

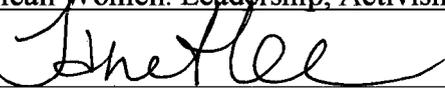
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Spirit Dine'tah Cole for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

in Women Studies, Women Studies, and Anthropology presented on June 9th, 1997

Title: Native American Women: Leadership, Activism, and Feminism.

Abstract approved: _____



Janet Lee

In fulfilling their traditional roles as leaders in their communities, American Indian women are often at the core of American Indian resistance and struggles for liberation. Native women have a long history of assuming leadership positions within their particular tribes. Their struggles share many of the characteristics of women's struggles associated with feminism in the larger society, yet many Native American women explicitly reject the label of feminism. This paper explores the reasons some Native women do embrace feminism and why others do not. Through an analysis of literature, cross-cultural research, and in-depth narrative interviews, I examined feminism and its compatibility with Native American female resistance. My framework is critical, it takes into account the historical oppression of Native peoples, as well as relative exclusion of Native women in the existing feminist research.

What became apparent upon interviewing Native women activists for this paper was the long history of leadership by women within Native American tribes. What is very apparent from both the existing literature by Native American women and conducted with Native American women is that, despite their more central position in their societies, traditional Native women interviewed tend not to view themselves as

feminist. An important theme running through the interviews and apparent from the literature reviewed was despite the fact that Native women in general do not have equality of opportunity within larger American society in terms of economic resources, employment, education, health care, etc. (see Churchill, 1993 and Stiffarm and Lane, 1992), and in many cases are solely responsible for the survival of their families (see Jaimes and Halsey, 1992 and La Duke, 1993), Native women do not view their struggles for more power within their communities and larger society as being incompatible with the primacy of home and family.

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June 9th, 1997

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NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN: LEADERSHIP, ACTIVISM, AND FEMINISM

by

Spirit Dine'tah Cole

A THESIS

Submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

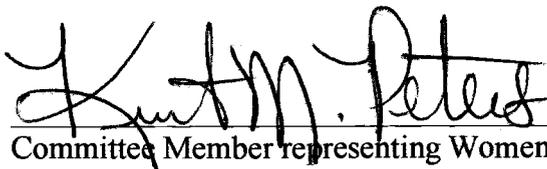
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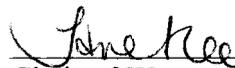
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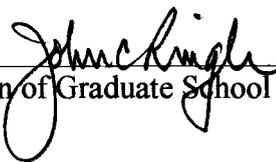
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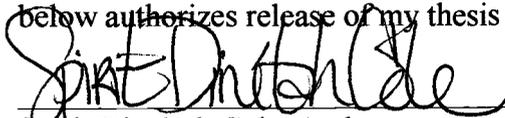


Chair of Women Studies Program



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Spirit Dine'tah Cole, Author

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Cultural Factors.....	4
Summary of Thesis.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN AND FEMINISM: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	12
Native American Feminism.....	13
Native American Women: Resistance and Sovereignty Under Colonial and Neo-Colonialism.....	16
Canadian Criticism.....	20
Voices of Women of Color and White Feminism.....	24
Native American Women: Autonomy, Cultural Continuity and Survival.....	29
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	31
Native Outlook and Worldview.....	33
The Impact of Land Dispossession.....	34
Historic Gender Roles: A Case Study of Ella Deloria's <u>Waterlily</u>	36
Contemporary Issues and Struggles.....	39
Cultural Appropriation.....	48
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.....	51
Sample.....	53

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Interview Protocol.....	54
CHAPTER FIVE: VOICES OF FREEDOM.....	62
Colonialism and Feminism.....	65
Native Women’s Activism and Feminism.....	72
Assimilation and the Feminist Perspective.....	77
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	83
REFERENCES.....	90
APPENDIX: DOCUMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT.....	94

DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my husband Edward for his encouragement and unyielding love and support. He believed in me when even I questioned myself. Also to Cosmo, my son, for shifting my focus away from work long enough to keep me sane and grounded. To my Grandpa Pete, who kept his heritage alive against all odds, and to whom I owe my inspiration for this work. To Janet Lee, for giving me the opportunity to prove myself in many ways, and for challenging me to think critically. And to the Native women who formed the core of this project who continue to inspire me in many ways, all my relations.....

Chapter One: Introduction

Native American Women And Feminism

In fulfilling their traditional roles as leaders in their communities, American Indian women are often at the core of American Indian resistance and struggles for liberation. Native women have a long history of assuming leadership positions within their particular tribes. Their struggles share many of the characteristics of women's struggles associated with feminism in the larger society, yet many Native American women explicitly reject the label of feminism. This thesis will explore the reasons some Native women do embrace feminism and why others do not. Through an analysis of literature, cross-cultural research, and in-depth narrative interviews, I will examine feminism and its compatibility with Native American female resistance. My framework is critical, it takes into account the historical oppression of Native peoples, as well as relative exclusion of Native women in the existing feminist research. This thesis explores the extent to which the women interviewed embraced a feminist worldview.

What became apparent upon interviewing Native women activists for this thesis was the long history of leadership by women within Native American tribes, and in differing degrees, the ways in which Native women embrace traditional worldviews about the “place” of women in Native and European society. What is very apparent from both the existing literature by Native American women as well as the interviews

conducted with Native American women is that, despite their more central position in their societies, the Native women interviewed tend not to view themselves as feminist. An important theme running through the interviews and apparent from the literature reviewed was despite the fact that Native women in general do not have equality of opportunity within larger American society in terms of economic resources, employment, education, health care, etc. (See Churchill, 1993 and Stiffarm and Lane, 1992), and in many cases are solely responsible for the survival of their families (see Jaimes and Halsey, 1992 and La Duke, 1993), Native women do not view their struggles for more power within their communities and larger society as being incompatible with the primacy of home and family. Ingrid Washinawatok-El Issa, a member of the Indigenous Women's Network, says

A few years ago, I was having a conversation with a friend of mine at a women's conference, and I was so taken aback that women were complaining about how they didn't want to sit home and take care of kids. That really made me sad, because I know how important a role that is. I don't have a problem at all with that responsibility. I'm sorry if your men or other people in your lives make you feel like being a mother is something that is not worthy. I don't necessarily understand the feeling of being fulfilled as a chief executive officer, but I have an insight into it. The raising of children is looked upon as something that isn't important, yet the future depends on it and the world depends on it. (Quoted in Farley, 1995,p.48).

