

The Familiar Face of Genocide: Internalized Oppression among American Indians

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Virtually nonexistent in traditional American Indian communities, today American Indian women and children experience family violence at rates similar to those of the dominant culture. This article explores violence within American Indian communities as an expression of internalized oppression and as an extension of Euro-American violence against American Indian nations.

When he was a small boy he tried
to summon the spirits with a flute
That his father threw out the window
while promptly beating his face in

On the bus to the big school
the white kids called him
timber nigger
and the only good indian is a dead one
unless he plays ball

So he learned to run and tackle
to cheer the onlookers
Til his father stabbed a hole in the pigskin
while promptly breaking the foot that he kicked with

He started to drink his Blue Ribbon
smashed his head through windshields

numbing the pain of an existence
too aching to bear

And
somewhere between two and nineteen
he turned hollow and dried up inside
his spirit flew off to the West

His body a shell left behind
to carry out revenge
for five hundred years of genocide
that he ate from an empty government hand-out can

When he put the rifle to his wife's head
and raped his two babies
he never even felt it
because he was already dead

American Indians have suffered from systematic genocide within Western society, in the forms of government-sanctioned physical onslaughts and confrontations, murder, land theft, forced removal and relocation, economic deprivation, incarceration, environmental racism, devastation of tribal sovereignty, and as a result of continued economic dependency. Acts of genocide committed against Indian people are founded on and legitimated by Western constructions of abject Otherness. Over five hundred years of social, political, and economic domination, Western society enforced its cultural codes of Otherness upon American Indians to gain our complicity in the power structure. Through formal Western education, conversion to Christianity, and assimilation into Euro-American culture and the capitalist economy, tribal people learned to speak the language and to interpret and reproduce the meanings of our oppressors; our own meanings, languages, and cultures were simultaneously devastated. American Indian participation in the construction and reproduction of Western language and meaning ensured our complicity in patriarchal power and aided Euro-American exploitation of our lands, resources, and labor.

Like colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the West—the very codes that created, reflected, and reproduced our oppression. As American Indians participate in, create, and reproduce Western cultural forms, we internalize Western meanings of difference and abject Otherness, viewing ourselves within and through the constructs that defined us as racially and culturally subhuman, deficient, and vile. As Western constructions of abject difference are both forced upon and accepted by American Indians, we define ourselves through these

constructions and subsequently participate in the reproduction of these codes. For, as we assume the dominant subject position, we often take upon ourselves definitions of the objectified, abject Other as (portions of) our own identities and act them out in flat, one-dimensional caricatures that mirror the dominant culture's representations. Moreover, as we buy into these codes, we not only apply them to our individual selves but also to those within our own marginalized group(s)—our loved ones and community members.

Virtually nonexistent in traditional tribal communities prior to European invasion, contemporary American Indian communities struggle with devastating social ills including alcoholism, family violence, incest, sexual assault, fetal-alcohol syndrome, homicide, and suicide at startling rates similar to and sometimes exceeding those of white society. In their groundbreaking works, authors Maria YellowHorse BraveHeart and Lemyra DeBruyn (1995; 1996a; 1996b) understand the widespread social ills plaguing American Indians as manifestations of internalized oppression. The authors assert that experiences of racism and internalized oppression contribute to current social ills among Indians as a result of Western imperialism, assimilation, and Indian identification with the dominate culture's codes (BraveHeart and DeBruyn 1996b). In describing causal factors leading to social problems, they state, "We contend that the high rates of depression . . . suicide, homicide, domestic violence and child abuse among American Indians can also be attributed to [the] processes of internalized oppression and identification with the aggressor" (1996b, 6).

Through five hundred years of assimilation and acculturation, American Indians have internalized Western discursive practices and so we often view ourselves in ways mirroring the dominant subject position. However, Indian people also live in a sort of cultural double consciousness, as portions of our traditional subjective identities persist in the preserved beliefs of our ancestors practiced today. Through the telling of our experiences and stories in a continued oral tradition and through the preservation of traditional ways, many Indian people resist the dominant culture's subject position, knowing that we, like our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, have not deserved a history of violence and genocide. Moreover, our oral traditions preserved many stories recounting the subjugation of our ancestors and these stories were passed along through generations creating an alternative interpretation, or knowledge, of the harms inflicted by white society.

