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# Historical and Contemporary American Indian Injustices: The Ensuing Psychological Effects

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HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDIAN INJUSTICES: THE  
ENSUING PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

A Capstone Experience Manuscript

Presented By:

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Approved By:

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Professor Kathleen A. Brown-Pérez, Commonwealth Honors College

## ABSTRACT

Title: **Historical and Contemporary American Indian Injustices: The Ensuing Psychological Effects**

Author: **Talia Nelson, Psychology**

CE Type: **Course Capstone Thesis**

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In this research I investigate the various ways in which the process of historical colonization has devastated the indigenous population and cultures. I explore and analyze its long-lasting effects. Additionally, this work delves into a range of the most frequent means of perpetuating American Indian stereotypes, discrimination, and violence that persists to date. I analyze and discuss resulting profound issues found within the American Indian society. In particular, effects on one's mental, emotional, social, and sometimes physical health, and the development of definitive psychiatric disorders. In support of the current as well as previous research and findings, this work also discusses scientific and psychological evidence. In addition to the analyses involved in this study, I provide suggestions to eradicate discrimination and violence against American Indians in contemporary society, and suggestions for clinicians to provide the correct and beneficial treatment for American Indians suffering from any of the aforementioned disadvantages. Through my investigation on the effects of historical colonization on the American Indian population, I found a relationship between cultural devastation and long-lasting effects. Specifically, experiences of historical loss and forced acculturation alter the wellbeing of many American Indians. Furthermore, through my exploration of contemporary means of cultural violence, discrimination, and stigmatization of American Indians, I also found a significant impact on the wellbeing of these individuals. Overall, this study ultimately provides societal awareness and a sense of the extreme disadvantages many American Indians have faced throughout history and continually to this day.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Discovery and Colonization of the “New World”

As citizens of the United States, many take great pride in the establishment of new American culture on the basis of European settlement, commonly assumed to have been led by Christopher Columbus and his successors in 1492. The anniversary of this event is even celebrated as an official U.S. holiday on October 12; what we know as Columbus Day. However, as scientists, historians, and researchers unravel the far-reaching tale of European discovery and colonization of our country, light is shed on a harsh historical reality. Finding the “New World” offered myriad prominent opportunities for European settlers, including power and free reign over the land and the natural resources buried beneath its hills. The magnitude of such vast possibilities incited insatiable greed within most European settlers, so that coming into contact with our nation’s true first inhabitants, the American Indians, essentially led to an overthrow of the indigenous tribal structures, institutions, beliefs, practices, and their traditional ways of life (Bamforth, 1994; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

Throughout United States history, the dominant culture of the colonizers has largely opposed American Indian customs. Led by extreme racism and discrimination, European settlers attempted to assimilate American Indians and force them to adopt cultural standards of the whites. Those who did not adopt these standards were viewed as “savages,” and colonizers ultimately began to see our nation’s first inhabitants as a hindrance to European access and control of the new land and its resources. Early strategies to get rid of the “Indian problem” involved a system of “ethnic cleansing” including violent invasions, seizing of American Indian land and homes, brutal

decimation or “racial genocide.”<sup>1</sup> No definitive numbers have been laid out, but many estimate that within the first four centuries following European contact, about 150 million American Indians were exterminated (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

In time, as the systematic processes of ethnic cleansing became increasingly frowned upon, European Americans began to use more tamed or “socially acceptable” approaches to destroy American Indian cultures. These tactics, developed by the United States federal government, began removing American Indians from their homes to more destitute, impoverished areas of the country; or they were placed onto reservations, in which the federal government formed by treaty, executive order, or legislation, in order to maintain segregation between the two groups. Subsequently, the Euro-Americans expected American Indians to relinquish their “savage,” “Native” lifestyles and embrace that of mainstream American culture instead. Sensing disapproval or disinterest among American Indians in adopting the new culture, Euro-Americans began to use education as a means to refine young American Indian children; to “kill the Indian and save the child” (Barker, 1997). Supported by the government, religious-based boarding schools were established in which Indian children were seized from their homes and forced to attend, typically starting at the age of four or five. They were prohibited from speaking their native language and were forced to abstain from practicing their cultural traditions, and

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the General Assembly Resolution 260A (III) Article 2 from the International Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on December 9, 1948, the United Nations definition of “genocide” meant that “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”



were not released back to their families for about eight years (Barker, 1997; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

It is upon the return of American Indian youth back into their tribal communities where we begin to see the powerful negative impacts that forced assimilation have on the indigenous populations. With the youth's homecoming, many of these children faced a cultural identity crisis, realizing they were no longer entirely "Indian," but they were also not "white" either. The confusion between two separate cultures and oneself adds even more stress onto the already complex process of one's identity development (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

#### Chauvinistic American Culture

As we unfold the long history of the United States, we unearth violent invasion, destruction, and mass devastation; but we also reveal countless historical discriminatory factors and unjust treatment that affect the social, economic, psychological and emotional wellbeing of many American Indians (Bamforth, 1994; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

Although not as seemingly obvious as occurrences have been in the past, discrimination, racism, forced assimilation, violence, and oppression of American Indians and culture still largely exists to this day. By and large, the historical loss and acculturation during the processes of colonization, along with the discriminatory violence and stereotyping in which American Indians are continuously subjected to by mainstream society, commonly leads to various negative psychological effects within the indigenous people.

In such a highly differentiated country as the United States, individuals in society generally find an observable characteristic such as skin color, or a collective symbol, to socially categorize various groups of people. This attribute or shared feature creates a certain image that society tends to relate to each particular group, which enables the

subtle perpetuation of stereotypes (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). Furthermore, as individuals continue to be exposed to inaccurate and often offensive depictions of “all” American Indians in society, they become sensitized and unconsciously ignore the true prejudice and immorality hidden behind stereotypical images. Institutionalized in U.S. law and preserved and accepted in popular culture, prevalent stereotypes ultimately devalue American Indians and their cultures in contemporary society (Weaver, 2009). American Indians are now the only major ethnic group that continue to be the subject of sports team names, mascots and chants, stereotypical logos, labels and advertisements, and children’s toys and characters exposed in the media, in textbooks, and in fictional books as well (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Pewewardy, 2004; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Accumulating evidence reveals that discrimination affects one’s physical and mental wellbeing similar to that of other psychological stressors, such as major life events involving death of a loved one, employment termination, or marital divorce, for example. Aside from the occurrence of calamitous events, stress levels of an individual also fluctuate based on their personal social roles, geographic location, and socioeconomic status (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Today, many American Indians continue to be devalued in society and remain at the bottom of the societal hierarchy by means of depleted access to political, economic, educational, and cultural resources and opportunity in the U.S. (Gone, 2008).

### Chapter Summary

Essentially, the direct physical violence and processes involved in European colonization are what led to defining the indigenous as non-human “savages.” Subsequently, this led to societal acceptance of derogatory Indian stereotypes that devalue the American Indian population, otherwise known as structural or cultural

violence (Galtung, 1990; Weaver, 2009). “Colonization, racism, and oppression all fan the flames of violence...As long as this devaluation continues, violence will continue” (Weaver, 2009). Whether that violence is direct and causing physical harm, or subtle and legitimized causing mental and emotional degradation, its continual use destroys the overall wellbeing of many American Indians.

A great deal of research has been conducted to understand and explain the impacts ongoing colonization has had on the indigenous inhabitants of North America. Being subjected to extreme violence, cultural devastation, forced assimilation, and enduring discrimination have led many American Indians to suffer from great historical loss or historical trauma. In turn, these sufferings negatively impact many of these individuals’ social, mental, and emotional health. Additionally, American Indians still frequently contend with direct, structural, and cultural violence where society legitimizes discrimination and hostility towards their population and cultures (Galtung, 1990; Gone, 2008).

Contemporary research focuses on the existing perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes in today’s society, which introduces a relationship between social stigma and a wide range of ensuing negative effects within the indigenous populations (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Major & O’Brien, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Specifically, findings of identity crisis, low self-esteem and distorted self-concept, heightened stress levels, increased alcohol and substance use and abuse, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and various other defined psychiatric disorders (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Hill, 2009; Sigelman, 2001; Tann et al., 2007; Weaver, 2009; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the effects of the harsh realities and challenges they are subjected to by dominant American culture are likely to be some of the main causes of finding

increased incidence of several other health risk factors. In particular, found among American Indian populations more than any other ethnic or racial group in the country are higher rates of poverty and unemployment, alcoholism, greater incidence of higher health risk factors such as the risk of tuberculosis and diabetes, higher rates of interpersonal violence as well as attempted and successful suicide (Bamforth, 1994; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Hill, 2009). These devastating experiences leave a legacy of ongoing emotional trauma, resulting in an unending vicious cycle that many American Indians are forced to endure throughout their lives (Weaver, 2009).

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The European invasion and settlement of the Americas by treaty or removal of the indigenous people to more destitute areas has devastated much of the indigenous ways of life throughout history. Many archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and researchers have sought out to understand and explain the impacts colonization has had on the indigenous inhabitants of North America. They have sought to understand the consequences of cultural devastation, forced assimilation, and enduring discrimination on American Indians' social, mental, and emotional health. American Indians still contend with structural and cultural violence, in which our society legitimizes discrimination and hostility towards them. Extensive research focusing on the existence of contemporary perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes in American society through the media, textbooks, children's toys, school or sports teams' mascots, and logos, has shown a relationship between social stigma and a wide range of ensuing negative effects within the indigenous populations.

Muzafer Sherif, one of the founders of modern social psychology, developed several techniques for understanding social processes, particularly that of social norms and social conflict. Muzafer collaborated with his wife Carolyn, an American social psychologist who helped to develop the social judgment theory, on numerous projects and scholarly books for many years. A classic study called "The Robbers Cave Experiment" studied the origin of prejudice in social groups, for example. One particular article they published focused on issues pertaining to psychological harmony and discrepancy in minority groups with regards to a sense of belonging and self-identification (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). In this study, Muzafer and Carolyn applied widely

supported generalizations about socialization processes and personal experiences to certain psychological phenomena that seem to occur with membership in minority groups. They also give psychological analyses and use a variety of psychological literature, research, and defined concepts to support their claims (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). These analyses relate sociological aspects of individual experiences to different psychological occurrences that commonly ensue simply from being part of a minority group (Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

Scholarly research has extensively shown that European colonization and historical loss has significant effect on the wellbeing of most indigenous people. Anthropologists have recently been revealing ethnographic data from the North American Great Plains in this particular text, showing that tribal warfare developed in response to environmental fluctuations and indigenous cultural-ecological processes as a result of Western contact (Bamforth, 1994). An incredibly experienced archaeologist by the name of Douglas B. Bamforth specifically studied the effects of European colonization on American Indians of the Great Plains. Bamforth sought out to acquire a better understanding of the extent to which European contact devastated indigenous ways of life, and the rapidity in which this devastation occurred in this area throughout history (Bamforth, 1994). To date, numerous scholars consistently research how European colonization generally has harmful impact, creating various issues among indigenous tribes.

Discussion of the history of European colonization is also seen in text written by two authors in the Department of Human Services at the University of Western Carolina, and published in a Personnel and Guidance Journal for Counselors. Michael T. Garrett, Ph.D., and Eugene F. Pitchette particularly discuss the long history of both assimilation

and extermination of the indigenous people (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000). During colonization, American Indians are often forced to reconcile two different cultures. In the past, if one should not conform, they were frequently removed or killed off simply to rid of the “Indian problem” (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000, pg. 4). The dominant American culture has a lengthy history of opposition to indigenous cultures and this is continuously characterized by racism, discrimination, violence, and attempts of forced assimilation. Such detrimental historical factors “continue to act as a powerful influence on the worldviews and experiences of Native American people” (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000, pg. 3). They go on to offer implications for psychological counseling, suggesting that counselors should take this knowledge into account when assessing American Indians to better understand one’s likely struggle with cultural identity, and to promote fair and correct medical treatment that is necessary (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

Debra K. S. Barker extensively studies American Indian Literatures. In the book, *American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Contemporary Issues*, she published the article “Kill the Indian, Save the Child: Cultural Genocide and the Boarding School” (1997). Barker discusses the attempts of forced cultural assimilation on American Indian children with the use of boarding schools. Ultimately, she explains how the boarding school system played a major role in the long history of attempted genocide of the indigenous population: America’s major effort to rid of the “Indian problem.”

