).

Waldram contends that the idea of “success in treatment” may itself be problematic as well (201). Native and non-Native approaches often differ according to what is deemed as appropriate or effective therapy, and there are different cultural and historical contexts for judging efficacy. Scientific perspectives often don’t accept the existence of the spiritual or the healing possibilities of prayer and beliefs that transcend physiological effect and response.

Unlike the medical model, in which knowledge about treatment is thought of in terms of measurements of efficacy (through use of quantitative analysis and statistics), Aboriginal healing traditions incorporate different, broader, and more humanistic understandings of efficacy... The European intellectual tradition and the scientific method are distinct from Aboriginal intellectual traditions and ways of knowing; only with great caution might they be employed in attempting to assess the efficacy of Aboriginal spirituality... These systems must be allowed to articulate or, if necessary, generate their own understandings of “success,” and their own methodologies for measuring it. For Aboriginal spirituality in prisons, this has not yet been done” (214).

As he sees it, questions of efficacy must be situated in the context of how Elders see inmates’ problems in the first place, and how Aboriginal spirituality then deals with them. For example,

The Elders speak not of ‘personality disorders’ but of a lack of respect; they speak not of ‘schizophrenia’ but of ‘bad medicine.’ They view the individual’s problems as rooted in historical processes which resulted in the loss of culture and spirituality for Aboriginal people... The Elders... seek to reconnect the individual with his cultural and spiritual past, healing both the individual and his people. (214-15).

It is also important to point out that Elders and inmates who are involved in prison spirituality programs believe that the healing occurs precisely because of the intervention of the Creator or other spiritual forces. As Waldram points out, the consideration that these forces are *real* is not taken into account by most scholars of symbolic healing, and as a result their understanding of Aboriginal spirituality as such is not complete (78). And while scientific views seeks scientific explanations, Aboriginal explanations “focus on the importance of prayer and sacrifice, and the role of the Creator in protecting participants from the heat and in fostering healing in the broad sense. It is simply accepted that healing occurs without the need for a detailed explanation of how it happens” (208).

Coping in Prison

Coping theory provides another avenue for considering the ways in which ceremonial participation may affect one's life. Coping theory regards people as both shapers and products of their circumstances and explores the dynamic ways in which people respond to stressful events or experiences. As such, it is not so much the events in one's life that determine one's disposition, but the way in which one responds. These responses are not determined by individualistic forces of will, however, but are embedded in layers of environmental and social factors. As Kenneth Pargament describes it, coping is multidimensional, involving cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological dimensions; it is highly contextual and affected by an individual's myriad social relationships; it involves diverse possibilities and choices in response; and, most importantly, it is a process that evolves and changes over time (1997). Coping theory examines these multiple dimensions and explores the ways in which their interaction affects one's ability to cope. For many Native American inmates, the sweat lodge ceremony plays an irreplaceable part in coping with life in prison.

Importance of Coping

In their 1988 article "Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates," Zamble and Porporino assert that incarceration itself is not inevitably deleterious to the mental and emotional health of inmates. The authors give voice to many of the contradictory and inconclusive studies that try to make such a claim. As they state:

Conceptually, it makes little sense to search for the psychological effects of imprisonment without acknowledging that these effects may vary considerably across individuals. How individuals cope with problems is more important than the frequency or severity of problems they experience. Unfortunately... previous psychological studies have concentrated on finding generalized and uniform effects. The reasons for variations among prisoners in social functioning and emotional or mental health have been typically ignored. (11)

The authors locate these variations in the interaction between personal and environmental factors, and they choose the conceptual framework of coping theory for its expression of an attempt to operationalize this message of interactionism (12). As such, it is not the problems

related to imprisonment that determine the behavior of inmates but the ways in which inmates cope with these problems.

Logically then, prisoners who cope better do better, both inside and outside the prison walls. As Robert Johnson (1996) asserts, mature coping “is at the core of what we mean by correction or rehabilitation, and thus creates the possibility of a more constructive life after release from prison” (98). Other advantages of mature coping include an increase in prosocial attitudes, a decrease in disciplinary problems, a decrease in anxiety and depression, and improvement in measures of general health (119).