It became clear from the interviews that even when Native women do engage in activism directed toward bringing attention to male dominance within their communities, struggles quickly labeled "feminist," they still do not label their actions as such. The

Native American women that were interviewed for the most part did not define their activism in terms of specifically "women's issues" or "women's struggles," but rather as "Native American" struggles. Many women pointed out that Native people struggle together, for survival, and issues of women and men cannot be separated. These themes are also reinforced within the literature. Margo Thunderbird, a Shinnecock articulates,

In our struggle there are not necessarily dividing lines between women's issues and men's issues. We are all struggling to survive as nations, as communities, as societies. Bringing our societies from the past, maintaining those connections into the future, and being the bridge to the next seven generations is a long upward climb.

In addition to extensive literature review, oral history interviews using a narrative style with Native American women activists and community leaders was the method used to answer my research concerns. Assertions in literature were reinforced by fifteen oral narrative interviews with Native American women. The interviews were structured to take into account the different styles of sharing knowledge within Native cultures, such as the use of stories to teach, and the acknowledgment of proper cultural approaches in speaking with elders. The oral narrative interview method, in which the women are encouraged to tell their stories on their own terms created a more comfortable relationship between myself as researcher and interviewees, and best took into account the cultural traditions of Native Americans that focus on storytelling as a teaching tool, and mutual respect in communication. As well, due to a history of exploitation on the part of researchers with regard to Native peoples and cultures, I thought it best to utilize a

non-intrusive and non-exploitative method as possible. Native women were offered the choice to remain anonymous, and all women interviewed chose to do so. Many of the women were well known in their urban and rural communities, and remaining anonymous protected them from possible backlash.

The impetus for this thesis arose out of a distinction made in the literature between traditionalist Native American women activists who explicitly denied they were feminist and Native American women who embrace the feminist label. While it would seem at a glance that coalition building and support from feminists in larger society would lend itself to the struggles of Native American women, many Native women argue differently. This thesis explores the extent to which Native American women view themselves as feminist, and how they view their positions as leaders in their communities.

Cultural Factors

For the purposes of this paper, and in light of the constantly changing political landscape, I find it necessary to discuss important cultural factors to consider in the study of Native peoples. The terms "Native," "Native American," "Indian," "American Indian," all refer to the original inhabitants of the area referred to as the United States of America. In addition the term "indigenous" is used, and refers to those tribes, peoples, and nations that inhabited the United States of America before European colonization.

tribes. As well, rather than reinforce generalizations regarding Native women as many studies have previously done,¹ this thesis explores the lives and voices of Indian women on their own terms, in their own words.

In a dissertation, Twila Souers (1992) has suggested that although many Native groups have expressed a desire to be called by their tribal names or the more generic term Native American, it is common to hear tribal individuals refer to themselves or others as "Indians". She elaborates on how this label originated with Columbus' first encounters with indigenous populations of the Bahamas (Souers,1992, p.7). Since that time, the term "Indians" has been used in most contexts to refer to individuals Native to the United States of America. Native people in this country, she argues, have been well indoctrinated in the use of this term, and it has become internalized in most tribal contexts. (Souers,1992,p.7). As well, within Native communities, this term is also familiar language in the development and implementation of federal policy as well as in dominant society's portrayal of native people. Souers discusses the ways that the media in the United States of America have applied this generic terminology to describe all tribes, and she argues that this historical use of language has had a tremendous impact on how outsiders view Native peoples, and how Native people view themselves (Souers,1992,p.7).

In order to have a foundation for understanding a study of this kind, it is important to be aware of this cultural context and colonial history. Souers elaborates,

¹ See studies such as Kroeber (1938)

defining the cultural context as "the complex set of relationships that native individuals and tribes must continually negotiate and maintain as cultural, tribal, and political entities. As a critical example, Native people must function within tribal, local, state, and federal laws far more extensive and complex than those governing the general population" (Souers, 1992, p.7). Due to the historical nature of relations between European-American governments and Native people as a "conquered" people, their situation is unique. This is further discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

In addition, Native people are identifiable as "different" from the majority population and are bombarded with stereotypes that are created and maintained within larger society. Souers says, "most mainstream Americans generally view Native Americans as members of the stereotyped collective rather than individuals from the more than five hundred tribes existing in the United States at the present" (Souers, 1992, p.8). Shared historical and contemporary experiences and expectations create a common ground for Native Americans, but the diversity and dynamic nature of Native people in this country must be recognized.

This paper will also contribute to helping to correct negative stereotypes of Native women, and help to inform a new kind of research that is more informative and inclusive. As Vine Deloria Jr. discusses, it is a never-ending process to keep the public informed so that Native people can build alliances to help them in their quest for survival and cultural recovery. In Custer Died For Your Sins, he says "the central message of this book, that Indians are alive, have certain dreams of their own, and are being overrun by

the ignorance and the mistaken, misdirected efforts of those who would help them, can never be repeated too often" (Deloria, 1988,p.xiii).

Paula Gunn-Allen discusses in her work how women have responded to what Deloria refers to as the "mistaken and misdirected efforts of those who would help them" (ibid., p.xiii) by describing the ways that Indian women have redefined themselves as "Indian women" a category she describes as "retaining American Indian women's basic racial and cultural identity but distinguishes women as a separate political force in a tribal, racial, and cultural context- but only recently has this political insistence been necessary" (Gunn-Allen,1986,p.30) She argues that in past, pre-European contact times, tribes and nations were more congenial to womanhood, and often placed women as "creatrix and shaper of existence in the tribe and on the earth" (ibid,p.30). Everyone then was aware of the significant role that women played in the survival of the community. Because of the loss of status women have suffered, it is important Gunn-Allen argues, to reclaim the power that is lost through learning cultural traditions and being active in your community.

It is the aim of this thesis to analyze the experiences of American Indian women activists and feminists, seeking to find ways of understanding the cultural framework that informs their attitudes about women, and drives them in fighting for justice and equality in a patriarchal society. My own Native heritage shapes my focus on Native women with this thesis, and as well, my European heritage motivates me to focus on the ways that understanding and communication to strengthen relationships and alliances between

Native people and other groups of people. Often struggles with oppressive societal structures consume those working towards social justice, and building bridges based on compassion, empathy, and understanding can be very empowering. It is extremely pressing that we as human beings begin to work together to save our lives and our planet, and building multicultural alliances is a crucial part of this process. It is in this sense, and in this spirit, that I hope to provide Native American women a voice in academia, a place where Native women are often under-represented due to societal forces influenced by a history of racism and genocide of Native people. Further, this information will hopefully be a foundational step in a learning process that will benefit both white feminists and Native women in our search for common ground.