Largely influenced by her Lakota Indian heritage, Hilary N. Weaver, a Professor in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Buffalo, New York, also discusses the history of colonization in the Americas. Weaver (2009) focuses on the violence against American Indian women. She introduces several consequences of ongoing colonization, such as trauma associated with historical loss from federal policies

of cultural and physical genocide that devastated indigenous populations. She then goes on to describe some of the subsequent emotional, mental, social, and spiritual effects that tend to arise among many American Indians as well. After providing a substantial overview of colonization and violence that American Indians are subjected to, Weaver (2009) also suggests ways in which society can eradicate stereotypes and violence, and move toward activism and advocacy instead.

Unjust violence and discrimination against American Indians is discussed more thoroughly in text written by Professor Johan Galtung, of the University of Hawaii, Manoa. Johan Galtung was an extraordinary mathematician and a prolific researcher, who has made many contributions in various fields of sociology by publishing over one thousand articles and over one hundred books. He is also the founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies, he assisted in the establishment of the International Peace Research Association, and he led PRIO to create the first academic journal on Peace Studies: the *Journal of Peace Research*. In this journal, Galtung (1990) introduced the concepts of “structural violence” and “cultural violence,” which involve cultural aspects of a superior race that are used to legitimize violence directly, structurally, or symbolically against an inferior race. Furthermore, he discusses morality, peace, subconscious effects of historical trauma, alienation, socialization, and various other consequences of cultural and structural violence in which many American Indians are subjected to (Galtung, 1990). A major factor that enables our society to continuously harbor stereotypes of American Indians is through acts of cultural violence. Since racial discrimination is legitimized and deemed acceptable in our society, we often do not realize certain actions are considered to be violent when they really are; and in many



cases, they may negatively impact the mental, emotional, or physical health of American Indians.

Wolfgang Mieder, a Professor at the University of Vermont, is best known as a scholar of Paremiology, the study of proverbs. He has authored countless books and over three hundred articles of the sort. In a specific article, Mieder (1993) discusses a broad range of existing stereotypes and racial slurs against American Indians, but he focuses on a particularly hateful proverb, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” This diatribe originated from Philip Sheridan in the 1860’s, and has been in use in the United States ever since. Mieder (1993) discusses the proverb’s meaning, history, and distribution in society from the nineteenth century to present-day, showing that it is still frequently used verbally, in American literature, and in mass media as well. This emphasizes the fact that although we may not notice, discrimination and stereotypes of American Indians are still commonly used within our society in a number of different ways.

The powerful phenomenon of social stigma and its various effects are studied and discussed by Professor Brenda Major and Assistant Professor Laurie O’Brien, of the University of California, Santa Barbara (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Dr. Major has been a highly regarded Professor for twenty-seven years and has published over one hundred articles and book chapters on stigma, coping, self-esteem, and inter-group relations. The main research focus of Major and O’Brien (2005) was the psychology of stigmatization. They reviewed recent theories and empirical research within an identity threat model of stigma and its influence on well-being. Studies have shown a relationship between stigma and poor mental, physical, and cognitive health, as well as low social status, poverty, and reduced access to employment, education, and housing (Major & O’Brien, 2005, pg. 394). They explain that stigma directly impacts a group through mechanisms of

discrimination, expectancy confirmation, and automatic stereotypes; and indirectly through threats to personal and social identity. Specifically stating:

Identity threat results when stigma-relevant stressors are appraised as potentially harmful to one's social identity and as exceeding one's coping resources. Identity threat creates involuntary stress responses and motivates attempts at threat reduction through coping strategies. Stress responses and coping efforts affect important outcomes such as self-esteem, academic achievement, and health. Identity threat perspectives help to explain the tremendous variability across people, groups, and situations in responses to stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005, pg. 393).

Furthermore, several perspectives are discussed to help explain the immense variability of consequential effects across different people, groups, and situations. In particular, Major and O'Brien (2005) research examined influential factors affecting individuals' likelihood of perceiving themselves as being subjects of discrimination, and their ensuing emotional, mental, behavioral, or coping responses.

The *American Indian Law Review* is a nationwide scholarly forum of articles written by legal scholars, law students, attorneys, and other expert observers that presents and analyzes developments in the field of Indian law and Indian affairs. In particular, the article written by Johnson and Eck (1995/1996) discusses common derogatory stereotypes of American Indians, and how they are portrayed in textbooks, movies, television, in literature, and children's toys, as they were in the "Wild West frontier days." They introduce the consistent legal battle to end the use of Indian nicknames, sports mascots, and characters in movies, advertisements, literature, and children's toys that has not yet been won. Furthermore, Johnson and Eck (1995/1996) discuss how the

ongoing perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes in American society has been linked to many serious problems in Indian society. What is more, Johnson and Eck (1995/1996) reveal the existing controversies surrounding this large-scale problem in our country, and the ways that some Americans have been, and continue to attempt to put an end to it all.

Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Kansas, Dr. Cornel Pewewardy teaches courses in multicultural education of the indigenous people of our country. Pewewardy published an article discussing the contemporary controversies regarding derogatory Indian stereotypes (Pewewardy, 2004). American Indian mascots, logos, and nicknames among school-related events perpetuate racial stereotypes by legitimizing discrimination and oppression against the indigenous people. This commonly results in discomfort and various other negative internalized effects among students of this population (Pewewardy, 2004). Pewewardy (2004) presents more contemporary arguments surrounding American Indian stereotypical images and prejudices that still frequently occur to this day. Presenting more current issues allows a better understanding of the internal problems that discrimination creates on a more personal and relatable level.

A similar study examining the consequences of American Indian mascots and other common representations on aspects of the perception of self for American Indian students was performed by Professor Lee Sigelman, Columbian College Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former department chair. Results of the Sigelman (2001) research study show that when students were exposed to common American Indian character images such as Pocahontas, they generated positive associations but reported a depressed state of self-esteem, community worth, and fewer achievement-

related possible selves. Researchers suggest that American Indian mascots are harmful because they are a reminder of the limited and stereotypical ways that others see them, which furthermore affects how they view themselves (Sigelman, 2001). Moreover, the specific studies of Sigelman (2001) had statistically significant results of a lower sense of self due to the perpetuation of stereotypes, even among “innocent” portrayals, such as the Disney character of Pocahontas.

Camilla Townsend’s *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* uses the life of Pocahontas to represent the struggle of cultural assimilation that the indigenous people of North America faced upon the arrival of the Europeans. Townsend uses symbolism to represent English royalty and to create an image of American Indians that perpetuate existing stereotypes. In particular, with the character of Pocahontas, she grasps one of the earliest stereotypes of American Indian women as the “Indian princess” who willingly accepts and adapts to the “superior” European culture upon their arrival in the Americas. The character of Pocahontas as the “Indian princess” in Townsend’s book is a widely accepted image of contemporary popular culture. This representation used throughout *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* provides a wonderful example of the stereotyped image of American Indians that our society has created and maintained. The image shaped by the symbolism of Pocahontas in Townsend’s book, as well as in Walt Disney’s books and movies, effectively perpetuates stereotypes of American Indians with the use of popular culture.

James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* may also be interpreted as a way of perpetuating stereotypes. Specifically, the separation of two races in the “new world”: the civilized culture of the whites, and the savage culture of the American Indians. Using the American frontier, Cooper seems to exemplify a theme where the man

of color must conform to rules and boundaries set by the white man. It can also be interpreted that the savage and incompetent lifestyles of the “Native Americans” are so deeply ingrained that they could never become civilized, and could therefore never be trusted by a white man. Moreover, since American Indians could not conform to white ideals, they should either become a white man’s slave or be exterminated altogether. Due to the fact that his books are consistently being republished and read by many Americans, Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* can be seen as a way to enable the existence and acceptability of American Indian stereotypes. Although these are interpretations of underlying themes of the book rather than outright conclusions, they are good examples of ways our society continues to perpetuate the stereotypical image and views of American Indians.

*Ethos: The Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology* was published on behalf of the American Anthropological Association, and it contains a collection of articles about the cultural politics of mental health among First Nations people and Native North America. Dr. Joseph P. Gone is an Associate Professor in the Department of Clinical Psychology and the Program in American Culture (Native American Studies) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He is formally trained in Psychological Clinical Science and currents of theory and practice in Psychiatry, Cultural Anthropology, and Sociolinguistics. Gone (2008) focused his discussion on the everlasting social and psychological effects of European colonization, cultural devastation, forced assimilation, poverty, and racial discrimination in which American Indians still contend with. Investigators introduced cultural politics of mental health study and practice in three Native American communities, providing a critical analysis of each (Gone, 2008). As opposed to evidence generalized from self-reports and basic survey

responses of the indigenous people, the research of Gone (2008) gives observational evidence of actual contact, which is much more substantial data to have.

Les B. Whitbeck, the John G. Bruhn Professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, performed a study with three UNL Assistant Sociology Professors: Xiaojin Chen, Dan R. Hoyt, and Gary W. Adams, also investigating effects of discrimination, historical loss, and enculturation on physical and mental health among minority groups (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004). Amidst a wide range of injustices the indigenous people are continuously subjected to, Whitbeck et al. (2004) discuss how American Indians are the only major ethnic group that is still stereotypically perpetuated in sports mascots, chants, characters, derogatory language, nicknames, etc. Whitbeck et al. (2004) introduce specific diagnostic criteria commonly used to measure psychological effects and heightened stress levels. They go on to discuss resulting psychological and physical health disparities they found among several culturally similar groups of American Indians in the upper Midwest U.S., meeting the diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse over the course of one year (Whitbeck et al., 2004). The results of the Whitbeck et al. (2004) study provide new evidence showing that ongoing perpetuation of stereotypes, discrimination, historical loss, and enculturation that many American Indians experience may have great influence on eventual alcohol abuse.

Tann, Yabiku, Okamoto, and Yanow (2007) also extensively researched the prevalence of alcohol abuse found among American Indians. Published by the US: National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, Tann et al. (2007) examined the risk for alcoholism, diabetes, and depression (triADD) in American Indian and Alaska Native populations. Despite the small sample size that was used, results indicated that these indigenous populations are at an elevated risk for

individual as well as combined presence of triADD when compared with European Americans (Tann et al., 2007). The observation of specific negative risks the indigenous populations are subjected to, compared with that of European Americans, emphasizes the existence of discrimination and poor treatment that still takes place among American Indian populations. The discrepancy between the two populations also shows that unjust socioeconomic factors play a role in this inconsistency between cultures, putting the indigenous populations at higher risk of developing a psychological or physical illness (Tann et al., 2007).

Stemmed from previous research indicating that American Indians experience depressive disorders at higher rates than those reported by the general U.S. population, Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma, Lisa G. Byers' dissertation describes an analytical mental health study (Byers, 2006). It introduces the application of an integrative theory to the study of discrimination, ethnic identity, and historical and individual trauma, in relation to depression vulnerability. Results indicated that traumatic distressed and marginalized identity were significant predictors of depressive symptom distress (Byers, 2006). This also provides supporting evidence that many American Indians are likely to develop negative psychological effects as a result of ongoing historical loss and discrimination.

Doris Leal Hill, Assistant Professor in the School of Medicine at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, noted that "the incidence of suicide in American Indians is highest of all ethnic populations...The prevalence rate for suicide within the American Indian population was 1.5 times the national rate in 2001" (Hill, 2009, pg. 65). She then provided statistical analyses and evidence of the incidence of suicide, depression, and substance dependence commonly found within the American Indian population (Hill,

2009). The Hill (2009) study emphasizes the vitality of the relationship between an individual and their environment by showing that disengagement of the two is likely to be a prime causal factor of these findings. In her analysis, among those who displayed states of disconnectedness and a loss of sense of belonging to their culture and environment, many showed various consequential psychological effects and sometimes the development of defined psychiatric disorders (Hill, 2009). Moreover, Hill (2009) provides statistical evidence showing that negative psychological effects may arise when American Indians are subject to disconnect from their cultural environment and lifestyles and assimilate to that of the “superior” race, as they often do during colonization.

The ongoing colonization and changes in the history of the United States has devastated much of the indigenous ways of life throughout history. Many scholars have extensively researched the negative impacts these changes have on American Indians. They have sought to understand the consequences of cultural devastation, forced assimilation, and enduring discrimination on American Indians’ social, mental, and emotional health. To this day, our society legitimizes discrimination and violence towards them, and continues to perpetuate derogatory Indian stereotypes through the media, textbooks, children’s toys, school or sports teams’ mascots, advertisements, and logos. It is clear that there is a true relationship between social stigma and a wide range of ensuing negative effects within the indigenous populations; and this is what scholars are continuing to research and study, in search of new and inventive ways to eradicate this inequality and unjust treatment of the true first inhabitants of the Americas.