Prisoners, however, are not exactly predisposed to mature coping skills.⁷ It may very well be ineffective coping skills that landed them in prison in the first place.⁸ Prisoners, then, not only have their own ineffective coping skills to overcome, but they have an immature mainstream prison culture (which tends to be hostile, manipulative, exploitive, rebellious, and self-centered) to contend with as well (Johnson, 113). As a result, many prisoners retreat to niches or sanctuaries of private life that help them avoid such a culture and insulates them from the mainline prison (120). Such sanctuaries may include spending more time in their cell or with a few select friends, or participating in activities that support life “off the yard.” Prisoners who employ such tactics “live not as role types or stereotypes parading about the prison yard but as individuals within small and manageable worlds” (121).

Of course not all niches are created equal. Some operate as sanctuaries from stress and nothing more. While perhaps the most common mode of prison adjustment, the drawbacks of these private sanctuaries include social isolation, antisocial action, and a general lack of

⁷ In data collected by Zamble and Porporino (1988), coping strategies used most often by inmates were low-level (such as reactive behaviors, avoidance, escape, and palliation). Although these may be effective in dealing with problems, remediation is only temporary because these strategies leave the basic situation unchanged (58). Higher-level coping modes (systemic efforts to analyze a problem, to consider alternative, or to redefine or reevaluate their situations) involve some active thinking about one’s situation, and generally require planning and analysis. Only a small minority of the offenders interviewed used these coping modes.

⁸ Zamble and Porporino: “... from all of the analyses we performed we are led to conclude that most subjects had a great deal of trouble coping with life outside of prison. They were poor at adopting responses that could ameliorate their problems, and they had an inadequate repertoire of effective coping responses, especially the higher-level strategies that might provide long-term or general improvement in their situations. Often they responded in habitual, inappropriate, or stereotyped ways, despite the nature of the problem” (69).

engagement with constructive social learning and growth (Johnson, 121). A more rehabilitative niche would be one that facilitates self-improvement, emotional support, and meaningful activity, a place “where one feels secure enough to respond maturely to stress instead of avoiding it” (ibid.). For the purposes of this study, I am proposing that the sweat lodge ceremony is one such niche. According to Johnson, the extent to which it facilitates the development of mature coping skills depends on the extent to which it can foster the primary attributes of self-determination or autonomy, secure social environments, and relatedness to others. What will be seen, however, is that self-determination and autonomy are predicated on community, not individuality. Again, the primacy of social bonds and communal attachments is raised.

Religion and Coping

In the quest to cope, individuals draw on a variety of resources – material, personal, social, and the like (Hobfoll 1998). One resource that often gets drawn into the coping equation is religion, especially for those with limited access to alternatives. It is Pargament’s contention that when religion becomes a force in the coping process, the ability to predict outcomes beyond the effects of secular coping methods may increase (197). It is important to note that it is not religious *affiliation* that is predictive of better or worse mental health, but rather the *ways in which a person is religious*.

As presented earlier, the importance of community and social attachments cannot be overstated. Social bonds enliven morals and beliefs (Bainbridge 1992), socialization affects choices and participations (Sherkat 1997), and collective actions integrate collective beliefs and bonds into the lives of individuals. In effect, the influence of religious values and beliefs on individuals is predicated on social and communal attachment.

In addition, positive relationships have been made between good mental health (less anxiety, higher ego strength, more integrated social behavior, less paranoia or insecurity, for example) and intrinsic (or internalized) religiosity (Payne *et al* 1992). Such orientations are characterized by greater commitment and integration into the personal, internal lives of their practitioners, in contrast to extrinsic orientations characterized by utilitarian motivations aimed towards status, security, self-justification and sociability (see also Pargament 1997, 61). It is interesting to note that from a Native American perspective, the distinction between internal and

external is not so clear cut, nor is it the same. As seen earlier, one's identity is predicated on communal involvement and belonging, the "security" and "sociability" aspects of extrinsic orientations that, in this theory, are secondary to internal life. Pargament offers some corrective to the individual nature of "intrinsic belief" when he says: "to the extent that religion becomes a larger and more integrated part of the orienting system, it takes on a greater role in coping. To the extent that religion becomes less prominent in the orienting system, more disconnected from other resources, and less relevant to the range of life experiences, it recedes in importance in coping" (Pargament 1997, 147). Perhaps for Native Americans, it is the extent that communal involvement is integrated into one's life that influences the extent of religious involvement in coping. In other words, religion can be helpful, harmful, or irrelevant to the coping process depending on its incorporation into the lives of its practitioners and the social attachments that it affords. Since social attachments are a primary experience for Native people, the religious nature or understanding of these attachments may hold greater weight.