Often, the foremost struggle for many Native American women is for survival on a physical and a cultural level. Native American women have experienced severe cultural disruption and change resulting from the enactment of United State's federal policy towards Native Nations. Not only have Native women survived this process, but have forged lives of strength and leadership within their communities. Many times these aspects of Native women's lives are overlooked in research and in academia.

Through the voices of Native American women involved interviewed for this thesis, it is my hope that information critical to the dialogue between Native people and the rest of society informing the survival of Native people will emerge. The experiences of Native American women, the knowledge gained, and the recommendation they have for forging alliances is key to the understanding of women's movements in America.

To a greater purpose, it is my hope that this will also be an avenue for the passage of information from one generation to the next. Native women elders especially hold knowledge that is important to their communities and to future generations of Native women (Souers,1992,p.3) Critically, the transmission of life stories can provide models of both survival and leadership for the younger generations (Souers,1992,p.3). While this study focuses on a narrow topic within the lives of Native women, it can be understood in the broader context of the ways that Native women know about surviving in a hostile world, as well as how to make successful transmission in times of rapid cultural change while maintaining vital connections to their cultural heritage (Souers,1992,p.4).

Summary of Thesis

Chapter One of this paper provides historical context of the lives of Native American women, with a focus on the period among 1496 to 1978. This period was one of colonization and conquest of Native American people in the Western hemisphere. It is this history that shapes the lives of Native women today, and must be understood in order to be aware of both the issues and struggles of Native women specifically, and the interconnectedness of Native American men and women in their communities and in their Nations.

Chapter Two examines the literature concerning specifically Native American women in relation to their association with the concept of feminism, feminist theory, and feminist praxis. This chapter will look at the range of viewpoints of Native American

women with regard to their relationship to both the women's movement in general and feminism in particular, and will illustrate the schism present in the Native community with regard to the issues and struggles of Euro-American women's movements, and their own daily struggles for survival.

Chapter Three addresses the methodology used in this study, and includes the interview protocol. Since it is extremely important to understand historical factors that have contributed to Native American's oppression to this end, a discussion of culturally congruent methodology will be explored. In this chapter I will discuss the importance of personal narratives in the expression of Native women's lives, the use of an interview guide, as well as the collaborative process.

Chapter Four contains the results of fifteen oral narrative interviews with Native American women of different nations from different regions of the US residing mostly now in the Northwestern United States. I sought mainly in the interviews to determine whether more assimilated, educated, and mixed blood women were indeed more likely to label themselves feminists as Jaimes and Halsey (1992) assert. I was unable to substantiate this in terms of specific self-labelling as "feminist" in the fifteen interviews, but it did appear that more assimilated women were likely to have a developed feminist consciousness. In this chapter, I will also discuss the implications of the findings.

Chapter Five concludes with a further discussion of the implication of the study for the larger body of literature that focuses on the history and contemporary experience

of Native peoples. Finally, suggestions for building multicultural alliances, and a summary of the thesis is included.

Chapter Two

Native American Women and Feminism: A Review

Of Literature

The voices of the women that were interviewed for the most part agreed with the secondary data used in this study. The continuities between the two sources were fairly consistent, particularly with regard to the ways in which Native women believed that feminism was incompatible with Native American resistance due to a belief that feminism divided men and women, or was associated with colonialism, or simply that Native women argue they have always been free in their traditional cultures. None of the women I interviewed labelled themselves as “feminist”, so I felt it was very important to examine the literature to give Native American feminists a voice. It appears that their concerns are the same, and many, like Paula Gunn- Allen, have re-created feminism to reflect her culture and worldview. As well, it does appear that more educated women, particularly those with advanced degrees are more likely to self label as “feminists”, even though none of the women I interviewed considered themselves “feminist”. They did however relate to feminist issues and struggles on a personal level. One of the interviews seemed to challenge this assumption, as this woman had an advanced college degree in the social sciences and did not label herself a “feminist” or have developed a “feminist” consciousness.

Native American Feminism

Women such as Shirley Hill Witt, Rayna Green, Paula Gunn-Allen, and Dr. Annie Dodge Wauneka are Native women activists who have defined themselves as feminist. Their perspectives in their various writings have attributed societal ill to a systemic power differential in which men hold much of the power. In general these women believe there is a connection between matriarchal aspects of indigenous tradition and the nature of many of the struggles engaged in by contemporary native women and feminists (Green,1982; Hill-Witt, 1974; Wauneka, 1976). These women argue that in order to challenge the existing structure of society in which people are oppressed based on their sex, women need to draw on their past power, particularly Native traditions. These themes were reflected in many of the interviews, as well.

Rayna Green, in her article, "Diary Of A Native American Feminist," articulate her feminist vision. She argues that because of matriarchal traditions in Native societies, Indian women fit squarely in the "feminist consciousness" (Green,1982,p.211). She argues that sexism in the Indian community is the most pressing concern in the lives of Native women, and while she decidedly considers herself a feminist, she recognizes the differences among Indian women. She says, "There are as many versions of Indian feminism as there are treaties" (Ibid,p.212). She also describes how "looking for a feminist or radical orthodoxy will be an endless search in Indian country" (Ibid,p.214).

This appears to be supported in the narratives, as it seems that the diversity of experience in Native country combined with the context of native life makes a survival more central than theory.

In an interview with Dr. Annie Dodge Wauneka, a Dine' physician and activist, Shirley Hill Witt asks about feminism and the women's movement. Wauneka shares the turmoil that her people are experiencing at the hands of the federal government, as well as the successful battles her people have waged and won. She strongly believes that Native American women, to offset their "second-class" role, must become more active in politics and aware of the educational opportunities open to Native American women.

Hill-Witt says of Wauneka,

But she does not shrink from setting priorities in matters of Indian rights and women's rights, and the place of culture in the world to come. She has observed that, 'Modern Indian women are being forced to decide whether the fight to retain an Indian identity is more important than the battle for equal rights.' Her answer is that 'the struggle to maintain tribal self-identity is more important than equal opportunity for Indian women'" (Hill-Witt, 1982, p.34).