## CHAPTER THREE

## EXPLANATION OF CURRENT METHODOLOGY AND GOALS

Research Methods

The focus of the current research is on the effects of discrimination, racism, violence, and forced shortcomings many American Indians are continuously subjected to throughout history. The violence and processes involved in historical colonization of the United States, as well as ongoing stereotypes and injustices American Indians face, consequently result in a variety of social, mental, and emotional health disparities.

This research primarily aims to provide valuable knowledge and insight that will ultimately help psychological counselors or therapists in their treatment of American Indians. The various aspects of this research is vital for doctors to understand in order to implement the most successful methods for coping with historical loss or trauma and its effects, as well as coping with contemporary stereotypes and discrimination and its effects as well. This research also aims to raise awareness in society of the prevalence of derogatory Indian stereotypes and the strife and tribulations many American Indians face because of it all. Once these issues are understood and grasped, it is hoped that society will cultivate the will to change, and the discrimination and perpetuation of American Indian stereotypes will cease in time.

The research approach used involves thorough review and analysis of scholarly peer-reviewed literature on the history and effects of European colonization in the U.S., the prejudice, racism, and injustices American Indians have been subjected to historically and continuously to date. Other scholarly literature used for this research surrounds contemporary controversies of societal perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes, and various mental, emotional, social, and psychological health disparities that commonly

ensue. All of the literature sources will be gathered and analyzed over the course of eight to nine months in attempt to eradicate possible biases and obtain the most thorough and valuable support for conducting this research study. Furthermore, the accumulation of information and results from previous studies surrounding the above mentioned issues should also provide leading support for the current studies suggested means to obtain overall improvement and eventual societal change.

The methods of this research are limited by the failure of inclusion of actual field or laboratory work, since this is solely an undergraduate capstone document. However, this research approach can be used and extended in future research to provide actual scientific data and a better understanding of the issues and resolutions discussed.

#### Purposes and Scope of the Paper

Beginning around the time of Columbus and his European successors' discovery and colonization of the Americas in 1492, the nations' first inhabitants were tremendously marginalized. Many American Indians were subjected to extreme violence, cultural devastation, forced assimilation, and enduring discrimination that have led most to suffer from great historical loss or historical trauma. American Indians still frequently contend with direct, structural, and cultural violence where society legitimizes discrimination and opposition towards their population and cultures (Galtung, 1990; Gone, 2008). In today's society, discriminatory stereotypes persist in common language, books, the media, characters, advertisements, logos, sports team names, mascots, and chants, and various others.

Contemporary scholarly research focuses on the existing perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes and introduces a relationship between suffering through discrimination and social stigma with a wide range of ensuing negative effects found

within indigenous populations (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Specific findings have shown significantly low self-esteem and distorted self-concept or identity crisis, heightened stress levels, increased alcohol and substance use and abuse, a number of defined psychiatric disorders, and an overall higher suicide rate (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Hill, 2009; Sigelman, 2001; Tann et al., 2007; Weaver, 2009; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Furthermore, some previous literature suggests that the effects of the harsh injustices American Indians are subjected to by the “superior” mainstream American culture are likely to be some of the main reasons behind higher rates of poverty and unemployment, alcoholism and disease, interpersonal violence and higher attempted suicide rates found among American Indian populations more than any other ethnic or racial groups (Bamforth, 1994; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000). Suffering through any of these traumatic experiences leaves ongoing psychological impressions, resulting in a vicious life cycle that many American Indians are forced to endure (Weaver, 2009).

In this essay, I review and analyze the ongoing history of colonization, and the various aspects, effects, and implications of the vicious life cycle many American Indians are unjustly forced to undergo by the dominant American society. I will extend previous research and solution proposals in attempt to make a more radical shift in societal awareness and change regarding the issues I mentioned above. I will conclude with a brief discussion of the current research study's limitations, and go on to give suggestions of how to improve this study and generate a better overall outcome for future research on American Indian injustices and psychological health disparities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## U.S. COLONIZATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON AMERICAN INDIANS

Brief Overview: Colonization

The momentous discovery and arrival in North America by Christopher Columbus and his successors offered many notorious opportunities for these European settlers, including power and complete control of the new land and its various natural resources. Possibilities of extreme power and control drove most European settlers to become ravenous and greedy for more. Therefore when they first came in contact with the land's original inhabitants, the American Indians, the European settlers' insatiable greed essentially influenced them to perceive the presence of American Indians as a hindrance to their access and control of the land and resources. Early strategies to rid of this "Indian problem" involved a system of "ethnic cleansing" including violent invasions, seizing of American Indian land and homes, brutal decimation or "racial genocide." No definitive numbers have been laid out, but many estimate that within the first four centuries following European contact, about 150 million American Indians were exterminated. By the end of the eighteenth century, the indigenous population had been reduced to 10% of its original immense size through warfare and diseases carried overseas by the European invaders (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Throughout the history of the United States, the "superior" culture of the Euro-American colonizers is largely opposed to the "inferior" American Indian customs. Predisposed with severe racism and discrimination against American Indians for their color, appearance, and ways of life, European settlers began to force assimilation. Many were forced to disregard their traditional cultural practices, values and beliefs, and adopt cultural standards of the whites. American Indians who refused to conform were viewed

as “savages,” and were either removed or murdered. The Euro-Americans’ fundamental goal was to rid of the “Indian problem” by overthrowing the indigenous populations’ tribal structures, institutions, beliefs, practices, and traditional ways of life and replace it with their own (Bamforth, 1994; Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

As the systematic processes of ethnic cleansing became increasingly disapproved of, the European Americans began to use more controlled or “socially acceptable” approaches to abolish American Indian cultures. These strategies, developed by the U.S. federal government, began removing American Indians to destitute, less desirable areas of the country; or they were placed onto reservations, in which the federal government formed by treaty, executive order, or legislation, in order to maintain segregation between the two groups. One of the more prominent removal processes that occurred in the 1830’s is widely known as the “Trail of Tears.” In attempts to “civilly” settle quarrels over land and its resources, many tribes in their entirety were forcibly removed to Oklahoma, an area of the country for which Whites at this time had no particular use or desire for. However, this “civilized” approach devastated the tribes’ cultures; every means of their existence wholly depended on their original homeland, in which they were unjustly stripped away from. Consequently, an incalculable number of American Indian lives were destroyed or lost completely (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

By enforcing such radical tactics, Euro-Americans expected American Indians to relinquish their “savage” ways of life and embrace that of the mainstream American culture instead. Frequently sensing disapproval or disinterest among American Indians in adopting the new culture, Euro-Americans began to use the power of education as a means to refine young American Indian children. Supported by the government, Euro-Americans established religious-based boarding schools in which Indian children were

seized from their homes and families around the age of four or five and forced to attend for about eight years. To force assimilation of mainstream American culture, the children were prohibited from speaking their native language and abstain from practicing their cultural traditions (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

As the American Indian youth returned to their tribal communities, we can begin to undoubtedly see the powerful negative impacts that forced assimilation have on the indigenous people. Once children returned to their homes and families, many faced a cultural identity crisis, realizing they were no longer entirely “Indian,” but they were also not “white” either. The confusion between two separate cultures and oneself adds even more stress onto the already complex process of one’s identity development. Although conditions and government policies had become more “civilized,” several historical factors and the process of acculturation continue to be one of the most powerful influences on the lives and experiences of many American Indians (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

### Acculturation and Identity

Acculturation is generally described as the process of cultural change that results from continual contact of two or more different cultures. For an individual, the process of acculturation may mean abandoning one’s traditional values, customs, and beliefs, and replacing them with that of popular culture shared by the dominant social structure. Assimilation is a specific type of acculturation in which one culture changes significantly more than the other culture, and in turn, starts to resemble it. Often times, assimilation is established intentionally to sustain control over the “defeated” individuals through strategies using force, or sometimes voluntarily as well (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

By and large, American Indians differ in their level of acceptance and dedication to their specific tribal traditions, values, and beliefs through an array of customs, language, family, and community structure. Therefore, individuals differ in their level of acculturation or adaptability, largely influenced by their socioeconomic status and particular geographic surrounding, varying from urban, rural, or reservation settings. Garrett & Pitchette (2000) also effectively identifies and describes the five levels of acculturation or “Indianness” identified for American Indians: at the traditional level, the individual may speak English but maintains traditional tribal language, values, beliefs, and practices; at the marginal level, one may speak both English and their original language, but has not fully accepted or identified with the culture and customs of the dominating structure; at the bicultural level, the individual has generally been accepted by both the dominant and tribal societies and has the ability to simultaneously accept and practice values and behaviors of both cultures; at the assimilated level, the individual is fully accepted by the dominant society and embraces the cultural values, beliefs, and customs of the mainstream culture only; and last, at the pantraditional level, fully assimilated and socially accepted American Indians make the conscious decision to revert back to their old, traditional ways of life (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000).

During the processes of acculturation, simultaneously being placed in two psychologically incompatible cultures creates immense conflict. As members of a widely discriminated group, marginal American Indians have been found to experience the most difficulties in attempting to resolve cultural conflicts by adopting the superior group’s culture. By accepting these novel values, beliefs, and customs, these individuals may lose touch with their traditional cultures and lifestyles. In turn, many marginalized individuals

begin to feel caught in between the two incompatible cultures, and find great difficulty in reconciling their differences (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

One's self-identity is shaped as he grows and interacts with a social environment; one's group identifications imply psychological connections of the individual with other social structures and his particular culture. Psychological ties with social groups through one's sense of relatedness and belonging are linked with the concept of self-identification (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). Ties of an individual include commonplace statements like "I am Catholic," "I am a dentist," "I am a woman," or "I am Italian."

In the business of everyday living it is an economy of expression to speak of such ties as "identifications." As these simple declarations imply, identification is always "identification *with...*," and always with *something*. Identification always implies a relationship between a subject and an object. The *subject* is an individual. The *something* which is the *object* of identification may include various aspects of the individual's world (Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

Due to the strong psychological ties most American Indians associate with their tribal cultures and environment, such an immense cultural conflict and instability as a result of acculturation, generally results in psychological consequences. In the absence of perceived group stability, an individual tends to experience great insecurities and cultural tension, and is likely to withdraw from a group and frantically seek stability in another. Furthermore, many will face a severe internalized crisis as they struggle to find their true identity and sense of belonging (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

Moreover, Garrett and Pitchette (2000) discuss the renowned psychologist Erikson's (1968) "theory of identity development," that emphasizes the need for establishing a healthy self-concept and personality in order to successfully progress



through the subsequent stages in human growth and development. An inability to do so results in identity confusion and is commonly followed by severe feelings of internalized insecurity, alienation, and seclusion.

Cultural values and the influence of acculturation in the process of identity formation are critical determinants of the health of many American Indians. Facing individual and group conflicts of acculturation from early adolescence to early adulthood influences many American Indians' individual self-perception, and their wellbeing in emotional, social, mental, and spiritual realms as well. In turn, many find themselves in a critical life-long and often unsuccessful pursuit of a true sense of purpose, relatedness and belongingness in their psychosocial environment (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

## CHAPTER FIVE

## VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICAN INDIANS

Direct and Structural Violence

With the simple word “violence,” we easily identify thoughts of physical abuse, injury, or killing. However, the concept of violence is much more complex. “A violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and spirit” (Galtung, 1990, pg. 294). Therefore violence should be identified not only by the direct physical aspects, but it should also be extended to include any avoidable insult or limitation to basic human needs and necessities for survival, freedom, personal well-being and maintenance of a healthy self-concept. If all of these aspects are not satisfied, the individual will ultimately be degraded and devalued in time (Galtung, 1990).

The concept of “direct violence” is defined by Galtung (1990) to be an event, while the concept of “structural violence” is defined as a process with ups and downs. We have seen countless acts of direct violence varying in severity throughout the long history of the United States. In the European settlers’ attempt to colonize the New World and rid of the “Indian problem,” American Indians were subjected to direct violence by means of extermination or genocide, maiming, seizing of their homes and communities, repression, and overthrow of their cultures.

One may refer to the concept of structural violence as a form of indirect harm-inducing violence, based on the ways in which a superior social structure impairs those of an inferior structure by preventing them from obtaining basic needs for survival. When an inferior structure is socially, economically, and politically dominated, oppressed, and abused, its subsistence is significantly reduced. Structural violence creates conflict and

provokes consequent direct violence that is frequently demonstrated in hate crimes, terrorism, war, and genocide, for example (Galtung, 1990).