American Indians' knowledge of our historical and continued oppression is experienced as a profound anguish. As Shirley Hill Witt explains, "Among Native Americans, the memory of genocide and tribal extinction is a raw unhealing wound" (1974, 35). This pain is described by Duran and Duran as a "soul wound" (1995, 27). The authors contend the genocidal efforts of Western imperialism have "inflict[ed] a wound to the soul of Native American people that is felt in agonizing proportions to this day" (Duran and Duran 1995, 27).

Our experiences of colonization and disempowerment under patriarchal capitalism are silenced by white society. The perpetration of cultural genocide is *whitewashed* by the dominant culture in the master narrative of “discovery” and “manifest destiny.”

Like the knowledges and stories of Others under patriarchal oppression, American Indian people’s pain is not recognized nor validated by the dominant culture. Instead, white society uses negative constructions of Indians as subhuman and lacking a full range of human qualities and emotions in order to justify our disempowerment. BraveHeart and DeBruyn elaborate upon this contention, asserting that American Indians have been socially constructed as incapable of experiencing emotional responses to pain and suffering. They contend, “[T]he historical view of American Indians as being stoic and savage contributed to a belief on the part of the dominant society that Indian people were incapable of having feelings. This belief system intimates that Indians had no capacity to mourn and, subsequently, no need or right to grieve” (BraveHeart and DeBruyn 1996b, 11). Drawing upon the literature on Nazi concentration camp survivors, BraveHeart and DeBruyn assert that American Indians today experience a phenomenon the authors label “Historical Unresolved Grief Syndrome” resulting from the “historical trauma”¹ experienced under cultural and economic imperialism. The authors contend that social problems such as alcohol abuse experienced by Indian people are symptomatic of the past and present traumas we experience, and also symptomatic of the dominant culture’s denial of the harms inflicted upon tribal people and from the invalidation of Indian pain (BraveHeart 1995; BraveHeart and DeBruyn 1996a; 1996b).

The intense historical unresolved grief and pain that exists is accompanied by an extreme rage at the dominant culture for abuses past and present. And, like Indian grief and pain, this rage is also invalidated by the dominant culture and denied avenues for expression. American Indians who assert rage externally toward our white oppressors—as in the American Indian Movement’s occupations of Alcatraz and the Washington Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Wounded Knee stand-off—are chastised, censored, imprisoned, and murdered.

Like Others who internalize the dominant subject position, American Indians sometimes express pain, grief, and rage internally toward ourselves and externally within our families and communities. Turned upon ourselves, American Indian people express rage, pain, and grief in depression, anxiety (BraveHeart and DeBruyn 1996b), drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and suicide. These contentions are supported by BraveHeart and DeBruyn who understand alcoholism among Indians “as a self-destructive act motivated by depression and grief . . . resulting from internalized aggression and internalized oppression” (1996b, 5).

In addition, American Indians sometimes express internal oppression outwardly upon our families and other Indian people in physical assaults, homi-

cide, and in violence against women and children. In a discussion of domestic violence in American Indian families, Duran and Duran explain, "The root of anger is at the oppressor, but any attempts at catharting anger to its root result in swift retaliation by the oppressor . . . safer to cathart anger on a family member . . ." (1995, 29).

The demonstration of internalized oppression among American Indians and Others does not occur deterministically, nor in strict dichotomous directions (inward/outward). Rather, inward and outward directed internal oppression should be understood as only two existing expressions within a nonlinear continuum of multiple expressions. Individual expressions of internal oppression are affected by individual material situations and experiences. Thus, potentially as many expressions of internal oppression exist as experiences of oppression. It is likely that the harm these expressions pose to self or Others is related to the extent that one is marginalized and oppressed by the dominant culture. The fluidity of expressions is an important factor in understanding the presence of internal oppression particularly among Indian people, where traditionally one was spiritually and culturally connected to the tribal community, and no explicit individual/community distinction was drawn. Here, outwardly expressed internal oppression and the subsequent harm of family or community is also an assault upon the self, as one destroys their own social network of support, connectedness, and love. Likewise, the inward expression of internalized oppression upon the self also harms the community to the extent that one is unable to provide support, connection, and love to family and tribal members.²

When we, as marginalized Others, internalize and portray our inferiority in these ways, we become a sort of "self-fulfilling prophecy," as we provide the dominant culture with evidence to support our continued objectification, disempowerment, and exploitation. When marginalized Others internalize the dominant subject position, we become our own oppressors as we carry our abjection within. We view our selves and our group(s) as essentially responsible for our political, economic, social, and cultural disempowerment. The dominant culture no longer needs to overtly force, threaten, or coerce our disempowerment, for now we enforce it within ourselves and within our communities of Others.

AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILY VIOLENCE AS INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Domestic and sexual violence against women and children is linked to other forms of domination within society, including racism and classism. Although largely absent from discussion, some feminists call attention to the significance of race and class constructs in the use of violence against women and children (Collins 1990; Davis 1990; Ferraro 1990; Wilson 1994; Diaz 1995; Okamura, Heras and Wong-Kerberg 1995). Like women and children who are constructed and objectified as inferior Others, individuals marginalized based upon abject

differences (race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) also experience violence under patriarchal domination. Others who are several times the subject of the dominant culture's representations—poor children and women of color, for example—experience greater disempowerment and violence at all levels of society, to the extent that they are devalued within patriarchy.

Prior to Euro-American contact, traditional American Indian societies valued all members of their communities as gifts from the spirit world. Differences between social groups, including gender differences between men and women, were viewed as symmetrical or mirroring one another in metaphysical balance. Elders, women, and children were valued and honored in their crucial roles in traditional families and communities. According to the oral traditions within our tribal communities, it is understood that prior to mass Euro-American invasion and influence, violence was virtually nonexistent in traditional Indian families and communities. The traditional spiritual world views that organized daily tribal life prohibited harm by individuals against other beings. To harm another being was akin to committing the same violation against the spirit world. On rare occasions when violence did occur, it was dealt with by all members of the tribal community and emphasis was placed on restoring harmony within the families of all that were affected.

Today, American Indian women and children are among the most economically, socially, and politically disenfranchised groups in the United States. Since contact, American Indian women and children have been victimized by Euro-American imperialist governments, religions, economies, and educational systems. American Indian women and children experience violence within the dominant culture and its institutions and also within our own families and tribal communities.

Through the processes of colonization, American Indian people have internalized white patriarchy and Western constructions of abject Otherness upon which patriarchal power is justified and maintained. As our traditional cultures were devastated, we internalized Western power structures at many levels and assumed Western dichotomous gender differences that privilege men and objectify women and children. We have internalized constructions of women and children as powerless commodities. Within our tribal communities today, Indian women and children are subordinated and oppressed by our own people.

As American Indian people internalize Western patriarchal power hierarchies, violence (as an exercise of power over those more marginalized) has become familiar within Indian homes and communities and can be understood as an expression of internal oppression. These expressions of internalized oppression became more acceptable in Indian families and communities as we internalized and participated in Western power constructs.

Largely eroded within many Nations, traditional American Indian economies, spiritual practices, and family and community structures no longer guard

tribal members from marginalization and violent exercises of authority. As Western culture, language, religion, and economic structures were imposed upon tribal people, many traditional, extended and matriarchal families eroded and were replaced by male-dominated familial structures (Leacock 1987; Anderson 1991; Feinman 1992).

Within these Western patriarchal-family structures, many American Indians recreate the power structures of the dominant culture. That is, Indian men often have privilege and authority over Indian women, and Indian fathers and mothers have privilege and authority over children, whereby each may exert violence as a socially acceptable operation of Western patriarchal power. Like other politically, economically, and socially disempowered individuals in the dominant culture, then, American Indian men may assert male authority violently in their homes and communities against women and children, and Indian women may assert parental authority violently against children.

The occurrence of violence within American Indian families today can further be understood as an experience normalized within Indian communities as Indian people have experienced mass victimization within Euro-American society. A primary example of the mass victimization of Indian people is found within the Euro-American educational system. In boarding schools in the United States and residential schools in Canada, physical and sexual abuse was a common experience for many children attending the schools (LaPointe 1987; CrowDog 1990; Northrup 1993; Emerick 1996). Boarding school teachers, staff, priests, and administrators (primarily whites) often physically and sexually abused students (Emerick 1996), sometimes justifying their violations of children as disciplinary measures (LaPointe 1987). In several boarding schools in the United States and Canada, it is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of all students attending the boarding schools were beaten or raped (Emerick 1996). Not only were Indian children abused directly by staff and administrators, but children were also forced to administer assaults upon one another (LaPointe 1987; Northrup 1993). For many, violence became a way of life as entire childhoods were spent in the boarding schools. In several tribal communities, it is estimated that all adults living within the communities today were either abused or witnessed the abuse of others as children attending the schools (Emerick 1996). Author Charlene LaPointe (1987), a survivor of boarding school atrocities, asserts that as generations of American Indian people were abused as children and forced to administer abuse upon other children in boarding schools, this common experience of violence has normalized child abuse and family violence within Indian families and communities today.