Dr. Wauneka's sentiment regarding the struggle between tribal self-identity, or sovereignty struggles versus the battle for equal rights in larger society seems to reflect what the women interviewed were expressing. Native women are struggling to survive as Native people, and for human rights. Often, although they may very well sympathize and feel the direct impact of sexism and patriarchy, it is difficult for them to separate their struggles with those of Native men.

Paula Gunn-Allen also makes the link between feminism and Native matriarchal societal structures, arguing that indigenous tradition represents the "red roots" of white feminism (Gunn-Allen, 1986). Gunn-Allen also addresses feminism in "America's Founding Mother's: Our Native American Roots". She argues that in pre-Colonial America, untouched by European patriarchy, Native American people developed elaborate systems of thought that included science, philosophy, and government based on a belief in the central importance of female energies as well as autonomy of individuals, cooperation, human dignity, human freedom, and egalitarian distribution of status, goods and services (Gunn-Allen, 1989, p. 108): "Yet feminists too often believe that no one has ever experienced the kind of society that would empower women and make that empowerment the basis of its rules of civilization. The price the feminist community must pay because it is not aware of the recent presence of gynarchical societies on this continent is necessary confusion, division, and much lost time" (Ibid, p. 108). Gunn- Allen asserts that as feminists, we have to acknowledge our history on this continent. She discusses the need to learn from the mistakes of the past by learning about history. She especially points out the need to recognize that the same forces that devastated the gynarchies of Britain and the Continent also devastated the ancient African civilization. She also believes that these values and laws of Native America became part of the vision of American feminists and other movements of liberation around the world.

Native American Women: Resistance and Sovereignty Under Colonial and Neo-Colonialism

The problem many Native American women activists involved in the struggles facing Native Americans today have with the concept of feminism is that it is directly tied to the white establishment. Many Native women feel that feminism does not apply to their lives, and that sexist oppression, not a traditional part of most Native American cultures, is not the main problem in their lives. They see sexism as an extension of the colonial pattern of domination, and feminism is also a part of this. Native American activists, or "radicals" believe that traditional lifestyles would solve the problems facing Native women.

Linda Hogan, in her article "Native American Women: Our Voice, the Air" argue that feminism is a complicated issue for Indian women due to the fact that what affects women also affects the entire community. She says, "as individual Nations, we have allegiances to the members of our tribes that seldom exist for non-Indian American women. The issue of survival affects all people and the major efforts by Indian feminists have been struggles against the dominant society" (Hogan, 1982, p.4).

Annette Jaimes, in "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance" provides a lengthy discussion of the relationship between Indian women and feminism. She argues that on the face of things, both the "matriarchal" aspects of indigenous traditions and the nature of many of the struggles engaged in by contemporary Native women seem to lend themselves to such a union with what the broader population

has come to describe as "feminism." She distinctly notes that often those who have most openly identified themselves as feminists have tended to be among the more assimilated of Indian women activists, "generally accepting of the colonialist ideology that indigenous nations are now legitimate sub-parts of the US geopolitical corpus rather than separate nations" (Jaimes, 1993, p. 331). She points out that in Euro-American society, Indian people are now viewed as "minority" populations rather than citizens of their own distinct nations.

Jaimes provides the clearest cut distinction between Native American feminists and Native women activists. Her approach is very critical of feminism, arguing that it is not in the best interests of Indian women to define their problems in society to solely a male target. Rather it is best for Native American women to not focus their energies on allying with feminists, but to adhere to the ways of their grandmothers so to remain "unconfused in her cultural-sexual identity throughout her life" (Jaimes, 1993, p. 334).

Margo Thunderbird, a Shinnecock, also provides a framework for understanding the relationship between feminism and Native American women. She argues that with the emergence of feminist movement and the struggle for equal rights, people have consistently asked, "What are the Native women's issues?" and have wanted to find a commonality with Native women in order to understand their struggles. She argues that in Native people's struggles there are not necessarily dividing lines between women's and men's issues. She says,

We are all struggling to survive as nations, as communities, as societies.
Bringing our societies from the past, maintaining those connections into

the future, and being the bridge to the next seven generations is a long upward climb. Our concern is that there be no division among the men, the women, the children and the elders. Our society is a holistic one, and we carry with us the people, the families. Our issue is to maintain this unit and not to separate (Farley,1993,p.49).

Lorelei Means and Janet McCloud, both prominent activists in the "radical" women's organization Women of All Red Nations (WARN), also both explicitly reject the feminist viewpoint. Both argue that the most pressing problem for Indian women and men is that of survival. Both believe that a return to the old ways and a return of their land base are the most pressing concerns in light of the 500 years of genocide inflicted upon them by European-Americans. Their focus is what is defined as "sovereignist" in nature. Many feminists are part of the problem in Means view, in that "as a group they are obviously the material beneficiaries of the colonial exploitation that their society imposed upon ours" (quoted in Jaimes,1993). McCloud argues that feminism's perceived focus on male supremacy as their main and most pressing problem does not fit for Native Americans. She argues that white supremacism and colonialism are the main problems in the lives of all Native people.

As was discussed previously, some Native American women believe that white feminists are cut off from what is the central issue for many Native American women.

Renee Senogles, a Red Lake Chippewa talks about the differences between Native American women and white women who are feminist. She says,

The difference between Native women and white feminists is that the feminists talk about their rights and we talk about our responsibilities. There is a profound difference. Our responsibility is to take care of our natural place in the world (Farley,1993,p.69).

Chrystos, a Menominee poet, is very critical of the women's movement in the US. She was involved in the movement in the 1970's, and in her piece "I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away From Me" she describes the feelings she had when she was involved. She says,

After three and a half years I had so little left of myself, so many bitter memories of women who disrespected me and others, the lies, pretensions, snobbery, and cliquishness. The racism which bled through every moment through every level. The terrifying and useless struggle to be accepted. The awful gossip, bitchiness, backbiting, and jealousy. The gross lack of love. I left the women's movement utterly drained. I have no interest in returning. My dreams of crossing barriers to true understanding were false. Most of the white women I thought I was close to want nothing to do with me now. Perhaps white women are so rarely loyal because they don't have to be. There are thousands of them to pick up and discard (Chrystos, 1980, p.68)

Pam Colorado, an Oneida scholar in Canada made the arguments that feminism does not address the specific concerns of Native American women. She discusses how none of the feminist literature she analyzed addressed the genocide and colonization "of which white feminists are still very much a part" (Colorado, 1990, p.34).