In addition, religious coping complements non-religious coping through its attachment with the sacred. Whereas secular coping tends to emphasize dimensions of personal control and power, religious coping responds to the limitations of personal control and aims towards looking beyond ourselves for help (Pargament 1997, 8, 310). As Pargament states,

Try as we might to maximize significance through our own insights and experiences or through those of others, we remain human, finite, and limited. At any time we may be pushed beyond our immediate resources, exposing our basic vulnerability to ourselves and the world. To this most basic of existential crises, religion holds out solutions. The solutions may come in the form of spiritual support when other forms of social support are lacking, explanations when no other explanations seem convincing, a sense of ultimate control through the sacred when life seems out of control, or new objects of significance when old ones are no longer compelling. In any case, religion complements nonreligious coping, with its emphasis on personal control, by offering responses to the limits of personal powers. (310)

So – not only does religion provide us with resources of social attachment and religious belief, but it ties us to something greater than ourselves and accompanies us on the way to acceptance (of our limits) and hope (of that beyond). As such, religious coping is both comforting and compelling. I now turn to one way in which it may be concretized in the daily life of inmates.

Religious Ritual and Coping

It is my contention that the sweat lodge ceremony may be an ideally suited niche for the development of mature coping skills. Not only does it offer avenues for tapping and building resources (cultural, personal, and social), developing constructive relationships, and fostering new ways of being in the world, but it also adds the dimension of the sacred, a dimension that carries its own unique portals of community, identity, and self-understanding (see also Csordas, Ness, Glik 1988).

In the beginning of this section I mentioned three attributes of mature coping: self determination, security, and relatedness to others. Of these three, relatedness to others is the most encompassing, for as Johnson notes it is through relatedness to other that autonomy and security can be achieved (107). While many discussions of ritual address the cathartic nature of symbolic expression (Freud 1959, Gay 1979), Janet Jacobs (1992) contends that it is through the relatedness to others that catharsis is actually achieved. She writes:

As an interactive process, ritual engages the participant in behaviors that reinforce connection and attachment to significant others. The subject of such attachment may be a divine being, a spiritual leader, a religious community, or an entire society. However, it is the sense of connectedness that facilitates the cathartic response through which painful emotion can be brought to consciousness, and relived or expressed for the first time. (291)

As such, the cathartic value of a religious rite is derived not from its socially sanctioned provision of emotional release but from the interpersonal connection between the communicant, the sacred, and significant others (292). Emotions and experiences are validated by the presence of others in a space free from the fear of consequence or retaliation (297). Such an assessment of religious practices suggests that

religious ceremonies play a significant role in reducing anxiety and isolation as emotions are acknowledged, expressed, and resolved within the social milieu of attachment and connection to significant others... The psychological benefit of ritual thus emerges out of the relational aspects of ceremonial acts that validate and give expression to the emotional reality of human experience. (298)

This resonates with Garrouette's understanding of rituals as vehicles which enable people to experience connectedness rather than simply a means to channel anxiety (133). Community is once again primary for ceremony to be effective (and affective).

Religious ritual is an avenue of prosocial coping in which acts are intended to care for others, seek their care, or behave in ways that involve positive social interaction (Hobfoll 1998, 144). Such coping can be associated with a more active coping style as well, as effort is taken to foster and maintain such interaction. As a result, practitioners are participating in cooperative efforts of personal efficacy and control. They are building their resources and in a sense setting themselves up for more effective coping in the future.

Religious rituals are valuable not only for the social attachments that they engender but for the concepts that they embody as well, concepts available for appropriation by those who participate in them. They offer perspectives from which life can be understood, processed, and dealt with; they provide cognitive tools for managing experiences, defining problems and needs, and increasing one's sense of control and personal responsibility. They help explain and define events by providing implicit, underlying ideals and beliefs that inform one's interaction with life.