Another indirect form of structural violence includes alienation, which is commonly seen as a result of the socialization of American Indians. The subjected group, the indigenous population, is forced to disregard its own traditions and adopt that of the dominant culture instead. Specifically, the federal policies that implemented church-affiliated boarding schools forced American Indian children into socialization and acculturation without giving them a say. Several other frequent occurrences of indirect, structurally violent acts include repression, marginalization, exploitation, discrimination, and social dominance (Galtung, 1990).

### Cultural Violence

Galtung (1990) describes the concept of “cultural violence” as an invariant, a “permanence” remaining essentially the same for long periods of time. Fundamentally, it as any aspect of culture, the symbolic realm of our being that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or harm like direct or structural violence does, but it is used to legitimize either or both. Cultural violence enables direct and structural violence to appear and feel “right,” or just “not wrong,” and consequently it is deemed acceptable in society (Galtung, 1990).

For instance:

One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being ‘murder on behalf of the country is right, on behalf of oneself wrong’ Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent (Galtung, 1990, pg. 292).

The historical repression and removal of American Indians to destitute areas in the U.S. during colonization is a form of cultural violence in that these acts that devastated the American Indian population were deemed acceptable in society and viewed as “civilized” government tactics. It is logical to infer that after ceasing the extermination of American Indians, society was ultimately desensitized to less destructive acts of violence. “With the violent structure institutionalized and the violent culture internalized, direct violence also tends to become institutionalized, repetitive, ritualistic, like a vendetta” (Galtung, 1990).

Confronted with assimilation, many American Indians are forced to choose between seclusion and cultural alienation, or to express the dominant culture rather than their own. Assimilation also forces a child or adolescent to choose to follow the dominant culture or continue to follow her own repressed and marginalized culture; both of which are forms of cultural violence in which American Indians are continuously victims of (Galtung, 1990).

#### Racial Slurs and Cultural Violence

Since Columbus and later explorers and settlers began to colonize America, most American Indians have suffered immensely as a result of European expansion and progress. Early views of the indigenous beings as “good Indians” or “noble savages” quickly decimated and were replaced by federal policies that dehumanized American Indians, and in turn, societal attitudes changed and the dominant culture came to view them as “wild savages.” They were stripped away from their homelands, murdered, or placed on reservations where many continue to live disadvantaged and marginalized lives today (Mieder, 1993). Furthermore, it is evident that society is still seemingly

desensitized to the unjust acts of cultural violence, discrimination, and unequal treatment we continue to subject American Indians to (Mieder, 1993).

In particular, cultural violence is frequently practiced in the repeated use of racial slurs against American Indians. Originated in 1860's from Philip Sheridan, the hateful proverb: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" has been a commonplace statement that is still frequently referenced in present-day American society. In Mieder's (1993) analysis of this particularly horrible proverb, he explains that on a literal level, it grotesquely justified the mass extermination of the American Indian population; on a more figurative level, it spread the belief that Indians could only become "good" if they conformed to Christianity and the culture of their white oppressors. Another similar provocative statement, Mieder (1993) analyzes is, "Indians will be Indians," which he notes to clearly allude the belief that no matter how hard the dominant Euro-American culture tried to change them, American Indians will for ever remain uncivilized, "wild savages" (Mieder, 1993).

As Mieder (1993) describes, it is an offensive racist joke, therefore it shows the tenacity of proverbial stereotypes in the U.S. today. One would think that such a small, empty statement that was stated over 1,000 years ago wouldn't dare still exist in mainstream contemporary society; however, this is quite the contrary.

The fact that this proverb is still used today is a very sad comment on this society and its behavior toward Native Americans. As long as the white majority population of the United States retains its prejudices and stereotypes about this minority population, the proverb will not cease to exist. Wherever it will be uttered or written, it will expose blatant inhumanity toward Native Americans (Mieder, 1993).

## Social Stigma

Stigma is the disapproval associated with a certain attribute that essentially dehumanizes and degrades an individual in a particular social context. It directly impacts a group through mechanisms of racism and discrimination, automatic stereotypes, and expectancy confirmation; and indirectly through threats to personal and social identity. Stigma is a compelling phenomenon with a wide variety of extensive effects on its subjects (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Social stigma, in addition to historical trauma, socialization, isolation, and other consequences of cultural and structural violence against American Indians lead to various subconscious consequences (Galtung, 1990).

In the course of stigmatization, certain attributes become associated with negative societal perceptions and stereotypes, which are widely shared in culture. These stereotypical traits then become the basis for avoiding or excluding individuals with the same or similar characteristics. Essentially, stigma exists when categorizing, negative stereotyping, exclusion, discrimination, and low status occur simultaneously in a situation of power that allows this unjust process to occur (Major & O'Brien, 2005).

By limiting opportunity and access to important resources for nutrition and quality medical care, those who are discriminated against are exposed to toxic physical and social environments. Furthermore, discrimination directly affects the physical health, social status, and psychological wellbeing of those who are stigmatized. The stigmatized are put at a much greater risk for various mental and physical health problems; noted in Major & O'Brien (2005), data from the American Heart Association (2003) show that these individuals have increased risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and depression. Members of stigmatized groups are often discriminated against in employment settings, educational settings, in purchasing a home or health care, and in

criminal justice systems. Cultural knowledge or situational cues that indicate one's group is devalued, marginalized, and of low status lead to social identity threat. From repeated exposure and experience with the dominant culture, members of a stigmatized group are aware of their social standings in society and that they are discriminated against, looked down upon, and devalued by those superior to them (Major & O'Brien, 2005).

A potential threat to one's identity is based on his personal understanding of how others perceive him, his interpretations of social settings, and his motives and goals. A serious identity threat results when stressors related to a social stigma are harmful enough that they exceed one's coping capabilities. One's stress responses and coping efforts have been found to influence important outcomes such as self-esteem, overall health, and academic achievement. An existing relationship has been shown between social stigma and poor mental, physical and cognitive health; as well as anxiety arousal, low self-esteem, poverty, and reduced access to employment, education, and housing (Major & O'Brien, 2005). In turn, some may even become alcohol or substance users as a means of "coping," which may subsequently lead to abuse and dependence of that substance.

## CHAPTER SIX

MAINSTREAM VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICAN INDIANS: DISCRIMINATION,  
STIGMA, AND PERPETUATING STEREOTYPESAwareness

Although direct physical violence against American Indians is not a frequent occurrence in contemporary American society as it was in the past, cultural violence still prevails in a number of ways. Present-day Americans of the dominant culture in the U.S. may not acknowledge or even notice the many ways the indigenous continue to be discriminated against and stigmatized because of its commonality; the majority of our society is habituated<sup>2</sup> to it. However, we must not forget that the perpetuation of stereotypes in the dominant mainstream American culture is a form of violence that threaten or significantly affect the mental, emotional, social, and sometimes physical health of the American Indian population.

American Indians are enormously stigmatized through the various sectors of the media, aiding in the habituation of the persistent acts of cultural violence in our society. In today's popular culture, the most prevalent stereotypes are perpetuated by the use of the historical image of "savage" "Native" American Indians, and tribal or individual American Indian names, displayed in advertisements, logos, and labels of commonly used American consumer products. Stereotypical names of American Indians and their tribes, as well as this non-human animalistic image, are also perpetuated through schools' or professional sports teams' names, mascots, and chants. Equally if not more effective,

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<sup>2</sup> Habituation is defined as a learning behavior in which a response to a stimulus weakens with repeated stimulus presentations (Kolb & Wishaw, 2006).



the stereotypical image and exaggerated stigmatized personalities of American Indians are frequently portrayed in characters of popular movies, television shows, comics, and books. Even many popular children's toys of fake bows and arrows or tomahawks and "Indian" costumes provide concrete examples of the continuous existing stereotypes against American Indians (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Pewewardy, 2004; Sigelman, 2001; Whitbeck et al. 2004).

### Symbolic Discrimination in Classic Literature

Camilla Townsend's *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* uses the life of a historical American Indian Pocahontas, daughter of Chief Powhatan, to represent the struggle of cultural assimilation and forced acculturation that the indigenous people faced upon the arrival of the Europeans. Townsend uses means of symbolism to represent English royalty and overall European superiority over the inferior American Indian population, and also to create an effective "image" of all American Indians that perpetuate existing stereotypes. In particular, with the character of Pocahontas, she grasps one of the earliest stereotypes of American Indian women as an "Indian Princess" who willingly accepts and adapts to the "superior" European culture upon their arrival in the Americas. The character of Pocahontas as the "Indian Princess" in Townsend's book is a widely accepted image of contemporary popular culture, especially with the infamous Walt Disney's later reproduction of Pocahontas' life story through an enchanting children's cartoon fairy tale.

The well-known book *The Last of the Mohicans*, by James F. Cooper, may also be interpreted as a way of perpetuating American Indian stereotypes. Specifically, separating and maintaining the division of two races in the early European establishments of the "New World." The two groups are represented as the civilized and developed culture of

the white Euro-Americans, and the “savage,” unruly, shoddy cultures of the American Indians. With the central theme using references to the Western American frontier, Cooper seems to emphasize that a man of color must conform to rules and boundaries set by the superior white man. It can also be interpreted from the story that the savage, uncivilized, and incompetent lifestyles of the American Indians are so deeply ingrained that they are irreversible; no matter what was done, or how it was done, all indigenous beings could never become civilized, thus could never be trusted by a white man. Diminishing the humanity of American Indians even further, if they could not conform to European American ideals, they would have to become the white man’s slave or be exterminated altogether. Due to the fact that his books are consistently being republished and read by many Americans, Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* can be seen as a way to enable the existence and acceptability of American Indian stereotypes. Although these are merely interpretations of underlying themes of the book rather than outright conclusions, they are simplistic and plausible inferences made from recurrent themes that are similar to various other means of perpetuating stereotypical ideations and concepts commonly seen and studied today.

#### Present-Day Society’s American Indian Image and Name Use

The image I refer to is often depicted as the “wild savage,” “Native American,” as society perceived American Indians to be in colonial times. This image typically portrays a red-brown skinned American Indian wearing a beaded and feathered headdress or long dark braids with a feather headband; beaded and patterned jewelry; fringe “buckskin” which is usually tan loincloth draped around their bodies; and “war paint” generally on their cheeks and arms; it is often shown holding or associated with weapons such as spearheads, a “tomahawk” which is a small ax, or a bow and arrow; this image is also

sometimes associated with “Native American” symbols of wolves and eagles, forestry and wildlife, drums, pipes, and a typically bright-colored, diamond and triangular-patterned “Native American” design.

Many logos, labels and advertisements we regularly see and use today continue to feed the existence of this stereotypical American Indian image. The “Natural American Spirit” cigarette box is bright aqua blue with black, yellow, red, and white font, the “Native American” triangular-pattern design, and a “Native American” symbol of an eagle. The cover of the box displays a cartoon-image of a bare top half of an American Indian, wearing a large feathered headdress, smoking a long cigarette. The way that the Indian image is positioned and the appearance of the long cigarette makes it appear to be holding a long spear at first glance. The logo of a chewing tobacco company called “Red Man” displays a similar illustration of the head of a male American Indian wearing a beaded and feathered headdress. The brand name in itself is an offensive racial discrimination of the stereotypical “red” skin color of American Indians.

“Dogfish Head,” a popular brewing company of craft brewed ales established in 1995, produced a particular dark brew available year round at many restaurants and retailers, entitled “Indian Brown Ale.” The name of this dark brown colored beer is yet another example of an offensive discriminatory identification associated with American Indians’ stereotypical skin color that is still perpetuated today. Similarly, Heartland Brewery out of New York crafted a beer they called “Indian River.” Its main advertisement is extremely offensive, using the most common derogatory American Indian stereotypes in that it presents a sexualized female “Native American” character wearing very little fringed buckskin clothing, “war paint” and a feather, holding the “Indian River” beer and a gun.

Also, established in 1995, the “Blue Moon” Brewing Company has a name logo of a diamond shape framing a symbol of a sun, similar to the one of the common symbols associated with “Native” American Indians. The logo on Blue Moon’s beers depict a large, blue full moon above a forest of trees; this can be linked to wolves that “howl under a full moon” which are stereotypically related to American Indians. We can also infer that the company name itself, “Blue Moon,” is an example of the stereotypical nicknames society tends to associate with individual American Indian or tribal names that are used to represent a meaningful sign or symbol of their cultures. Other examples of stereotypical nicknames created in mockery of American Indians could be names like “Chief Running Bull” or “Little Sun Dance” or “Brave Eagle Wind,” for example. Additionally, a malt liquor introduced to the American market, “Crazy Horse” main logo is a circle framed with a stereotypical “Native” triangular design, displaying an illustration of a horse wearing a clichéd Indian feathered headdress in the center. The name “Crazy Horse”<sup>3</sup> displayed above and below the dressed horse head insinuates that it is the “Indianness” represented by the feathered headpiece is that which makes the horse “crazy”; furthermore perpetuating the offensive stereotype that American Indians are “wild” and “savage” non-human animals.