Many of these critiques were threaded throughout the interviews that I conducted as well. Colonial domination, rather than equal rights for women is much more of a concern. Due to a historical context of colonialism and genocide, Native people are focussing their efforts to maintain some semblance of sovereignty and Nationhood in light of their status in the United States today.

Canadian Criticism

In Enough Is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out, Janet Silman puts into print the struggles of a group of women from the Tobique reserve of Eastern Canada. This group of women, in the late 1970's, managed with their political activism to change a section of the Canadian Indian Law that took their government status away if they married white men. Men who married white women, however, not only had their native status taken away, but their white wives were accorded native status. So on the Tobique reserve, non status women and their children were not eligible for housing, medical, or food assistance. Over a period of eight years (1978-1986) a group of status and non-status Tobique women fought to change Canadian law. They took their case to the United Nation's Human Rights assembly and Canada was censured for its sexist clause in the bill that impacted many Native women's lives, all over Canada.

The Tobique women's group formed many alliances with activist organizations worldwide including feminist organizations in Canada, but when approaching American feminists for support in their struggle, they were either ignored, or discounted. One woman describes how the Tobique women got more support from white women in Canada than they did from a Canadian Native Women's organization. However, Native Canadian women found resistance when they reached out to American feminist organizations. One of the books contributors, Karen Perley, describes the lack of attention by American feminists:

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We got in touch with women's organizations and some individual women in the US- to start sending letters to the Canadian embassy as a high pressure tactic. I was disappointed at the lack of response from those American women's groups, and famous women like Gloria Steinem. I thought, I don't believe this- they're supposed to be so pro-woman and they don't even have the decency to phone or write. It didn't phase them a bit, maybe because Canada is a foreign country (Silman,1987,p.202).

Katherine Chist, in her article, "Aboriginal Women and Self-Government: Challenging Leviathan," provides a very useful analysis of the struggles of Native women in Canada. The article provides a thorough historical account of the disenfranchisement of Native women through the Indian Act of 1876, and the contemporary struggle of Canadian Native women to challenge the male dominated Native associations that do not meet their unique needs. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) spearheaded efforts to challenge the Charlottetown Accord, which was intended to amend the Canadian Constitution to recognize the rights of First Nation's peoples to govern themselves as sovereign Nations.

The problems, however, beyond the fact that Native women were not invited to be involved in the negotiations, were the fears articulated by many Native peoples that treaty rights would be undermined, recognition of aboriginal governmental authority did not go far enough, or on the opposite end of the spectrum; that aboriginal governments were not "ready" for self-government. NWAC argued that the amendment did not go far enough to explicitly protect the rights of Native women in Canada. As well, NWAC argued that the Native groups such as the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, the Metis National Council, and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada not only did not speak for their constituencies, but particularly did not speak to the needs of Native Canadian women. Chist documents the political struggles of NWAC and the male dominated Native Canadian organizations, looking to see if the opposition of NWAC to the Charlottetown Accord was a gender-based critique typical of mainstream feminism, about political exclusion, or something else.

Chist's analysis was useful, particularly her discussion of whether liberal feminism, with its focus on social change that includes women in political discourse and decision-making, and participation in the economic sphere, is really applicable in the lives of aboriginal women who are seeking "a reconstruction of family ties and obligations rather than their deconstruction" (Chist,1994,p.26). Importantly, Chist points out in her analysis of the work of Monture-Okanee and LaFramboisie, Heyle, and Ozer, that Native women, unlike feminists, are not focused on "an adversarial approach to the male gender in general" (Chist,1994,p.26). While Chist takes a rather narrow approach to

feminists in general, this is a theme which I have also found to be reinforced in my research, that is Native women are active in the rebuilding of their cultures and their communities, and are more concerned with the healing of the relationships between men and women, and the cultural restoration of traditional gender roles. One of the important perceptions in Native communities is that feminists are not concerned with these issues, but rather being equal with men and not changing the structure of society.

While patriarchy was a part of everyday life and existence for European women, Native American women in many tribes had different experiences. Traditional gender roles for Native American women were as varied as the cultures and Nations of people that resided in North America, but based on ethnohistorical analysis some similarities exist. For example, in many Native American societies the meaning of “power” is quite different. As Klien and Ackerman (1995) stress, power is based on “active reality” and is wholly dependent upon cultural context. What this meant for women in precolonial society was that the meaning of ‘gender’ and gender roles were not defined in terms of power-over, as in men having power over women based on their sex. Rather, power is seen in a different light, manifesting in a multitude of ways, and is dependent upon individuality or ability and was not restricted to the political realm.

Another aspect Chist’s article I found useful was her discussion of the impact of colonialism and patriarchy on the status of Native Canadian women, and the political structures that created an aboriginal male elite. This structure was responsible for the loss of status combined with the internalization of the values of patriarchy that impacted

women's traditional value and autonomy in society. These are also important issues in the United States. Because of the difference in perception between Native and European societies, the idea of balanced reciprocity, or sharing in the community's survival based on your strengths and abilities rather than gender roles, was lost in contact with colonialism and European culture.

For example, Richard Sattler (1995) argues that because of an inculcation of European values, women lost some of their autonomy and decision making powers outside of the domestic sphere of activity. In some traditional societies, such as the Cherokee, survival and sharing were very important. Women's roles were not limited to the domestic sphere, but were important in the political, and economic realm as well. Sattler discusses how pre-relocation Cherokees were matrilineal and matrilocal, and controlled aspects of the society's economic system. Women were responsible for agricultural production, and "owned" the land they used. Sattler says, "complementary of gender roles and status's among the Cherokee reflect a more open, egalitarian system in which the differences in prestige and power reflect individual achievement and age, rather than a ranking of descent groups and ascriptive hierarchies" (Sattler, 1995,p.228).

The Voices Of Women of Color and White Feminism

Many "sovereignist" Native American women share criticisms of the Euro-American feminist phenomenon with other non-white sectors of the United States. In particular, African American women have been very outspoken in this regard. Women

such as Gloria Joseph and bell hooks have written extensively on the topic. Gloria Joseph argues that "the white women's movement has had its own explicit forms of racism in the way it has given high priority to certain aspects of struggles and neglected others...the black movement scorns feminism partially on the basis of misinformation, and partially due to a valid perception of the White middle class nature of the movement" (Joseph and Lewis, 1981, p.43).

bell hooks also criticizes feminists for their treatment of women of color. She argues that as a black woman from a Southern working class background, black cultural tradition informs her being. In the world of feminism, hooks asserts, there has been much focus on notions of sisterhood and friendship, that often it is based on what hooks calls principles of "seamless harmony". She says, "no one really speaks about the way in which class privilege informs feminist notions of social behavior, setting standards that would govern all feminist interaction" (hooks, 1990, p.89).

hooks discusses what it means for black women to be involved in the feminist milieu. In "Third World Diva Girls: The Politics of Feminist Solidarity" she says, "It was a common occurrence at feminist events for women of color to be accused of having said or done the wrong thing (especially in confrontational encounters where white women cried). Feelings of social awkwardness intensified when black women found that our social and cultural codes were neither respected or known in most arenas of feminist movement" (Ibid, p.89).