Furthermore, in the process of forming themselves through ritual action, ritual participants are embarking on the emergence of a new kind of identity, a new mode of "self-in-relation-to-the-world" (McGuire 1988). It is a mode in which ritual participation expresses agency – the embodiment of intentional self-construction, empowerment, and legitimization. Through ritual language and action, images of world, self, and community are proposed, complete with alternative understandings and meanings of value, responsibility, the nature of self, the nature of life, and the possibility of self-transcendence. Through participation, these values are internalized and socialized into forms of action, interaction, and belief. They are energized with meaning and legitimization through their relation to the sacred as well as the community who embraces them.

Such appropriation can also work to protect and maintain serviceable constructs once they are established (Pargament, 106-114). Rituals then become resources not only for transformation but for preservation and conservation as well, of religious as well as psychological and social ends. As such, rituals may act as points of resistance against the greater powers that be. As low status members of society engage in ceremonial expressions of agency, oppressive social relations are momentarily overturned and participants gain some venue for self-

determination and self-creation (Turner, 1969). Within the Native American population, rituals and religious ceremonies continue to provide a social identity and emotional connection for disenfranchised and alienated members of society. For the Native American men in prison, this shared identity extends not only to the brothers in the lodge, but to those outside the confines of the prison walls as well.

Outcomes

According to Pargament, the extent to which religion is helpful in the coping process depends on three things: the kind of religion, the person doing the coping, and the situation. “Depending on the interplay among these variables, religion can be helpful, harmful, or irrelevant to the coping process” (312). Helpful religious strategies offer spiritual support and a sense of partnership with God, positive social support, benevolent religious reframing, and a sense that control is centered in God, not in the self. Negative religious coping reflects discontent with the social group and God, punitive religious reframing, and a higher sense of personal control and power (293-300). In terms of people, religion seems to be more helpful to groups with less access to secular resources and power, and to groups that involve religion more deeply in their lives (more internalized schemas/framework) (300-302). In terms of situations, Pargament found that religious coping is associated with better outcomes at all levels of stress, and the benefits of religious coping increase as stress intensifies (303). Given that some forms of religious coping are more harmful than helpful, it is important to note that religion also has the capacity to exacerbate the effects of stress and make bad matters even worse (307).

Zamble and Porporino found that after imprisonment much of the inmates’ old habits stayed the same. Their data show very little positive behavioral change in prison, and this is consistent with the idea of limited effects of environmental conditions alone on behavior. “Compared to the power of the interaction between events and individual response, imprisonment in itself is not sufficient to produce any consistent changes in behavior” (151).

On the other hand, Johnson contends that mature coping skills learned in prison *can* be transferred to life on the outside. Mature coping enables one to solve problems, or at least to make them more manageable, and in his opinion prison life and life in general are related. “Prison problems are essentially exaggerated – though sometimes greatly exaggerated – versions

of problems experienced in normal life” (122). In addition, once one starts coping successfully the process feeds itself. Whereas immature behavior produces failure, lower self-esteem, and inhibits problem solving, successful coping builds self-confidence and encourages one to take on new tasks and learn new skills. Mature coping thus becomes a self-reinforcing cycle of improvement. (Johnson 123, Zamble and Porporino, 15).

If mature coping skills can be transferred to life outside, then it is even more imperative that avenues for developing these skills be incorporated into the rehabilitation process whenever possible. And since it seems that active, committed, intrinsically religious persons have better personal adjustment, then it would also follow that religious organizations which foster the development of an active, committed, intrinsic orientation would contribute to the mental well-being of their adherents (Payne *et al*, 75). In light of Radical Indigenism, this well-being is also dependent on the ability of individuals to connect in real ways with their tribal communities, both within and outside of prison walls.

The purpose of these considerations is not to show the ways that sweat lodge ceremonies meet the needs of religious coping, but to show how theories regarding the well-being of people return again and again to the importance of community and pro-social involvement for healing and positive change. A community manifested in ceremony may compel healing even more to the extent that relationships are created, re-created, and confirmed, not to mention the unique ways that participants access resources and knowledge applicable to their daily dealings and lives.