The logo of the popular dairy brand “Land O’Lakes” that produces mainly butter, margarine, creams and milks is another culprit of illustrating the stereotypical American Indian image. Land O’Lakes logo displays a female American Indian with two long braids and a feather headband wearing tan fringe loincloth. She is holding the particular boxed product out in front of her, while lying on her knees upon a patch of grass in front

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<sup>3</sup> Crazy Horse was the English name of a well known American Indian leader and war chief of the Lakota tribe. He eagerly fought numerous physical and political battles with the American government in resistance of whites’ invasions on Lakota lands, and died in custody of the U.S. Army in 1877 (Bray, 2006).

of a lake and forest. Another popular product used in cooking is “Calumet” baking powder produced by Kraft. A calumet is a certain pipe used in some traditional American Indian cultural ceremonies, and Kraft’s Calumet baking powder logo is of the hackneyed male American Indian head dressed in a large feathered headpiece.

The names of many American Indian tribes are used to brand name various different American consumer products that have no official relevance with the tribes. For instance, “Apache” helicopters, Jeep “Cherokee” motor vehicles, “Oneida” flatware, and the motor vehicle company “Pontiac.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in our sports obsessed American culture, we see quite a few American Indian tribal names and stereotypical image used for professional sports team names and mascots as well. Currently, we have the Cleveland Indians, Kansas City Chiefs, Atlanta Braves, and the more racist team name of the Washington Redskins. Many Americans may not necessarily see or understand the significance of this; however, using American Indian nicknames is a clear illustration of our current society’s increased habituation for the use of racist and discriminatory stereotypes of American Indians that persists today. Where we see a significant decrease of offensive discriminatory acts towards other ethnic or “minority” groups, we conversely do not see the same decrease in cultural violence towards American Indians. Rather, we see that in mainstream American society, “offensive epithets characterizing Indians are not only tolerated, but widespread” (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

Similarly, there are a number of schools throughout our country that also perpetuate American Indian stereotypes in their school names, mascots, and sports chants. For instance, one of the more popular college football teams in present-day society are the Florida State Seminoles, in Tallahassee, Florida. As a Florida resident and

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<sup>4</sup> Pontiac was a past noble leader and war chief of the Ottawa American Indian people (Maxwell, 1957).

having many friends who attend Florida State, I have stepped onto the campus enough times to see the indirect but strong stigmatization, discrimination, and racism against American Indians that is spread throughout. The campus is filled with images of their stereotypical Seminole Indian mascot, historical American Indian war weapons, Seminole slogans, and American Indian statues.

During the Seminole football games, especially at pre-game and halftime, their school mascot, band, dancers, and cheerleaders put on major performances exhibiting various stereotypical and sometimes “mocking” behaviors. The performers are dressed in stereotypical American Indian costumes, marked with “war paint,” and sometimes use props to excite the crowd, such as foam tomahawks, toy-like mini hand drums, or a fake spear or bow and arrow. Typical routines involve different behaviors and dances such as the “tomahawk chop”; as well as “war chants” and “Indian” fight songs; each behavior ultimately devalues, “mocks” or misrepresents the true ceremonial behaviors and cultures of the stigmatized American Indians; altogether giving inauthentic representations of the current American Indians and cultures (Pewewardy, 2004).

FSU students are also festively dressed up similarly to the performers and actively engage in the entertaining performances with derogatory cheers and chants. The traditional FSU Seminole “war chant,” as they call it, includes the phrases “You got to fight, fight, fight for FSU! You got to scalp ‘em Seminoles!” The entire representation of American Indians in schools such as FSU perpetuates stereotypes that represent these individuals as they were perceived back in the historical colonization time period when they were perceived as “savage” and aggressive warriors; or what’s worse, they are devalued and stigmatized to be non-human “animals.” The repeated exposure and

prevalence of these stereotypes and stigmatizations in society reinforces and accepts those false and immensely offensive depictions (Pewewardy, 2004).

### Manufactured Image and Personalities of Contemporary “Native” Characters

Although some television shows, movies, and books have portrayed American Indians in a more realistic and favorable manner, most are still guilty of characterizing them in a historical, primitive fashion rather than in their true, present-day temperament. Each uniquely manufactured character of American Indians share a common theme in that they depict simplistic, degraded, and stigmatized individuals. Many American Indian characters of the media are not even given a name and are simply referred to as the “Indian,” whereas white characters are given personal names as well as positive, descriptive and detailed personalities (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996). The various, prevalent characters in popular culture are represented as dangerously violent, “savage” warriors and hunters; as aggressive drunks or rapists; as an “Indian princess”; as a wise, elderly chief or nature preserver; as unintelligent and childlike; or flaccid and submissive (Mieder, 1993).

Specifically, these stereotypical figures are displayed as cartoons in the popular war game *Mortal Combat* character of a “Native American” warrior named Nightwolf, and in the characters of Thunderbird, Warpath, and Danielle Moonstar in the television show *X-Men*. Additionally, the extremely popular television show *The Simpsons* aired an episode with an un-named elderly, overweight, masculinized American Indian woman; mockingly, “no-name” also had no teeth, a deep raspy voice, and struggled to speak broken English.

Targeting the younger population in American society, Hollywood issued a series of books and movies we have all heard of, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series, that has

recently become a popular culture “teen” craze. Starting in the second book and movie of the series, the character Jacob Black of the Quileute people is introduced. Jacob and the Quileutes are set on their undersized and isolated tribal reservation of La Push, Washington, perpetuating the common stereotypes that associate American Indians with wildlife and poverty. The series depict Jacob and his tribe in many other ways that perpetuate the familiar stereotypes, for instance, he and his “brothers” are frequently shirtless, childlike, and unruly.

The *Twilight* series tells a fictional story based on a treaty between the White “good” vampires versus the “distrustful” Quileute Indians. As the story fictionally portrays, the Quileutes transform into massive, unruly and vicious werewolves to protect the land and people from vampires and harm. A group of eight vampires, the Cullens, who fed off animal blood rather than humans, came to live in the small town of Forks. Because the Cullens were not a threat to humans, the Quileute’s agreed not to chase them away and made a treaty to share the land and let the Cullens live as humans. The Quileute’s agreed to never tell a soul that the Cullens were really vampires, as long as they never stepped foot on the Quileute Indian reservation land, La Push. Fighting for the love of Bella the human, Jacob the Quileute Indian wolf and Edward the White vampire have extreme disdain and hate for one another and their people. The story as a whole, especially this treaty between the white vampires and the Quileute Indian tribe tell a similar, more stereotypical and false story of the colonization in the United States. Set by a treaty, as the story fictionally portrays, the “good” white Vampires somewhat “take over” the land that was originally claimed by the unruly werewolves or “savage” Quileute Indians. The story exemplifies the constant fighting, segregation, distrust, and disdain between the white Euro-American population and the American Indian



population, which essentially habituates the acceptability of its existence in contemporary American society (*The Twilight Saga*; M. Morgan).

Targeting an even younger population of our society, there are figurines and cartoon characters of the Smurfs, for example, wearing the stereotypical American Indian headdress, loincloth, and war paint. These caricatures are portrayed as “savage” Indian Smurfs with angry facial expressions, aggressive personalities, and sometimes shown holding a spear. This distorted stereotypical “Indian” is quickly noticeable in various other children’s characters, toys, and even in school textbooks. However, “the consequences of indoctrinating children with these racially biased stereotypes are not recognized by a majority of Americans” (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

#### Welcome to Walt Disney World of Discrimination!

The infamous Walt Disney is one whom is guilty of aiding in desensitizing contemporary American society to the cultural violence against American Indians. Depicting a somewhat distorted story of European colonization of the U.S., Disney’s *Pocahontas* perpetuates just about every existing stereotype of American Indians as discussed earlier. Her fringed buckskin and “war paint”-bearing, yet stunningly beautiful character fosters a misleading image of the American “Indian Princess” in the influential developing minds of children. However, unlike the other Disney Princesses, Pocahontas does not end the story with her love, the handsome white European settler John Smith; as a result of war that erupted from the Europeans attempt to take over American Indian land and resources. Furthermore insinuating that because she chose her American Indian culture and people, she was unable to marry the man she loved and was forced to remain a “noble savage” (LaCroix, 2004). The story itself romanticizes and to some extent “mocks” American Indian image and cultures, their appreciation and respect for the

environment and animals, as well as their “inferiority” during European colonization; devaluing the indigenous population even further.

The characters of “Native” American Indians, specifically “Red Man” and “Tiger Lily” in Disney’s *Peter Pan* are yet another degrading example of Walt Disney’s derogatory racial and stereotypical American Indian characters. However, Disney’s racism is much more apparent in *Peter Pan* than his other works, through the movie’s song entitled “What Makes a Red Man Red?” Extremely discriminating against stereotypical American Indian behaviors, language and use of clichéd broken English, as well as insinuating their stupidity and incompetence, the first two phrases state:

Why does he ask you, “How?”

Why does he ask you, “How?”

Once the Injun didn’t know,

All the things that he know now.

But the Injun, he sure learn lot,

And it’s all from asking, “How?”

Hana Mana Ganda, Hana Mana Ganda.

We translate for you:

Hana means what mana means,

And ganda means that too (Walt Disney).

The following phrase makes a direct derogatory slur in using a generally offensive term, “*squaw*,” which is a French distortion of the Iroquois word *otsiskwa*, meaning the female properties (Pewewardy, 2004). The entire phrase reads:

When did he first say, “Ugh!”

When did he first say, “Ugh!”

In the Injun book it say:

When the first brave married *squaw*,

He gave out with a big “Ugh!”

When he saw his Mother-in-Law (Walt Disney).

The last two phrases of the song are especially racist towards American Indian skin color, specifically. They also directly mock their “origin” and directly refute the validity of any outside source that claims otherwise, by stating:

What made the red man red? What made the red man red?

Let’s go back a million years, to the very first Injun prince.

He kissed a maid and start to blush, and we’ve all been blushin’ since.

You’ve got it from the headman,

The real true story of the red man.

No matter what’s been written or said,

Now you know why the red man’s red! (Walt Disney).

The hidden meanings, insinuations, and outright racial slurs throughout this discriminatory, odious song imply disdain and mockery of American Indian cultures. It demeans living and breathing American Indians with the implication that dominant “superior” American society views them to be “inferior” savages who are utterly incompetent and incapable of even simple tasks as human verbal communication (Pewewardy, 2004).

All things considered, it seems as though Walt Disney’s strategy of attracting youth with his magical fantasies is a way of embellishing whites, and mainstream American culture, while diminishing that of any other race or ethnicity, specifically American Indians for the discussion of this research. Although Disney’s strategy may not

be as obvious or clear cut, it seems to be strikingly similar to the federal government's past strategy of acculturation; refining young impressionable minds of American Indian children by enforcing them to adopt the culture of the superior white American society in boarding schools. Could it be that the wondrous, legendary Walt Disney has been using the innocent, fruitful minds of our children as his mules, to carry out subliminal messages of extreme racism and discrimination? (LaCroix, 2004).

With Disney's magical and fantastic appeal, his discriminating stereotypical characters and fairy tales are generally the first told to most children in American society, setting a construct of certain images, attitudes, and beliefs of "right or wrong" in their impressionable minds. The imaginative mind of a child is apt to follow similar paths of such fascinating and captivating constructs during maturation, influencing the development of their definitive social attitudes in the future; and as Johnson & Eck (1995/1996) said it so well, "how can we expect adults to redevelop healthy attitudes about racial differences when taught differently as children?"

To some bearing this in mind, Walt Disney and all of his fantastic creations may not seem so "magically" good-natured as we may have previously thought; but he is the "King" of mainstream children's popular culture! This is an issue that demands attention. American society should be well aware of the harsh realities and possible influences surrounding Disney's characters and fairy tails, and take it all into consideration during our efforts in raising healthy affable children.

#### Stereotypes in American Society Creates Problems Within "Indian" Society

Stereotypes are tremendously persistent in contemporary American society; once the accepted stereotypes of other groups interfere with one's discriminatory perception and social attitudes towards individuals in other groups, he or she is likely to

unconsciously be on watchful alert for the traits in which they have come to believe characterize and represent members of another group (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). “Although one’s ethnic group is just one of a number of possible identity sources, ethnicity is at the heart of the equity problem in American society” (Pewewardy, 2004).