Mitsuye Yamada also describes her experiences with feminism and the women's movement as an Asian-American woman. In her article, "Asian Pacific American Women And Feminism" she addresses the exclusion many Asian women feel in the United States. She argues that the women's movement does not endeavor to include and does not deem important the issues and struggles of Asian Pacific women. She says, "A movement that fights sexism in the social structure must deal with racism, and we had hoped the leaders in the women's movement would be able to see parallels in the lives of women of color and themselves, and would 'join' us in our struggle and give us input" (Yamada,1980,p.73).

From analysis by other women of color such as Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, Angela Davis, Barbara Christian, and Sumi Cho, it becomes clear that other Asian American, Chicana, and Latina women seem to agree with many Native American women that feminism does not address their unique needs as women of color in struggle. Women of color in general tend not to favor the notion of a "politics" that would divide and weaken their communities by defining "male energy" as "the enemy." Jaimes says, "women's liberation, in the view of most 'minority' women in the US and Canada, cannot occur in any context other than the wider liberation from Euro-American colonial domination and of the people's of which women of color are a part. Our sense of priorities is therefore radically different- and irrevocably- different from those espoused by the 'Mainstream' women's movement" (Jaimes,1992,p.335-336).

However, despite the argument by many women of color that white feminists are not concerned with the unique issues of women of color, some white feminists are engaging in research surrounding issues of race and racism in an attempt to address these historical imbalances within feminism. Some white women are very concerned with including and opening up the dialogue to women who have traditionally been excluded. Women such as Diane Bell, Barbara McDonald, and Robin Morgan have made it part of their perspective to not only learn about women of other cultures and their unique struggles, but to give voice to those most often ignored in research.

Peggy McIntosh, a women studies scholar, provides one of the clearest analyses of white privilege by a white scholar. She writes about the tightly interwoven connection between white privilege and male privilege, as well as other oppressions in society. She begins her article "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work In Women Studies" with a discussion of the structural nature of sexism and racism. She says,

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon with a life of its own, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1).

She describes white privilege as an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency

gear, and blank checks" (ibid, p.1). She describes her personal experience and the trouble she had facing her own white privilege, and connects this with men's reluctance to acknowledge male privilege. She argues that by naming and describing this unacknowledged privilege that she has, she is newly accountable. She says, "as we in Women Studies work reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, 'having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?'" (Ibid,p.2) In dealing with her white privilege, she generated a list of the daily effects of white privilege in her life. She describes the list as, "a list of special circumstances and conditions I experience that I did not earn but that I have been made to feel are mine by birth, by citizenship, and by virtue of being a conscientious, law abiding 'normal' person of goodwill" (Ibid,p.2)

As the literature reveals there is a schism in Native American communities regarding feminism. Some women are comfortable wearing feminist shoes, and others feel it is irrelevant in traditional Native lifestyles, where women had power, status, responsibility, and importance in community life. Both of these perspectives were represented in the oral narrative interviews. "Traditionalist" women, such as Annette Jaimes believe they share more in common with other women of color in struggle than they do with their "assimilated" Native American sisters.

Native American Women: Autonomy, Cultural Continuity and Survival

Native American women feel they have much to offer other women. As a new millennium approaches, and the survival of the earth is at stake, Native women feel they hold the key to the survival of human beings as a species. As Yet Si Blue (Janet McCloud) explains,

It is going to be the job of Native women to begin teaching other women what their roles are. Women have to turn life around, because if they don't, all of future life is threatened and endangered. I don't care what kind of women they are, they are going to have to worry more about the changes that are taking place on this Mother Earth that will affect us all (Farley,1993,p.83).

Due to the fact that Native American women are marginalized in our society, it is entirely possible that they would be reticent to feminism and feminists, as it is often associated with white middle class women and not with women of color. However, more recently, women of color are embracing a feminism that was created by and for themselves. Native American women can grasp hold of feminist and womanist ideas, and build bridges with other women, thereby strengthening their struggles against oppression. The main goal of this research is to provide a voice for Native women's concerns about feminism so that they can be dealt with on their own terms.

Native American women are creating bridges and pathways that empower they and their communities and are working for change within their personal selves and in their Nations and communities. Traditional women are working to gain back knowledge

of their Grandmother and Mothers and ancestors so that they may take the knowledge and shape it into a unique vision of survival and continuity.

Beatrice Medicine captures this spirit of survival, creativity, autonomy, and innovation in her article. What I found to be most important in Medicine's article was her focus on the survival of Native American women. She gives much credence to the fact that despite centuries of cultural domination and genocidal policies of the US government, Native people have the creativity, courage, and tenacity to have survived. Despite the myriad of problems that Native women have faced in this country, the political and economic influences of Native American women have grown. They are reclaiming their power within their communities, particularly tied to artistic efforts, utilizing Euro-oriented educational structures, welfare and economic enterprises, and ritual participation (see Wall, 1994, Katz, 1995, Santos, 1994). This reclamation of power was reinforced in the interviews with the women.

Chapter Three Historical Context

Native women find themselves struggling against sexist oppression within larger society and within their own communities where in many Nations it is usually not a traditional part of Native lives and culture (see Shoemaker, 1995). More often than not Native women have greater concerns of both physical and cultural survival than ending sexist oppression due to a unique colonial relationship Native Americans continue with larger American society. One woman interviewed described how Native American activism and feminism involves the healing of the whole community, and with this healing come the re-empowerment of women as they follow the traditional path of their individual cultures.

When focussing on Native people, there are two levels of study that need to be addressed. In order to gain empathy and understanding to build bridges and teach, examining the effects of oppression, brutality, and violence are important. This is how we understand the ways that racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism are to be identified, as well as how we can appreciate the native American experience. Yet, when this is the only focus, Native American people are seen as passive. It was very important to me in the process of this undertaking, that the women involved remained active, with a focus on how they have survived colonization and conquest, despite the

odds stacked against them. So, in addition, one must look for the spirit of the people, the agency, the resistance, and the creative innovation.