Summary

In the context of personal change and healing, there is a dynamic relationship between social relatedness/attachment and personal appropriation of ritual/religious experience. The same dynamic is found in the development of community and identity. In the prison setting, the sweat lodge ceremony is a unique facilitator of both social and spiritual attachment. The social environment of ritual space and community confers social bonds as well as social, personal, and spiritual activity in regards to the ideals, perspectives, and practices of behavior. Sweat lodge participation provides a means for tapping into cultural, personal, and social resources that aid in healing and growth. As an addition or alternative to conventional treatment, spiritual healing

groups combine the invocation of sacred power with attention to psychological and behavioral dynamics in ways that may aid in the relief of psychological, existential, or life stress and may evoke changes and transformation. In addition, effects of healing are reinforced by the ongoing interpersonal milieu of the participant, providing reinforcement as well as a sense of communal responsibility and accountability. The efficacy of sweat lodge practice, then, is dependent on a combination of social relationships and the internalization of religious perspectives, actions, and ideals.

Resisting

Resistance is not a category or concept that was explicitly named by my collaborators, but it is inevitably present in the desire to “be Indian,” in the creation and recognition of “One Nation,” and in the relationships between Native Americans and other population groups in prison. This resistance begins on an individual level when one seeks out a community of identity and belonging that is distinct from the dominant community, and it culminates in subtle and not-so-subtle resistance against the larger structures of power and meaning. The extent to which ritual participates in the experience of power and meaning over-and-against dominant culture will determine its role in real resistance and acculturation.

The Politics of Identity

In his 1999 article on ritual healing and the politics of identity, Thomas Csordas explores the relationship between ritual healing and identity politics as a subtle form of political resistance. He argues that the relation between ritual healing and identity politics in contemporary Navajo society is positive and must be taken seriously, and he asserts that this relationship is played out on three different levels: one, in the representation of social self and other (or in the ways in which Navajo identity is articulated in relation to the dominant society); two, in the ways in which diverse healing traditions are pragmatically negotiated; and three, in the transformation of personal and collective identity, particularly in regards to dignity and self-worth as a Navajo.

Csordas considers this a “simplistic interpretation” however, and he is actually more interested in the ways in which experiential transducers operate between the religious and

political domains. As he states, “Bodily experience may be a prime example of such a transducer, and moreover one that is relevant at all three levels of relation between healing and identity politics I have identified” (15). As a transducer, bodily experience locates the individual within a social and cultural constitution of meaning and power, and religious tradition becomes “more than a badge of ethnic identity; it is a mode of engaging the world” (16).

The connection between experience and politics can also be described through the experience of “subjectivity.” In other words, rather than becoming subjectified by constructs and/or attitudes of the dominant class or embodying appropriations of themselves as constituted by Others (e.g., images of laziness, drunken Indians, and other gross stereotypes), individuals can participate in self-positioning and self-understanding. As has already been seen, this happens on a communal as well as personal level.

In *Invitation to Sociology*, Peter Berger attests that individual identity is largely constructed and shaped by the society in which one lives. As long as we remain ignorant of these influences, we continue to construct ourselves as such; we are in a sense kept “prisoners” by society, by the identities that are, in a sense, conferred on us as members. As individuals, however, we must free ourselves from these constructs when they are not beneficial. It is only through the exercise of freedom and choice, in tension with the social world, that our “liberation” can take place.

Michel Foucault refers to this liberation as “the practice of self-care,” or the practice of intentionally creating new forms of subjectivity (Rabinow 1984). As individuals subject to the dictates of external agencies, one’s freedom lies not in escaping reality but transfiguring it (ibid, 32-50). Transfiguring involves the interplay between what is real and the exercise of freedom. One grasps the dynamics of the social world in which one lives, while at the same time producing oneself – taking oneself as an object of elaboration, construction, and “a work of art.” By taking oneself as an object to be developed and cultivated, one gains access to self-ownership and/or self-possession. Allowing other forces to shape us, with no intervention on our part, leaves us immature.