The various groups within the United States’ socioeconomic hierarchy are interrelated, where the particular ethnic group that is discriminated against and stigmatized consequently faces conflicts of self-concept and personal relatedness at the onset of understanding “what he is” and their perceived level of significance in the larger society. Locating oneself in a stigmatized social ranking occurs when an observable characteristic or trait, like skin color for example, becomes the definitive symbol of that social category. Once an individual on the low end of the large social hierarchy becomes aware of their social standing and stigmatization, they are faced with the devastating consciousness of others’ demeaning perceptions of them, and the various shortcomings and disadvantages they will come to face as the ensuing result (Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

The psychological consequences of this tragic acceptance encompass even the most private areas of one’s life, including perception of their personal attractiveness, their perceived level of, and actual attainability of their life goals and desires.

Strivings for status, acceptance, prestige and a way of life are directed toward the level of groups at the upper end of the scale, which are more powerful in all areas of living. When the individual finds his moves upward barred because of discrimination in occupational, educational and social spheres, the psychological consequences are: thwarting of aspirations, discrepancies between desires and actual strivings, frustrations, personal insecurity and self-devaluation (Sherif & Sherif, 1961).

With the creation of the depersonalized stereotypical image and appearance, fictitious behaviors, and devalued characteristics of American Indians, their entire population is represented in a simplistic, demeaning, and exceptionally offensive manner. They are portrayed not as the civilized citizens of the many diverse and developed tribes in our country that they are in reality, but as one-dimensional caricatures of savages or as stoic historical relics pictured with a spear or a bow and arrow and wearing fringed buckskin loincloths, feathered headdresses, and beaded moccasins for example. Instead of “men” and “women,” Indians in many children’s story books are often referred to as “braves,” who are usually “whooping” while standing or bouncing around on one leg, or as “squaws” carrying a “papoose” on their backs (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

Mainstream American society prolongs the existence of such stereotypes through a number of different media outlets, such as advertisements, labels, and logos of popular culture consumer products; through individual or tribal American Indian nicknames used to name market products or sports teams; through songs, sports team chants, and language; and also through stereotypical sports mascots or caricatures seen in movies, television shows, books, children’s toys and children’s fairy tale characters as well. Furthermore, it has been found from an abundance of different research and studies that ongoing perpetuation of derogatory Indian stereotypes in the dominant American society has far-reaching consequences and have been linked to many serious problems within “Indian” society (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Pewewardy, 2004; Sigelman, 2001; Whitbeck et al. 2004).

Established by clinical psychologists, the consistent portrayals of negative images, symbols, and behaviors play a crucial role in disturbing American Indian children’s cultural and self concepts, as well as non-Indian children’s development of

social attitudes toward American Indians and their true existing culture. A stereotyped individual is “never seen as an individual, he is not seen for what he is” but rather, “for what he ‘ought’ to be” and the majority of these children internalize these prejudiced stereotypes and disdainful attitudes towards them, which significantly interferes with the child’s development of a positive and accurate self image and racial identity; too often this prevents the stigmatized child from fully developing their true potential in life (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

It is known that children begin to develop racial awareness within the first 3-4 years of life, therefore the perpetuation of stereotypes establish and maintain inequitable social attitudes amongst both American Indian and non-Indian children. Non-Indian children recurrently exposed to these stereotypical depictions at an early impressionable age, are ultimately prevented from developing healthy and authentic attitudes towards American Indians. The majority of Americans in our society do not recognize the consequences that indoctrinating our children with racially biased and extremely discriminatory stereotypes bring about (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996). Acquiring “knowledge” from the inaccurate portrayals may prevent non-Indians from developing accurate understanding and attitudes about American Indians. Therefore, as they grow into adulthood, non-Indians are likely to have unconsciously developed discriminatory attitudes about the indigenous population. On the contrary, Indian children who are consistently exposed to unauthentic stereotypes about themselves or their cultures feel extremely belittled and grow to have very low self-esteem as well as cultural and self worth; in turn, they are likely to grow into adults who feel and act inferior to others (Pewewardy, 2004). Moreover, many negative stereotypes are learned and unconsciously internalized long before one’s first exposure to the offensive team names and caricatures

for example. Repeated exposures to derogatory, inaccurate stereotypes of American Indians generally begins in early childhood and persists through adolescence, reaching far into largely influencing the perception and attitudes held in adulthood (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

Research evidence reveals that low self-esteem can lead to a number of serious consequences (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996), and it is detrimental to the academic achievement of students (Pewewardy, 2004). As students endure prevalent societal stereotyping of American Indians, they also endure various psychological repercussions. Furthermore, such discrimination, racism, and cultural violence especially through school team names, mascots, and chants, significantly devalues the stigmatized group and damages their overall well being. Specifically supporting this case, Pewewardy (2004) quotes, “it is no coincidence that American Indians have the highest suicide, school dropout, and unemployment rates of any ethnic group in the United States” (Ricder, 1999). When compared with other ethnic groups, research findings have revealed much higher rates of depression, PTSD, and defined psychiatric disorders among the American Indian population. This has also been found to be directly linked to a profound increase in various other heightened risks such as socioeconomic handicaps, alcohol or substance use and abuse, homicide, and committing suicide (Byers, 2006; Gone, 2008; Hill, 2009).

Furthermore, by allowing the continued use of Indian mascots, nicknames, and mocking behaviors and chants, schools are allowing both non-Indian and American Indian children to tolerate racism and continue to perpetuate offensive and psychologically suppressing stereotypes, which in turn will desensitize this cultural violence in mainstream American society as a whole. For instance, as a fourth year student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, it was not until I conducted my



research that I realized that the Massachusetts state seal depicts a stereotypical American Indian holding a bow and arrow, pictured with an arm holding a sword above their head, symbolizing their war-like nature and essence; having previously shown the words, “Come over and help us” coming out of the Indian’s mouth (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996). In other words, it was up until I learned the harsh realities of the existing perpetuation of American Indian stereotypes from my research and Capstone course, that I, too, was guilty of being desensitized and largely unaware of its continual commonality within contemporary American society.

Starting way back in history, during the early colonization period, American Indians have been regarded as savage, non-human animals rather than the living and breathing race of human beings that they are. This became an increasingly acceptable view throughout American society so that early European settlers could feel guiltless and justified about the removal and extermination of the “Indians” in the processes of colonization; however, we associate the American Indians with violence and warlike behavior, when in reality, Indians were merely reacting to European invasion and fighting back to protect their people and land that were being forcefully and unjustly taken from them. Since then, there has been a long and continual desensitization of their cultures, enabling us to continue to perpetrate a means of cultural violence towards the greatly disadvantaged American Indian population. As a result, contemporary American society has oversimplified every facet of American Indian life and cultures. Knowing the simple fact that the indigenous inhabitant societies of the United States contained over 500 separate cultures including over 300 different languages emphasizes the magnitude of the oversimplification and inaccurate depiction the majority of contemporary American

society still has regarding this rather civilized and extremely developed population (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

### Profound Negative Effects

Compared with populations of other ethnic minority groups, the American Indian population has a greater incidence of higher health risk factors and disparities. It is possible that disengagement of the integral relationship between individual American Indians and their culture because of colonization and acculturation may very well be a prime causal factor in this finding. During the past decade, a number of researchers have started to apply American Indian generational experiences of ethnic cleansing to their mental health studies in hopes of providing a better understanding.

As stated by Whitbeck et al. (2004), research has established that symptoms of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>5</sup> and grief have been largely attributed to the processes of ethnic cleansing of American Indians. At the time of the initial encounter between our nation's first inhabitants and Columbus and his European successors in 1492, the indigenous population lavished. During the "racial genocide" that subsequently occurred, about five to seven million American Indians were viciously murdered, and the American Indian population was reduced to a small 250,000 in 1890 (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Despite the shift to a more refined approach to rid of the "Indian problem," the following two centuries of federal policies were established to force acculturation and further devastate the remaining American Indians and their cultures. Due to the historical experiences and associations with such devastating immeasurable loss, noted symptoms of unresolved grief, depression, and PTSD related to historical

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<sup>5</sup> Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a syndrome characterized by physiological arousal symptoms related to recurring memories and dreams related to a traumatic event—for months or years after the event (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

trauma, are all commonly found within the American Indian population. More recent research even indicates that the current generation of American Indian adults still frequently thinks about the historical loss<sup>6</sup> of their population, which also leads to negative emotional responses (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Specifically, the findings of the Whitbeck et al. (2004) study have major implications for the high incidence of alcoholism among American Indians. The transmission of the negative effects of perceived discrimination through the construct of historical loss suggests that discrimination may provoke a sense of loss among some American Indians. It may be a dreadful reminder of their population's disadvantaged hierarchical status in society and the catastrophic historical events that have occurred, in this case, the processes of ethnic cleansing, removal, and forced acculturation (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

A significant amount of attention has been paid to the harmful impacts discrimination has on mental health, with a more recent focus on major depression<sup>7</sup>. Discrimination effectively operates in terms of ability to stimulate stress by limiting a particular group's social opportunities, generate stress reactions that lead to detrimental mental health outcomes, and negatively affect self-concept. Considering the fact that depression is one of the most prevalent but distressful psychological conditions worldwide, Byers (2006) focused her mental health study on available research indicating that American Indians experience chronic depression at higher rates and for longer

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<sup>6</sup> Historical loss in Whitbeck et al. (2004) study measured loss of land, language, culture, and traditional spiritual ways; loss of family and friends; loss of self-respect; loss of trust; etc.

<sup>7</sup> Major depression is a highly disruptive emotional/mood disorder characterized by prolonged feelings of worthlessness and guilt, disruption of normal eating habits, sleep disturbances, a general slowing of behavior. If left untreated, frequent thoughts of suicide are very common (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

periods of time than that of the general American society. Particularly, she examined possible relationships between factors of enduring discrimination, cultural identity, historical trauma<sup>8</sup>, and individual traumatic distress in relation to increased risk of depression. Results indicated that traumatic distress, and marginalized identity, were significant predictors of current depressive symptom distress.

Negative self-perception<sup>9</sup> or distorted ethnic identity has been a presumed influential factor for the onset of several mental health disorders; again specifically, major depression. In full agreement with Byers (2006) statement, “it is logical to assume that one’s self concept as an American Indian impacts internal views of the self that then guide attributions, and behaviors within the tribe and the larger society.”

Numerous research studies pinpoint American Indians to be the one ethnic group with the highest level of trauma<sup>10</sup> exposure through violent victimizations nationwide. American Indians are victims of rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault at an annual rate that is 2.1 times higher than the African American population, 2.6 times higher than for White Americans, and 4.7 times higher than the Asian American population. Additionally within the American Indian population, self-destructive behavior rates are high, especially within reservation communities; in particular, behaviors such as suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, and completed suicide.

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<sup>8</sup> As noted in Byers (2006), Brave Heart (1999) defines “historical trauma” as the present reactions of American Indians to the violence endured by previous generations in the form of imprisonment, loss of ancestral land, removal of tribal children to attend boarding schools, and violence.

<sup>9</sup> Self-perception is described as the cognitive structures that comprise self value, self concept impacts attributions that create emotional responses that then affect behavior (Byers, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> A traumatic experience is a disastrous or an extremely painful event that has severe psychological and physiological effects. Traumatic events include personal tragedies such as being the victim of violence, or a life-threatening experience (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

Within this population in 2001, the prevalence rate for suicide was 1.5 times the national rate. The main risk factors found for attempted suicide are stressful life events, definitive psychiatric disorders such as depression, and alcoholism (Hill, 2009). Specifically, from the research by Hill (2009), she logically asserts that suicide attempts indicate substantial psychological suffering, and probable alcohol or substance abuse. For this, she blames the influential factors to be cultural devastation, and high rates of multiple losses experienced through intergenerational mental, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse commonly found in American Indian population.

### Psychologically or Scientifically Speaking

It is easy for one to argue sociological relationships and correlations made to illustrate the various aspects of why or how American Indians are at an extreme disadvantage socially, physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, it is much more difficult to argue against scientific fact regarding the human brain, its development, and various factual influences and effects.

Moreover, it is scientific fact that an individual's genotype exists in an environmental context. One's "epigenetics" refers to the differences in gene expression that are caused by experience. Changes in one's gene expression can result from a vast range of experiential factors, such as chronic stress, traumatic or major life events, culture, drugs, and disease (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006). In addition to emerging and changing structures of one's brain, an individual's environment and experiences shape their developing behaviors. In other words, brains that are exposed to different environmental experiences are shaped in different ways:

Culture is an important aspect of the human environment, and so culture must help to mold the human brain. We would therefore expect people raised in widely

different cultures to acquire differences in brain structure that have lifelong effects on their behavior (Kolb & Wishaw, 2006).