Removal of children from their communities and placement in often harmful environments, coupled with the erosion of traditional extended-family systems, has confounded child rearing responsibilities and abilities for Indian parents today. Child removal policies and the boarding school era impacted many

Nations, as Indian children became completely absent from their communities. Sometimes with only the exception of small babies and toddlers, many Indian communities were virtually *childless* for long periods of time. As generations of Indian children grew up in boarding schools and other off-reservation placements, Indian parents and communities were displaced from child-raising responsibilities. In recent decades, after many off-reservation boarding schools closed, and many Indian parents suddenly found themselves responsible for the daily task of raising children. Often raised in neglectful or abusive placements themselves, these “unparented parents” are now expected to raise their own children without appropriate past experience or guidance (Fischler 1985). The problem of child-rearing is even more difficult as Indian parents seek to raise children in nuclear families, for not only are these (nuclear) parents sometimes without necessary parenting skills, but as Nancy Gale (1987) contends, many are also without the traditional networks of emotional and economic support provided by extended families.

Once uncommon or virtually nonexistent, the physical and sexual abuse of women and children in Indian families is now a familiar occurrence, as it is in the dominant culture. While silence of these harms exists both in the dominant culture and in American Indian communities, Indian communities suppress the harms committed upon us by one another often to a much greater extent. Within Indian families and communities, there is a *mass* silence enveloping domestic violence and sexual abuse committed by our loved ones and community members. This silence is distinguished from the pervasive silence in the dominant culture by the reality that silence among Indian people also occurs within double consciousness, as we simultaneously reject *and* recreate white male-patriarchal power. Like members of the dominant culture, Indian people are silenced as we buy into dominant cultural constructions that justify and normalize patriarchal violence. However, American Indian people are also simultaneously aware of our genocidal history with Euro-Americans.

With the knowledge of our past and present disempowerment, Indian people explain violence within our families and communities by attributing such actions to our historical and present-day suffering. Aware of our victimization by Euro-Americans, Indian people often attribute abuse by family members and friends to something the offender learned from the white man or as something he does out of helplessness, rage, and despair. We are aware of the dominant culture’s “scientific” truth-justifications for family violence. We accept theories about intergenerational violence, violence as learned behavior, social disorganization, and anomie without ever challenging patriarchal power. In other words, we identify with our familial and community offenders and attribute their abusive actions as “caused by” the historical genocide experienced by all American Indians or even as “caused by” their own childhood victimization. However, as we (rightfully) blame the dominant culture for their harms, we have

not held accountable the individual offenders within our families and communities. We have not challenged the white male-patriarchal power that creates and recreates our victimization and disempowerment at all levels. Instead, we allow family and community violence to continue. We remain silent to the totality of harms that our own commit against those most marginalized—our women and our children. We have allowed these harms to continue in a way that contributes to our disempowerment and to our oppressors' empowerment. It is, after all, what *they* want us to do to each other.

The silence within American Indian families and communities also exists in Others' families and communities, as well. African American women writers, including Michele Wallace (1979), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Angela Davis (1990), bell hooks (1994), and Melba Wilson (1994), discuss Black male violence against women and children as the exertion of patriarchal power in the home—power that has been denied Black men at all other levels of society. Each of these writers discloses the pervasiveness of silence surrounding sexism and male physical and sexual violence in their homes and communities. Each understands that African American male violence against women and children is silenced as it is justified and rationalized by the historical and continued disempowerment of Black men under patriarchy. These women writers of color also discuss the extent to which silence surrounding physical and sexual abuse in their families and communities occurs in order to prevent fulfillment of the dominant culture's negative constructions.

Like Others seeking to insulate their families and communities, American Indians also seek to protect our perpetrators of violence. Traditionally within many Nations, the tribal community as a whole was valued over individual members of the tribe. Individual actions that benefited the entire Nation were highly revered while acts of individual self-gain were not encouraged. Among the traditional Lakota, Braveheart explains that "the survival of the *tiospaye* [extended family] and the *Oyate* [Nation] is paramount and the individual is expected to sacrifice for the good of the *Oyate*" (1995, 5). Today, silence surrounding violence perpetrated by family and community members may also be understood as a way in which individual victims seek to protect their tribal communities from the scrutiny of the dominant culture.