Self-cultivation results in more than just maturity. For Foucault, power becomes effective through subjectivity, and the activity of self-construction establishes relations not only with the self, but also with other and the world around us. As such, self-cultivation is also imbued with political concerns. As John Ransom notes,

By entering into the activity of shaping our own subjectivity, each of us can potentially thwart, challenge, or at least question the ways in which we have been made. And let us again emphasize the political impact of such a project: in a society that relies on the unrecognized permeability of subjective states, the spread of technologies of the self result in so many newly resistant points. (152)

In other words, developing one's subjective self by transfiguring reality in a way that cultivates self-construction creates a point of resistance against the powers that be, against the plurality of forces that shape us into being who we are. Such opposition has cumulative power, affecting a challenge to the general, structural truth.⁹

The Role of Ritual

Foucault contends that the subject is constituted in real practices, both individual and social (Ransom, 369). This echoes Csordas' sentiment of bodily experience as experiential transducer. By creating a space for self-configuration (self-constitution), one is allowed to reposition and/or transfigure oneself, to bend the lines of power in the construction of the self and self-identity. Religious ritual can easily be used as one such space. Not only does it offer alternative structures of knowledge and rules of conduct, but also it allows (perhaps begs) the participants to create themselves in the image of this knowledge and conduct.

In the process of forming themselves through ritual action, ritual participants are embarking on the emergence of a new kind of identity, a new mode of "self-in-relation-to-the-world" (McGuire 1988). It is a mode in which ritual participation expresses agency – the embodiment of intentional self-construction, empowerment, and legitimization. Through ritual language and action, images of world, self, and community are proposed, complete with alternative understandings and meanings of value, responsibility, the nature of self, the nature of life, and the possibility of self-transcendence. Through participation, these values are internalized and socialized into forms of action, interaction, and belief. They are energized with meaning and legitimization through their relation to the sacred as well as the community who embraces them.

Such appropriation also works to protect and maintain serviceable constructs once they are established (Pargament, 106-114). Rituals then become resources not only for transformation

⁹ See Ransom pp. 145-150 for further discussion of subjectivity as opposition to larger structures of power.

but also for preservation and conservation of religious as well as psychological and social ends. As such, rituals may act as points of resistance against the greater powers that be. As low status members of society engage in ceremonial expressions of agency, oppressive social relations are momentarily overturned and participants gain some venue for self-determination and self-creation (Turner, 1969). Within the Native American population, rituals and religious ceremonies continue to provide a social identity and emotional connection for disenfranchised and alienated members of society. For the Native American men in prison, this shared identity extends not only to the brothers in the lodge, but to those outside the confines of the prison walls as well.

Yet these constructs, both ideological and real, are in tension with the realities of life. As William Roseberry points out in *Anthropologies and Histories*, there are definite limitations for every cultural realization. Although ritual may work to transform social life, to refigure it with alternative values and constructs of understanding, these transformations take place in the realities of existence. Prison life itself resists transformation in some very powerful ways. These men must live in prison and abide by prison, but perhaps they need not succumb to prison. They can operate within it in a distinctive and meaningful way for they have their own constructs – augmented by a community – by which to live.

The important themes here are self-definition, self-creation, and self-realization, in the context of a specific community that provides integration. And while all of this “self-“ actualization seems to lend an individualistic bent to the conversation, it is important not to give way to what Steven Hobfoll (1998) calls the “illusion of self-reliance” in which the benefits and realities of communal support are often underplayed. Radical Indigenism offers a corrective here as well, for Native philosophies of identity are dependent on community as well.

The sweat lodge ceremony, then, provides Native Americans in prison a locus for communal and personal configuration. It provides social and ideological integration and support in contrast to the dominant culture, and allows for the embodied practice of self-care, power, and meaning. In the context of prison, this again problematizes the definition of “success” in rehabilitation, for it challenges traditional institutional goals which are based on Euro-centric understandings of corrections, specifically goals of individual penance, responsibility, and accountability within a system that greatly limits one’s power and authority. Yet if we acknowledge the importance of self-creation in maturity and growth, and appreciate the social

bonds that are necessary for such growth, then ceremonies like the sweat lodge become that much more instrumental in the healing and restoration of our Native American inmates and communities.