Furthermore, an abundance of scientific research reveals that individuals raised in healthy or “stimulating” environments will maximize their intellectual development; whereas individuals reared in disadvantaged or “impoverished” environments will not reach their maximal potential (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

Each individual’s sociocultural world—the various circles of social influence in one’s life—can greatly influence one’s overall wellbeing. The immediate circle is comprised of those whom we interact with on the local level, whereas the next is comprised of one’s extended circle of relationships. The third circle is comprised of the people in our environments with whom we interact with minimally, and rarely by name; but whose standards, expectations, and behaviors still influence our lives, such as those within our community. The fourth and widest social circle is the culture in which we live: mainstream American society. The occurrence of events or distress within any or all of these social contexts can cause abnormality within the individual. “For some people, the experience of discrimination has profound impact on a person who is part of a minority group, whether involving race, culture, sexual orientation, or disability” (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

Severely restricted or complex, abnormal experiences are likely to retard both brain development and behavior. Stress<sup>11</sup> can alter one’s gene expression, such those related to the reuptake of our body’s hormone serotonin. This early alteration of serotonin activity can severely change how the brain responds to stressful experiences during

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<sup>11</sup> Stress refers to the unpleasant emotional reaction an individual has when he or she perceives an event to be threatening. This emotional reaction may include heightened physiological arousal due to increased reactivity of the sympathetic nervous system (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

maturation. Additionally, exposure to stress within a child's critical period<sup>12</sup> has a profound effect on a child's behavior later in life. Children exposed to desolate environments or to neglect or abuse will be at an extreme disadvantage later in life; which is revealed in the retarded intellectual development of children reared in horrible circumstances. "Although some argue that children can succeed in school and in life if they really want to, abnormal developmental experiences can clearly alter the brain irrevocably" (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006). By and large, it is proven scientifically that stressful experiences early in life increase one's susceptibility to a wide range of behavioral abnormalities, especially the development of anxiety disorders<sup>13</sup>. Findings from various studies confirm that early experiences of distress can alter one's response to stressors<sup>14</sup> in adulthood (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

A particular stress response, an "emotion," is a cognitive interpretation of strong subjective feelings that we often label as anger or love, joy or pain, fear or trust, etc. Emotional experiences—the activation of the body's "HPA axis"—include autonomic bodily responses such as rapid breathing, sweating, and dryness of the mouth. Emotions also entail a cognitive component of thoughts or plans related to the particular experience, or what we think about the arousing situation. However, severe and

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<sup>12</sup> Critical period is a particular time span in the course of brain development during which normal, healthy brain development is the most sensitive to specific experiences. The absence of appropriate sensory experience during a critical period may also result in abnormal brain development, which leads to abnormal behavior that endures even into adulthood (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Anxiety disorders are comprised of feelings of severe and constant anxiety; this category includes Generalized Anxiety Disorder, phobias, Panic Disorder, Acute Stress Disorder, and PTSD (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> A stressor is a stimulus that challenges the body's homeostasis, and then triggers arousal and attempts to reduce stress, otherwise known as the body's stress response (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

prolonged negative emotions, especially anxiety and depression, have been found to cause definitive clinical or psychiatric disorders (Kolb & Wishaw, 2006).

A significant psychological factor in understanding the various aspects of depression is the body's reactivity to stress. When we are stressed, the body's response activates the "HPA axis" which is stimulated to produce stress hormones such as Cortisol.

In depression, the norepinephrine neurons that regulate the hypothalamic neurons shut down, which produces chronic activation of Cortisol release, which is experienced as chronic stress; exposure to chronic stress can cause cell death and dendritic shrinkage in the hippocampus, changes that probably result from high levels of Cortisol (Kolb & Wishaw, 2006).

When the Cortisol release is too large, the norepinephrine neurons are no longer able to regulate it. As noted in Kolb & Wishaw (2006), a study by Charles Nemeroff (2004) showed that abuse or other severe environmental stress during critical periods in early childhood can disrupt and permanently damage the reactivity of the HPA axis. Chronic stress during the critical periods can lead to the oversecretion of Cortisol, which is an imbalance associated with depression in adulthood. "He found, for example, that 45% of adults with depression lasting two years or more had experienced abuse, neglect, or parental loss as children" (Kolb & Wishaw, 2006).

Emphasizing that cultural violence is just as harmful to an individual as direct physical violence, a particular study found that emotional pain activates the same neural systems that are normally activated when people feel physical pain. Specifically, the study participants' fMRI scans revealed that activation in the anterior cingulate cortex may act to suppress the feelings of social distress, as does inhibition in the orbitofrontal



cortex<sup>15</sup>. These results reveal that emotional pain activates opposing reactions of specific areas of the brain in the exact same way that physical pain does (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006). In other words, the human brain's reaction and the body's response to emotional pain, from cultural violence for example, is just the same as the brain's reaction and the body's response to physical pain, from direct or structural violence.

Criteria for diagnoses in psychiatry is included in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. The DSM defines "mental disorder" to be: "a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress or disability or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom" (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010). Some disorders can lead a person to inflict severe physical pain through self-mutilation or even lead one to commit suicide. Other disorders place the individual at increased risk of physical harm, because they lead individuals to adopt an unhealthy lifestyle (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

The DSM-IV-TR "Axis IV: Psychosocial and Environmental Problems" lists some of the particular conditions or negative life events/stressors that can cause, aggravate, or even result from a psychological disorder. From all of my research, it is logical to infer that the American Indian population suffers from one or more of each listed subsection. For "problems with primary support group in childhood," many are victims of removal from home, or health problems of a parent. For "problems with primary support group in adulthood," many are victims of estrangement from partner, or

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<sup>15</sup> The brain's orbitofrontal cortex is an area of the prefrontal cortex located behind the eye sockets that receives projections from the dorsomedial nucleus of the thalamus; it plays a central role in a variety of emotional and social behaviors as well as in eating (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

physical or sexual abuse by a partner. For “parent-child problems with primary support group,” many American Indians may experience neglect of a child, or sexual or physical abuse of a child. With “problems related to the social environment,” many may suffer from social isolation, difficulty with acculturation, and adjustment to life cycle transition. As for “economic problems,” many are faced with inadequate finances and extreme poverty. For “housing problems,” many American Indians have or continue to face inadequate housing or homelessness. Additionally, for “educational problems,” many American Indians are faced with inadequate school environment, academic problems, and discord with teachers or classmates. Many American Indians are also subject to problems with access to proper health care services and health insurance; problems related to interaction with the legal system/crime through arrest, incarceration, or being victim of crimes; and other psychosocial problems such as exposure to disasters and loss of important social support services (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

The DSM-IV-TR also lists and describes culture-bound syndromes— “In certain cultures, psychological disorders may be expressed as particular patterns of behavior, perhaps reflecting predominant cultural themes that date back for centuries, known as culture-bound syndromes—recurrent patterns of abnormal behavior or experience that are limited to specific societies or cultural areas” (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010). As for the American Indian population and culture, “ghost sickness” which is a preoccupation with death and the deceased that is reported by many members of American Indian tribes. The phenomenon of “ghost sickness” includes an assemblage of extreme psychological and bodily reactions, represented by nightmares, weakness, extreme fear, appetite loss, chronic anxiety, hallucinations, loss of consciousness, and a feeling of suffocation (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

Major depressive disorder is another defined psychological disorder commonly found within the American Indian population. Depressive episodes<sup>16</sup> involve an extremely intense dysphoric mood that far outweighs the ordinary disappointments and occasional sad emotions of everyday life. People with major depressive disorder also have cognitive symptoms that include an intensely negative self-view reflected by low self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and negativity that may lead many to become consumed by thoughts of death and to possibly look for escape by thinking about or actually committing suicide (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010). About 6.7% of the U.S. adult population suffers from it, and in the course of a lifetime, 30% may experience at least one episode that lasts for months or longer. Most individuals recover from depression within a year of its onset; but if the illness is left untreated, the incidence of suicide is high (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006); which is also a prevalence found among the American Indian population.

Many American Indians may also suffer from Dysthymic Disorder, which is a more chronic but less severe depression. During this extended depression, these individuals are never free of symptoms for any period longer than two months, and they commonly have other serious psychological disorders as well. “Approximately one-tenth will go on to develop major depressive disorder. A sizeable number also have a personality disorder...Others are likely to develop a substance abuse disorder, because they use drugs or alcohol excessively in misguided attempts to reduce their chronic feelings of depression and hopelessness” (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

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<sup>16</sup> Major depressive episodes involve feelings of chronic sadness and emptiness; loss of interest and pleasure in hobbies and activities; experiences changes of appetite, weight, energy levels, and sleeping patterns; and typically harbored thoughts of death or suicide (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

Anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric disorders, even more common than depression. The DSM lists six classes of anxiety disorders that together affect about 37.5% of the U.S. population. The most common are PTSD, phobias, and OCD, which are estimated to affect 15-35% of the population. Many American Indians are diagnosed with anxiety disorders, specifically PTSD, which are characterized by persistent and intense fear and worries about trouble or a disaster in the future, without any direct threat. They also tend to suffer from multiple physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, nausea, and breathing difficulty due to hyperactivity of the body's sympathetic nervous system in response to stress (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

A specific anxiety disorder that is caused by cumulative chronic stress is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is not simply a problem of abnormal brain activity, but it is also predisposed by social and experiential factors that fundamentally alter one's worldview. It is characterized by unrealistic, excessive and prolonged worry, as well as motor tension, restlessness, increased irritability, and sleep disturbances (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

In life, we are faced with an abundance of stressful situations in which we learn to cope with routinely. However, some events may be so physically threatening and emotionally devastating that they may influence various long-term consequences. Moreover, living with constant stress can be unbearable, and can ultimately suppress one's immune system, contributing to the possibility of other disease or infection (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006). Researchers in medicine and psychology are increasingly coming to understand the development of various disorders such as heart and respiratory disease and some forms of diabetes are influenced by the body's stress-related responses initiated in the central nervous system. In other words, a stressful event can set off a set of bodily

reactions that ultimately lower its resistance to disease. Specifically, experiences of intense stress and its negative effects, depression, lack of social support, repression, and denial can all influence the body's immune health and functioning. They can also instigate the symptoms of a chronic, stress-related physical disorder, such as cancer, hypertension, and rheumatoid arthritis. The reasons being, people under persistent and intense stress tend to acquire unhealthy habits like smoking, drinking alcohol, eating less nutritious meals, and getting less sleep. When one is in a state of stress, most become more susceptible to getting sick, possibly from an increased vulnerability to infectious disease as a result of decreased immune health and functioning (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010).

One may also develop an acute stress disorder after the occurrence of a traumatic event. In this condition, the individual develops feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror and they may continue to re-experience the event in thoughts, hallucinations, nightmares, and flashback episodes. If the extreme symptoms persist for over one month, the individual may go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is a fairly common diagnosed condition, with a lifetime prevalence rate of about 8% of the U.S. population. However, the rate is considerably higher for "at-risk" individuals—groups of people who have been exposed to traumatic events such as ethnic violence, for example (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2006).

For some individuals, depression or anxiety from traumatic life experiences is so painful and persistent that their thoughts transform into ideas of ways to escape the constant emotional distress. People who reach this point may feel that they are unable to cope with their problems, and may attempt and even commit suicide. A notable 90% of adults who commit suicide have a diagnosed psychological disorder; the most frequent being Major Depression, Schizophrenia, and Alcohol Abuse or Dependence. Suicide risk

factors that apply to the sufferings of many within the American Indian population include demographic or social factors of being a “Native American,” social isolation, economic or occupational stress/losses, or humiliation. Specific clinical factors include past and current major psychiatric illness (especially depressive), Personality Disorder (Antisocial), impulsive or violent traits by history, family history of suicide, current alcohol/drug abuse or heavy smoking. As for factors specific to youth, many may suffer from lack of family support, history of abuse, school problems, social ostracism/humiliation. However, the earliest and best-known sociocultural theory was from sociologist Emile Durkheim (1897-1952), which states that the principal reason for committing suicide is *anomie*—a feeling of alienation from society. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociocultural theories have “shifted to an emphasis on the role of the media in publicizing suicides, particularly among teenagers (Halgin & Whitbourne, 2010). Furthermore, putting many American Indians at an increased risk of suicide ideation, attempt, or completion, as a result of persistent cultural violence and social isolation they are forced to undergo.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Various Deductions

One cannot contest with the fact that abrupt and often forced changes and ongoing colonization in the United States has devastated much of the indigenous ways of life throughout history. Many scholars have extensively researched the negative impacts these changes have on American Indians; in particular, the consequences of cultural devastation, forced assimilation, enduring discrimination, and immense historical loss on American Indians' social, mental and emotional health (Garrett & Pitchette, 2000; Gone, 2008; Weaver, 2009).