This colonial historical context is extremely important to consider, particularly with a discussion of the differences in the experiences of Native women and white feminists. Because of the direct impact of colonization and genocide perpetrated against Native people, the experience of being a "conquered" people becomes central in an understanding of the experience of Native Americans in the United States today. In addition, the spiritual connection to the land of North America is as well a part of this context. These assertions were echoed both in terms of the oral narrative interviews and the research already done (see Churchill and LaDuke, 1992; Jaimes, 1992; Jaimes and Halsey, 1992; and Deloria, 1990).

Native American cultures are directly tied to the lands of North America. Because they believe their origin is here, Native peoples have developed complex and sacred ties to the land that supported them (Churchill, 1993; Deloria, 1988; Hungry Wolf, 1982). After 1492 and European colonization an era of genocide was initiated. Disease and later socio-political institutions and cultural genocide took the lives of 100 million Native Americans from 1492-1992. There are 1.9 million Native Americans left in the United States (Churchill, 1993; Stiffarm and Lane, 1992; Robbins, 1992). Native Americans have not successfully assimilated and integrated into Euro-American culture. While the immigrants who colonized the United States have tended to give up their primary language and culture in order to assimilate, Native people are often unable and unwilling

to give up their lives and culture although they were initially forced to by policies of the United States government. (Noriega,1992; Churchill,1992; Mohawk,1992)

Native Outlook and Worldview

An important consideration that continues to need to be addressed is the very different way that Native American people view themselves and the world around them. European-Americans have passed through an educational system that breaks down everything into the smallest units of study and examination. This habitually separates politics from social life, medicine from education, and so forth, in much the same way academic disciplines or areas of specialization are now separated or viewed in our everyday life. "This fragmentation will prevent anyone from perceiving tribal lifestyles on this continent as they were a century or a millennia ago" (Farley, 1993,p.12). The traditional Native way of perceiving the world involved a holistic outlook, and Native peoples held themselves accountable to future generations. To look at a single piece of Native worldview and culture does not do that people justice.

According to Paula Gunn Allen, Native activist, writer, and teacher, there are at least four fundamental facts of life for Native people that distinguish their experiences and struggles from anyone else. First, for Native Americans, humans exist in community with all things, (all of who are known to be intelligent, aware, and self-aware), and honoring propriety in those relationships forms one of the most sacred and basic aesthetic

positions in Native life. Second, in the eyes of America, Native Americans (like other wildlife) are extinct or soon will be. Native women must contend with a third fact, "one more difficult to notice or tell about: If in the public or private mind of America, Indians as a group are invisible in America, then Indian women are nonexistent" (Gunn-Allen, 1989,p.15). Finally, Native people are ever aware that they are occupied peoples who have no military power on Earth ready to liberate them. Gunn-Allen states, "these four truths are always present in our consciousness and none takes precedence over the others. They are all givens, like the mountains or the sky, part of what is" (Ibid,p.20). Despite the separation of native people from their roots, there is still a perception of what these "truths" mean in terms of tribal heritage, and connection to homelands, and sacred sites.

The Impact of Land Dispossession

Native peoples have faced a long period of war that has resulted in the destruction of their culture and the death of millions, as well as a loss of homelands. In the "post-war" era, the physical onslaught against Native peoples has ceased, but the daily struggles for survival, religious freedom, land rights, and cultural history have continued. Native women are key actors in this daily struggle for physical and cultural survival, both to heal their communities and their families.

Native American women have fought a long war against patriarchal, militaristic and repressive regimes (Jaimes and Halsey,1992). The Native American struggle began

when Christopher Columbus, lost in the Pacific Ocean, happened upon a previously occupied continent that he mistakenly identified and then claimed to have "discovered" (Brown,1971,p.2). A long and violent struggle for Native survival ensued. This struggle has continued for 500 years. (Weatherford, 1988).

After the "discovery" of the New World, Europeans flocked to this newly discovered continent. They conveniently ignored the fact that the land was already occupied by indigenous Nations. Native Americans put up a good fight, but were no match for the Europeans, who were experts at war with both resources and manpower, as well as more insidious forms of warfare, such as germ warfare (Churchill,1993; Weatherford,1990). The struggle for Native land rights continues to this day.

The destruction of Indigenous peoples through the expropriation and/or destruction of their land bases is very much an ongoing phenomenon in both the United States and Canada (Churchill,1993,p.7). In the 1800's it was the intent of the United State's government to allot each Indian family 140 acres and teach them farming methods and nuclear family values. This created great problems for native cultures, as they lost access to traditional hunting, gathering, and fishing lands, and were forced onto allotments. With the Dawes Act of the 1880's, tribal community lands were allotted to Indian families, and all surplus lands were taken by the government. Women and men lost their traditional roles and were thrust into gender roles of Europeans. Women were expected to be good wives and mothers, men providers and farmers (see Robbins,1992).

Land rights issues are still very much on the forefront of Native people's struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. The extraction of natural resources and the

pollution of Indian land is a very real daily occurrence. As a result, the land does not sustain the people, and in some cases they sicken and die. Churchill says,

Not only the people of the land are being destroyed, but, more and more, the land itself. The nature of native resistance to the continuing onslaught of the invading industrial culture is shaped accordingly. It is a resistance forged in the crucible of a struggle for survival (Ibid,1993,p.7).

Americans tend to view the land differently than Native Americans. It is a resource to be used until it can be used no longer, and in a non-sustainable fashion. Americans are not concerned with the future, but concentrate on gaining as much material wealth as possible in a lifetime. As Winona La Duke points out, American greed an leads to the exploitation of Native lands and peoples. She says, “in sharp contrast [to Native lifestyles] is the system of capitalism and other forms of industrialism that lack respect for people and their environments in an insatiable quest for resources” (La Duke, 1993,p.101).

Historic Gender Roles: A Case Study of Ella Deloria's Waterlily

Native American women had a strong tie to the land. They were often the ones who worked the soil and fed the communities during the winters. Women had important roles, and in many societies a great deal of power. Ella Deloria, in her historical account of pre-invasion life of a Dakota woman, Waterlily, offers the reader a much neglected view of a woman's place within Dakota society.