Conclusions

In this survey of community and identity, personal change and healing, and resistance, it is not doctrines or beliefs that become important so much as the integration of individuals into community life. This is consistent with Indigenous philosophies and approaches to religion and spirituality. As Vine Deloria Jr states, “whatever else a particular experience may be, religion itself exists in specific groups and is probably more a national or tribal affair than either an individual or universal affair” (1994, 287). Although universal ethics and rules of conduct “seem to appear as religions become more mature” (ibid.), the starting point is community and social bonds.

Community and social bonds establish the relatedness necessary for tribal belonging and identity in both being and action. It is the locus within which individual identity is formed and re-formed, and communal identity is experienced. Community integrates us socially and morally into value systems and world views that shape the ways in which we act and react in this world. Communities based on spiritual principles of meaning and relatedness add sacred legitimacy to their expectations and bonds. That these bonds and worldviews may be in tension with dominant culture is no surprise. The extent to which these bonds influence us may be.

While the importance of community and social bonds is evident, the internalization and personal integration of religious ideologies and – I would say – community – is important as well, so that not only are you a part of the community but the community is a part of you. It is in this process where the boundaries between self and community become blurred, where social experiences become embodied and tradition becomes a “mode of engaging the world” (Csordas 1999).

Of course there is a danger in overemphasizing the positive and integrative aspects of religious community and participation. Ceremonial activity is not inevitably salvific, nor is it a social alchemy that will inevitably “transform good intentions into new instincts or weave the threads of raw and broken experiences into a textured fabric of connectedness to other people

and things” (Bell, 264). There is always the role of agency and subjectivity, of personal intention and disposition, of communal health and integrity. This reminds me of something Leonard Peltier wrote:

Be thankful you weren't cursed with perfection. If you were perfect, there'd be nothing for you to achieve with your life. Imperfection is the source of every action. This is both our curse and our blessing as human beings. Our very imperfection makes a holy life possible.

We're not supposed to be perfect. We're supposed to be *useful*. (10)

This holds true for individuals as well as the religious communities of which we are a part.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this dissertation, I have reviewed the ways in which colonization and oppression have affected Native American inmates through community trauma, systematic discrimination, and social ills. In spite of such overwhelming destruction, however, Native Americans have also been active initiates of resistance and survival. By reclaiming culture and tradition in meaningful ways, Native people experience themselves, their lives, and their communities in contexts of hope and relationship and continuity. In practicing spiritual and cultural traditions, Native peoples not only tap into sacred resources of help and hope, but communal experiences of belonging and right relationship that bind one to one's community and enliven one's community in oneself. These experiences can take on political and social nuances in the degree to which they create distinct meanings, interpretations, and experiences of life that are at variance with those of the dominant culture.

For men and women in prison who have access, the sweat lodge ceremony is a primary means by which inmates connect with their communities. Although it is sometimes criticized as being a pan-Indian ceremony that can contribute to the homogenization of tribes, it remains the primary conduit for spiritual and communal experiences of Natives in prison. Participation in sweat lodge ceremonies can constitute identity and communal belonging, and can provide inmates with avenues for engaging shared values, practices, and ideologies that encourage personal and communal healing and right relationship. Participation in sweat lodge ceremonies also can provide inmates with alternative means of interpreting and experiencing their lives in an otherwise hostile and dis-serving environment.

As seen in this study, healing and transformation are not inevitable results of sweat lodge participation, but are dependent on personal attitudes and dispositions as well as the relative health and well being of the community. In mapping the experience of ritual participation, then, it is not the "ritual act" so much as the complex interactions of people, places, histories, traditions, relationships, and spiritual forces that embody the possibilities for transformation. Ceremonial participation is part of the process of learning about and experiencing one's self, one's world, and one's relationships. It is the means by which one is integrated into community life, the starting point for establishing the relatedness necessary for tribal belonging and identity in both being and action, the process whereby self and community merge.

For the men in this study, it is clear that the sweat lodge ceremony is pivotal in their experience of community, identity, and healing, both within prison and beyond. It is also clear that Amer-European therapeutic constructs that ideologically separate the individual from his community, encouraging the individual to consider his life in terms of himself, his deficiencies,

and the repairs necessary to his own psyche, further alienate Native men and women from their source – their communities. If prisons are truly committed to the rehabilitation of Native Americans in prison, then they must also be committed to their communities, and to the creation and sustenance of culture-specific programming and culturally effective criminal justice services. As Marianne O. Nielsen states, “The development of Native communities and the development of criminal justice services for Native peoples are intricately linked. They exist in a mutually influential balance: As one progresses, so will the other; as one is damaged, so is the other” (302).