Specifically, Hill (2009) proposes that a strong connection exists between suicidal ideation and one's sense of belonging as connectedness. American Indian experiences of stress, depression, and suicidal ideation are grounded in historical and contextual elements such as historical trauma as a result of colonization, and their loss of cultural practices, language, and sense of cultural belongingness. Having a sense of belonging to one's culture and practicing traditional cultural customs represent spiritual aspects of American Indians perception of the world, which bring harmony and stability to individuals, families, and communities of American Indians, and positively influences their cultural identity, pride, and strength (Hill, 2009). Furthermore, those who had a true sense of belonging as connectedness with their community and culture were less likely to have suicidal ideation, and family and community support seem to function as "buffers" that ultimately reduce the risk of suicide as well (Hill, 2009).

Unfortunately, American Indians are still continuously subjected to violence in its various forms to this day, largely due to the fact that much of American society is

unaware of its frequency and existence altogether. Through acts of cultural violence, mainstream American society ultimately legitimizes discrimination, structural and direct violence, and extreme hostility towards American Indians, making it “acceptable” and therefore it continues to go on unnoticed (Galtung, 1990).

Prevalent derogatory Indian stereotypes continue to deny the humanity and sacredness of American Indians and their cultures, and this devaluation of the American Indian population is institutionalized in U.S. law and enshrined in popular culture. “Stereotypes feed violence and all forms of oppression” and consequently, mainstream American society continues to be filled with offensive, distorted, and inaccurate depictions of American Indians (Weaver, 2009). These discriminatory stereotypes are perpetuated in popular culture through a number of different ways: in the media, in fictional books and textbooks, through caricatures and children’s toys, schools’ or sports teams’ names, mascots and chants, as well as in logos, labels, and advertisements of well-known consumer products (Galtung, 1990; Gone, 2008; Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Pewewardy, 2004; Sigelman, 2001). “As long as this devaluation continues, violence will continue,” and in order to end all violence against the American Indian population, challenging and eradicating derogatory Indian stereotypes is absolutely essential.

To think that the indigenous population is such a small minority that the dominant American society can afford to ignore their concerns is absolutely absurd, for violence against any aspect of humanity negatively affects us all. “Indeed, in this increasingly global world, it is clear that if violence against some members of a society is acceptable, then so too is violence against members of other societies. Violence begets violence” (Weaver, 2009).



An abundance of previous research has shown a true relationship between discrimination and social stigma, with a wide range of ensuing negative effects within the indigenous populations (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Specifically, findings of heightened stress levels, identity crisis, low self-esteem, depression, increased alcohol and substance use and abuse, as well as higher suicide rates among the American Indian population (Hill, 2009; Sigelman, 2001; Tann et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

All of this considered, along with definitive scientific facts in support of these research findings, it is logical to assert that there is a clear and true relationship between discrimination, stigmatization, and a number of negative internalized effects within the American Indian population. Moreover, since we reside in the United States of America where we preach freedom, rights, and equality, I question, why is this clearly not true for all men and women? When will we reach full equality in our country? How are we, as part of U.S. society, going to cease violence and come to obtain equality for all? As Robert F. Kennedy previously orated,

We tolerate a rising level of violence that ignores our common humanity... We glorify killing on movie and television screens and call it entertainment. ... Too often we honor swagger and bluster and the wielders of force; too often we excuse those who are willing to build their own lives on the shattered dreams of others. ... Some look for scapegoats, others for conspiracies, but this much is clear: Violence breeds violence, repression brings retaliation, and only a cleansing of our whole society can remove this sickness from our soul (Kennedy, 1968).

#### Can this be Improved or Changed?

Although the strong incorporation of violence within the colonial context of the Euro-American society makes its eradication difficult, the extreme probable

consequences of ignoring the continuing perpetuation of violence against American Indians makes striving for change a necessity (Weaver, 2009). Since we cannot change the damage that has been done in the past, we need to focus our efforts on changing the here and now, which must begin with correct education of our society. Educators must teach children and adults of the stark realities and truths about the history of the United States, and teach them about American Indian cultures, so that mainstream American society can learn and know that the historical images and character portrayals of American Indians do not accurately depict present-day American Indian culture or how contemporary American Indians act, look, dress, etc. We also need to use education in order to spread awareness and give insight into the existing problems of violence, the social factors that perpetuate this violence, and the significant consequences of the perpetuation of stereotypes. We must recognize the magnitude and importance of this issue and be willing to actually do something about it, because without the will to change, the eradication of violence against American Indians would be nearly impossible (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996; Weaver, 2009).

As the dominant American society becomes more aware of its strong persistence of cultural violence against American Indians, many protests, campaigns, education, and legislations can make a difference in the attempts to correct or rid of derogatory Indian stereotypes. Educational efforts and protests by various groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Concerned Indian Parents, as well as action by Wisconsin Attorney General James Doyle, the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, and the Michigan Commission on Civil Rights have already begun taking strides in the right direction to fight the battle in eradicating stereotypes.

To spread awareness of the issues surrounding violence in American society, an American Indian parent residing in Minneapolis, Phil St. John, joined the movement towards eradication of stereotypes in attempts to cease the prevalent use of “Indian” nicknames, mascots, and caricatures. Phil St. John joined the movement when a “whooping fan dressed as an Indian at a high school basketball game” greatly embarrassed his sons. In March of 1987, Phil St. John hired an advertising agency to construct a poster featuring logos of fictitious sports teams like the “San Diego Caucasians” and the “Kansas City Jews,” and placed them next to the Cleveland Indians pennant. The campaign gained widespread attention for the fight against stereotypes, even that the Michigan Civil Rights Commissions decided to denounce Indian nicknames. This is sheer evidence of American society’s naivety towards the actual prevalence of stereotypes that persists today; and that increasing public awareness through methods of advertising as Phil St. John did, can very well be effective, especially if other individuals or groups participate as well (Johnson & Eck, 1995/1996).

#### “How to” Guide

In order to abolish violence against the indigenous population, we, as part of American society, must first recognize the magnitude and consequences of the different forms of violence, acknowledge it is a problem, and recognize the changing societal context and social policies as factors that perpetuate this violence; individuals must then develop the will to change and take strides to eliminate the use of stereotypes; last, we must move toward activism and advocacy, which are “tools for making a difference,” in order to bring about successful social change. Specifically, “these tools are essential if we are to change a society that provides the context for rampant violence” (Weaver, 2009).

It is clear that bringing about such an immense societal change is a job that cannot be done by one entity alone. Grassroots activists, professionals, and tribal as well as other political leaders, must all merge together in a commitment to cease the perpetuation of violence against the indigenous population. “It is only through awareness, advocacy, and true societal change that we can begin to make a real difference” (Weaver, 2009).

Moving toward activism and advocacy, mainstream American society needs to first gain awareness and recognition of racism and discrimination that is embedded in language. In turn, being aware of the influence that language has on our perceptions can help us to negate much of that influence. However, “it is not enough to simply be aware of the effects of racist language in conditioning attitudes” (Pewewardy, 2004). Society in its entirety most likely will not be able to change the entire language, therefore we need the help of educators in the U.S. Educators can help to provide students with opportunities to increase their cultural awareness, explore racism in language, and also teach students terminology that is culturally receptive and does not perpetuate negative values and experiences” (Pewewardy, 2004).

By still tolerating the use of demeaning stereotypes in schools, language, books, children’s toys, and characters, we are reinforcing the derogatory stereotypical images of American Indians that is projected in the imaginations of the broader mainstream American society, and we further desensitize entire generations of children. Additionally, sports teams with stereotypical Indian mascots, logos, and nicknames teach them that it is acceptable to demean a race or group of people through American sports culture. Moving towards activism and advocacy in attempts to diminish cultural violence, mainstream American society again needs the help of educators, administrators, and policymakers to provide students with a multicultural education. Students need to be taught about the true

cultures and humanity of American Indians, which could possibly help counter the fabricated and distorted Indian images “that most school-age children have ingrained in their psyche by one hundred years of mass media” (Pewewardy, 2004).

As we continue to take strides in eradicating derogatory Indian stereotypes and cultural violence against American Indians, we as individuals can each help by refusing to buy products with stereotypical names or images, and refusing to support the enormous commercial incentives that heavily rely on these discriminatory images. Johnson and Eck (1995/1996) intuitively claim:

Public boycotts of these products could make the lucrative financial rewards tied to the exploitation of Indian stereotypes much less attractive...Specific legislation broad enough to reach more than just the Redskins or the producers of Crazy Horse Malt Liquor is needed...Eventually, the use of derogatory American Indian stereotypes, whether to sell liquor, promote sports teams, or advertise county fairs, must be made less profitable and therefore less attractive to advertisers, school boards, textbook publishers, and the business community at large. The legislature has the power to mandate this change. Educational efforts, protests, and legal action help to demonstrate that these images must be eliminated, and that the public supports this change.

### Health Improvement

Various suggestions exist for clinical treatment of profound psychological disorders found within the American Indian population. It is evident from previous research that at the core of American Indians is their strong sense of belonging through its association with active participation in their tribal community and traditional practices (Hill, 2009). Considering this, researchers and health professionals can generate a better

understanding of health needs within the American Indian population, and therefore provide effective insight into more appropriate prevention and treatment measures that should be tailored toward this population. One such method might involve culturally specific interventions which may incorporate any of the following: spirituality, relational wellness, self perception and self-esteem, as well as interpretations and translations of culturally specific practices and beliefs into the interventions; all of which may serve to “buffer” the impact of ongoing discrimination and historical trauma on American Indians (Tann et al., 2007).

Due to the fact that social, cultural, and environmental factors largely contribute to the development of definitive psychiatric disorders, treatments for behavioral disorders need to give increasing attention to culturally specific risk and resiliency factors and focus on changing or helping one cope with key environmental factors that influence how he or she acts. Interpretations and responses to stressors vary between different cultures, and health professionals’ failure to identify and understand these culturally specific nuances ignores vital information.

Evidence is mounting that majority-based stress models may no longer fit our increasingly diverse population. The challenge is that culturally specific research is difficult to do; it is ‘smaller,’ more focused research. It must take into account hard-to-access populations, language problems and issues of measurement that can make it expensive (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

But without significant effort, health professionals may be missing important key elements essential to fully understand culturally unique mechanisms of risk and resilience, especially within the American Indian population (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Tann et al. (2007) suggests that acclimating culturally specific treatment approaches that have been created and supported through the grant-funded *Special Diabetes Program for Indians*, and expanding them to include mental illness may be an effective method for identifying and treating American Indians affected by these multi-morbid conditions. This program allowed tribal communities to identify their diabetes-related priorities to create treatment interventions that mirror their specific tribal traditions, practices, and beliefs about their illness and providing aid in attaining health and wellness (Tann et al., 2007).

As such, therapeutic advances toward the development of more culturally resonant clinical services that address the psychological and social ills of some American Indians, reverberates the contemporary discourse held among many indigenous communities that, “our culture is our treatment.” Therefore culturally specific interventions aimed at helping American Indians to reinforce their sense of belonging to their traditional cultural beliefs and practices in their tribal communities “might finally be understood as legitimate clinical prescriptions for the healing of Native North America” (Gone, 2008).

In addition, psychotherapies or “talking” through one’s hardships, as well as cognitive therapies are necessary—which focus on the thoughts that ensue from traumatic events and negative emotions or stress responses. Cognitive therapies require one to directly challenge self-defeating attitudes and assumptions. Furthermore, the most effective treatment for depression or anxiety is helping one to adjust by encouraging them to talk about their difficulties (Kolb & Whishaw, 2006).

It is logical to contend that these various issues are existent and prevalent within mainstream American society; therefore further research and suggestions are necessary to

eradicate discrimination and stereotypes against American Indians and promote advocacy in bringing them to equality. As part of society in the United States which values freedom and equality, we each have the responsibility to help our fellow “brothers,” whatever their skin color, culture, religion, beliefs, and lifestyles may be; therefore we each need to find a way to help bring about changes toward a better life for American Indians, “one of pride and dignity befitting the indigenous people of this great country” (Meider, 2003).



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