

## “Sexualizing the Sacred: Appropriation of Native American Dance”

Dancing in Native American culture is considered a spiritual experience in which one is able to “access memory” and intimately connect with their roots (Mitchelle and Burelle 43). However, due to patriarchal colonialism, these sacred practices have been sexualized. This paper analyzes how this type of appropriation has taken place in children’s and young adult literature, as well as explains why accurate representation of such actions is vital. I will first examine a scene from Disney’s 1953 film *Peter Pan* featuring Tiger Lily dancing, followed by a similar scene in Kathleen Kudilinski’s 2006 novel *My Lady Pocahontas*, in which Pocahontas and other Native American women perform a ceremonial dance. I will demonstrate how in both scenes, although both very different, do the same thing: sexualize both the woman herself as well as the dance.

Despite this history of misrepresentation, children’s books by Native American authors can give a much more historically accurate and culturally truthful depiction of the history and cultural value of dance; I will then present Cynthia Leitich Smith’s *Jingle Dancer* and David Bouchard and Pam Aleekuk’s *Long Powwow Nights* as counterexamples. Accurate representation of Native Americans as well as their cultural and religious traditions not only allows Native American readers to see themselves, but also tears down the stereotypes and inaccuracies presented by patriarchal colonialism. Ultimately, I will explain how these counterexamples of texts are decolonizing and portray Native American dance in the correct way: as sacred experiences through which one can reconnect with their cultural and even spiritual roots.

## Texts References

Bouchard, David, and Pam Aleekuk. *Long Powwow Nights*. Red Deer Press, 2009.

Disney, Walt. *Peter Pan*. Walt Disney Productions, 1953.

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Smith, Cynthia L. *Jingle Dancer*. Harper Collins, 2000.