Among American Indian people, centuries of genocidal child removal policies remain fresh in our minds. We remember our children were taken away from us by white society to facilitate assimilation and because we are viewed as essentially inferior, lazy, alcoholic, and inherently unable to care for our children. We silence violence by family and community members to shield ourselves from white patriarchal responses and state intervention. We fear the dominant culture's responses if we contribute to their images of our essentially alcoholic and dysfunctional families, of our worthless and violent men, of our neglectful and abhorred women. In double consciousness we reject the dominant culture's

stereotypes about us as false and/or we participate in them, fearing they are not false; and, in either case, we know the images subordinate and oppress us. Thus, we silence ourselves and Other victims in our families and communities to prevent the dominant culture from using their Truth to further harm us.

In addition to the vast internal silences within our families and communities there are numerous structural and institutional constraints that make it even more difficult for Indian women and children to break silence. Within our tribal communities, there are few, if any, appropriate avenues for American Indian women or children to break silence. Tribal people are largely forced to rely on Euro-American institutions for “help” as traditional tribal methods used to restore harmony within their communities have eroded or been prohibited by the imposition of Western legal systems. Those living on reservations are required to notify federal or state officials (depending on jurisdiction) when “serious” cases of domestic and sexual abuse are reported. After a report is made, system officials have discretionary authority over whether to investigate and process a case. Often cases of domestic and sexual abuse are ignored by officials. If a case is taken up by officials, it is processed in the Anglo-judicial system—an institution that historically serves as an instrument of cultural genocide. Justifiably distrustful of Anglo-system officials, tribal people are often reluctant to contact outsiders for assistance. Equally as problematic, however, are other “minor” cases of familial abuse handled by modern tribal courts in the communities where victim and offender reside. In the past, the handling of cases in tribal courts was often not a viable option for victims of familial violence, as the tribal court sometimes minimized or silenced these occurrences within their own communities. Further, efforts to silence cases of abuse brought to tribal courts were maximized as tribal communities are generally small and members interrelated, whereby individual justice-system workers are likely to personally know or be related to the offender and may seek his vindication.

It is critical for American Indian people to understand our familiar social problems (family and community violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism, etc.) *not* as essential qualities and *not* as actions caused by nor justified by the gravity of our oppression. We must understand family and community violence as an operation of power within the white male-patriarchal structure, a structure that we were forced to accept and now have internalized. We must struggle to understand violence as a form of genocide that we internalize as we assume the dominant subject position. We must struggle to understand violence as a form of genocide that we recreate within our families and communities as we are now oppressors unto ourselves. We must understand our silences as contributing to the oppression of our women and children as they are disempowered by the totality of race, class, gender and age/ability constructs at all levels of society—within the political and economic institutions of the dominant culture and *within our own homes and communities*.

CONCLUSION

Like all Others who must resist patriarchy, American Indian people must also address specific issues within our own families and communities. We as Indian people must openly acknowledge and grieve our history and the many losses we have endured. We must come to express the pains we carry within us. We must understand the violations inflicted upon us by Euro-America as acts of capitalist domination and exploitation. This means we must resist the belief that we are excluded from the dominant culture's social, economic, and political processes because we are inferior.

American Indian people must also understand violence in our homes and communities as acts of patriarchal domination that we perpetrate against those the dominant culture falsely defines as inferior—women and children. Indian people must end the silence of family and interpersonal violence and understand it within the framework of the totality of the oppression we endure. However, we must not allow the knowledge of our oppression to justify or silence these harms. We must no longer shield individual perpetrators in our families and communities with silence. We must refuse all operations of Western power, even as they exist within our communities and homes in the violation and exploitation our own women and children. Together we must unite and reclaim the traditions of the Grandmothers and Grandfathers and incorporate these ways to heal ourselves, our communities, and our individual perpetrators of violence. Culturally and individually we must recognize our past and present traumas and grieve our losses on a new path of healing.