Experiences of community are essential to all experiences of Native life. Value systems are determined not by dogmatic rules but by the expectations of the community and the necessity of remaining in right relationship. Spiritual ceremonies are predicated on communal practice. Kidwell *et al* (2001) remark that in Native communities sin can be defined as the failure to live up to one’s responsibilities to the community, and “salvation can be defined as the ability to return to a state of *communitas*” (19). Any concept of a Natives’ sense of ‘self’ is almost always tied to how he or she fits into Native community (Weaver 1998). The challenge to these communities is that they are working to overcome the results of centuries of oppression and injustice. This injustice is evidenced not only in the lives of Natives in prison, but in their struggles for political power, economic empowerment, cultural revitalization, appropriate health care and education, and the restoration of sacred lands and religious freedom. I concur with Marianne O. Nielsen when she says, “Native people must not be alone in this struggle. Native crime and incarceration are not “Native problems,” they are “societal problems.” The cost in the waste of human life and potential is shared by all.” (302)

Some of the best examples of culturally effective criminal justice services are in Canada, where Aboriginal communities are developing and implementing sentencing and mediation initiatives including sentencing circles, elder and community sentencing panels, sentence advisory committees, and community mediation projects. In his book *Justice in Aboriginal Communities*, Ross Green (1998) presents case studies of these innovative approaches to sentencing, and explores the successes of and challenges to their implementation. Green states that the purpose of a justice system in an Aboriginal society is to restore peace and equilibrium within the community, and to reconcile the accused with his or her own conscience and with the individual or family that has been wronged. This is in contrast to the punitive focus of

conventional Canadian and U.S. law and corrections, and presents a direct challenge to the appropriateness of the present legal and justice system for Aboriginal people in the resolution of conflict, the reconciliation of offenders and victims, and the maintenance of community harmony and good order. The Native Law Centre of Canada¹⁰ is another source for programs, publications, and information related to the articulation and implementation of traditional Aboriginal values and practices in the criminal justice field.

As seen in this study, the renewal of traditional Native spiritual practices in the prison setting is not a cure-all for the personal and social ills of a people, but it may be a foundation from which communities and their people can continue to find hope and restoration in the world. The question of whether or not the traditions of particular nations can be renewed in a system that proscribes a generic, pan-Indian culture and spirituality is yet to be answered. The question of whether or not people and their immediate communities can be renewed in helpful and restorative ways is clear, and the answer is affirmative in the extent to which it is a community of integration and relatedness in both being and action.

¹⁰ The Native Law Centre of Canada can be found online at <http://www.usask.ca/nativelaw/index.html>, or at University of Saskatchewan, 101 Diefenbaker Place, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7N 5B8. Main Phone Line (306) 966-6189.

APPENDIX

Schedule of Questions

- name
- age now _____ age at time of current incarceration _____
- Where were you raised? By whom? Tribal affiliation?
- What spiritual traditions were a part of your family? Your community?
- If so, what spiritual practices did/does your family and/or community participate?
- Did you participate? If so, in what spiritual practices did you participate before coming to prison?

- Do you participate in spiritual practices now? If so, which ones?
Why/why not? How often?
- What kind of things influenced your decision to get involved or not in these practices?
- What continues to influence your decision?
- Does the presence of the sweat lodge affect the prison (its population, staff, the system, the environment perhaps)? If so, how?
- What other activities do you participate in here? (counseling, school, work)

If above answers indicate participation in sweat lodge practices, these questions will follow:

- If you are comfortable and willing, tell me about the sweat lodge ceremony – What are the rituals and symbols? What do they mean? Where/how did you learn this?
- Who is allowed to participate in the sweat lodge ritual?
- What do you hope to gain from the sweat lodge practices?
- Has the sweat lodge affected your life? (in general/in prison?) If so, how?
- Do you do other rituals during the week? When? Where?
- Are there other activities or practices that are meaningful to you here?

For all volunteers:

- Is there anything else you would like to share or say about the sweat lodge or our time together?

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