American Indians, as all Others, must also demand that all drug-and alcohol-treatment programs and therapies for survivors and perpetrators of physical and sexual violence empower Others through raising awareness of Western patriarchal structures of domination and exploitation. Author Iris Young proposes a realistic alternative to mainstream Western-treatment programs, calling for treatment programs that empower Others through “consciousness-raising talk.” She explains the process, “Through the give-and-take of discussion, participants construct an understanding of their personal lives as socially conditioned, constrained in ways similar to that of others by institutional structures, power relations, cultural assumptions, or economic forces. The consciousness-raising group “theorizes” this social account together, moving back and forth between individual life stories and social analysis to confirm and disconfirm both. The members of the group propose interpretations of one another’s life stories as well as propose accounts of the social structures and constraints conditioning those lives, and these proposals are tested through discussion” (1994, 50). As Young explains further, “consciousness-raising talk is empowering for Others, because it develops in people the ability to be reflexive and critical about the situated social basis of individual action . . . enabl[ing] people to move from

an acceptance of institutional forms as natural and given to seeing them as human constructs that are changeable . . ." (1994, 50). Treatment programs that are empowering, such as the approach described by Young, by definition, then, would address the *cultural and individual (historical and present) traumas and victimizations* experienced by Indian people.

Thus, Indian people, as all Others, must refuse to participate in a mental-health industry that benefits from treating our social ills (substance abuse, depression, physical and sexual abuse) as individual pathologies or familial dysfunctions that are detached from Western cultural and historical forces. Such treatment programs, instead, ensure our complicity in patriarchal power and further promote our disempowerment by denying and invalidating the structural nature of our oppression.

American Indians, and all Others, must not allow members of the dominant culture to *create us and speak for us* through their news reports, films, writings, research, teachings, art works, or sciences. We must resist these productions and create our own images and subjectivities by breaking silence and expressing our truths and experiences under patriarchy in every way possible. Our expressions can assist members of the dominant groups in recognizing that their power and privilege exists at the exclusion of Others. Our truths can also assist these individuals in recognizing that patriarchal structures and dichotomies of abject Otherness restrict their full range of truths and human potentials as well.

Those members of the dominant groups who want to challenge patriarchy must critically examine the nature of their own privilege. They must reject constructions of Otherness and refuse to participate in the appropriation and reappropriation of abject differences. Moreover, members of the dominant groups must be willing to listen to the expressions of Others. They must be willing to question the framework—the universal Truths—through which they hear Others. When Others' truths and expressions do not "fit" into these frameworks, members of the dominant groups must not reject (silence) us as wrong or false; instead, they must examine the exclusiveness of their framework.

COLOROX TREATMENT

Standing above my father
three and a half feet tall
carried home from a bar floor
after playing softball

Immobile in bed
face bruised and purple
Alcohol seeps from his pores

A crazy glued virgin mary statue
on the night stand
next to his head
her back turned away

Drunk and incoherent
Begs my mother for forgiveness
Swollen lips
Slurred speech
weeping
weeping
“Rosie, Honey
we had to fight those white guys
said things about Indians”

Eyes
rolling back
into his head

Standing above my father
three and a half feet tall

She
reminds me in shame and disgust
“This is what it means to be an Indian—
Drunk. And Baby, you’re an Indian”

While
all she can think is
“I’m the one who has to clean his
goddamned ball uniform”

Bleach out
the red blood
brown dirt
invisible tears

Like she wished she could
bleach out
his dark skin
as white as her own

NOTES

1. BraveHeart describes historical trauma as the “collective and compounding emotional and psychic wounding over time,” which is “multi-generational and is not limited to [one’s individual] life span” (1995, 6).

2. When Others accept the dominant subject position, we view ourselves in ways that reflect that position and participate in the appropriation and reappropriation of difference, further contributing to our own disempowerment. An understanding of internalized oppression is not intended to provide a justification for or a comprehensive explanation of the existence of social problems among marginalized Others. Nor does such an understanding suggest that all marginalized individuals experience and express our oppression deterministically in the limited ways I have described here. It is important to underscore the notion that all marginalized individuals who experience and express oppression do so in a multitude of ways that are far beyond the scope of this discussion. In addition, an understanding of internalized oppression is not intended to deflect responsibility from marginalized individuals who commit acts of harm against themselves and Others. Rather, a discussion of internalized oppression is intended to provide a framework for understanding the extent to which American Indian people and Other marginalized individuals are complicitous in our oppression as we accept the dominant subject position.

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