For Waterlily, the main woman character in the book, family and kinship meant something quite different from the contemporary Western model of a European family. In Native American cultures the family is an extended one, creating a giant support network designed for the people to mutually care for each other and help one another to survive. Deloria writes,

In the camp circle such groups placed their tipi side by side where they could be within easy reach for cooperative living. In their closeness lay such strength and social importance as no single family, however able, could or wished to achieve entirely by its own efforts (Deloria, 1988, p.20)

Waterlily also illustrates another profound difference in the ways in which medicine and health were viewed, using the example of pregnancy and childbirth. Native women knew their bodies and their capabilities. Women knew about giving birth, and were able to do it by themselves in the place of their choice. This is illustrated when Blue Bird, Waterlily's mother, gives birth to her in a secluded patch of woods while the community was moving from the summer camp to the winter camp. There were many women for support and assistance if it was needed, but the woman was able to decide when and if the help was needed. Bringing the next generation into the world was a sacred and blessed event in a woman's life, and the importance of how the children were brought into this life was not taken for granted.

One of the most important pictures to be derived from Waterlily is the inherently different roles for women in Dakota society, especially when compared to European cultures. Women were valued in Dakota society for their contributions to the community.

Men and women had their separate roles, but it does not seem as if one necessarily is more important than the other. Women were not property with no rights, to be treated as drudges and sole childrearers. This was reinforced within the interviews for this thesis, and Sutter as well discusses how Arapaho women were born into a society where they had an equal place.

This place of acceptance became hers at birth. She was born into a secure family and raised to know who she was. From her first steps, she was guided daily into the traditional tribal lifestyle that included roles for men and women. Usually the men did their necessary work, the roles of survival, each working in conjunction women did theirs and they were both engaged in with the others. For the most part, there was a purpose to these different roles (Sutter, 1982,p.53).

One of the first priorities of Euro-American colonists was to disempower women, and assimilate them into mainstream white society. Jaimes states, "The reduction of the status held by women within indigenous Nations was a first priority for European colonizers eager to weaken and destabilize target societies" (Jaimes, 1992,p.319). Among their strategies was to convert the Indians to Christianity, and as well to encourage inter marriage to weaken the bloodlines of certain Nations. Mixed-bloods were given more privileges, and were more likely to ally with the whites. Placing Indian children in boarding schools also served to indoctrinate them into the way of the white man. Assimilation into white society was the stated goal with regard to the "Indian Problem" but often outright genocide was the solution used on a day to day basis.

A central part of white's efforts to "domesticate" Native Americans was to deprive them of the right to raise and educate their own children. Beginning the late 1870's, Native American children were placed in

boarding schools away from the reservations where they were forced to speak English and wear European American clothing. To further acquaint them with white ways, children spent one-half their time working for nearby white families (Amott and Matthai, 1990, p. 83).

Education was a particularly insidious way to attempt to indoctrinate Indian women into American society. The Boarding school system was created to sever the kinship tie to reservation and to teach girls domestic labor skills so they could work for whites. The system failed, as Trennert explains.

Although there were a few success stories, on the whole Indian girls did not assimilate into American society as the result of their education. School authorities, unfortunately, made little attempt to accommodate native society and tried instead to force Indian girls into a mold of an alien society (Trennert, 1990, p. 233).

Contemporary Issues and Struggles

Native American women in the United States experience a dual struggle that manifests on a social, political and economic level. Even though the physical battles have ceased, the struggle to be free from oppression continues. Today, Native women struggle on "two fronts" (Gunn-Allen, p. 34). On one level is physical survival, such as fighting alcoholism and drug abuse, often their own or their family's. Institutional racism and historical oppression have created an internalized racism in Native American society. This internalized racism manifests itself in a variety of ways including poverty, rape, incest, and battering by Indian men. Other facts of everyday life include assaults on fertility and other health matters by the Indian Health Service (such as forced

sterilization), high infant mortality rates due to substandard medical care and lack of education, nutrition, and health information. (Jaimes,1992; Means,1990; McCloud,1990; Colorado,1990).

In light of this dual struggle, Native American women face a different challenge than do white, middle class feminists. The fight for survival of the people often becomes the foremost struggle before that of women's liberation. Native women face a system that creates and legitimizes the overwhelming poverty of a majority of Native Americans. This system forces them to commit a great deal of energy to caring for their families with very few resources, Native American women fight for the survival of their traditional cultures. Due to the loss of traditional cultures, Native people are struggling to regain the knowledge that has been lost.

Tribal women have the lowest wages in the country, and often because of that poverty, Native children are removed from homes and communities more often than children of any other background (Hogan, 1984,p.1) It is this poverty that has shaped the struggles of Native American women throughout the colonization and conquest of their people.

But despite these problems in Native communities, women and their families are continuing the fight. They are regaining the knowledge and respect that was buried under the white attempts to eradicate them. Native women did not traditionally have to contend with sexism within their family, it was a European imposed oppression working in

conjunction with racism. Gertrude Buckanaga, an Ojibwe woman describes her role growing up in a traditional household. She says,

As I was growing up, I didn't feel overburdened with household chore. Tasks were shared equally by boys and girls. We learned to work together and to respect each other. I was never made to feel that my place was in the home. I was free to choose, develop my interests. Today, I'm accepted as an equal by my husband. That's a good feeling haven't had to struggle to achieve it. Indian women have always been strong. They've kept families together (Katz,1978,p.122).

These are sentiments that are shared by the women interviewed for this paper.

Native American women have historically been at the forefront of the struggle against colonization and genocide. This includes the everyday struggles against racism, the need to balance Euro-American values and cultures with native traditions, communities and language; and behaviors directed at Native peoples by an entertainment and educational system that serves to continually marginalize and silence the voices of Native Americans (see Durham,1992, Jaimes and Halsey, 1992, La Duke, 1992). While it may seem as though Native women should join in the white struggle for women's liberation, many Native women feel that this women's movement does not address their unique needs as sovereign peoples with a long history of equality within their societies.

Native American women feel that the larger women's movement does not take their unique position in this society under consideration. Native women's struggles and resistance are quite different from those of white women in the United States. As Janet McCloud elaborates,

Most of these progressive non-Indian ideas like "class struggle" would at the present time divert us into participating as equals in our own colonization. Or, like women's liberation, would divide us among ourselves in such a way as to leave us colonized in the name of gender equity.(quoted in Ibid,p. 314).

Native American women activists are at the forefront of Indian resistance to dominant societal forces. They are involved in fish-ins, protests, demonstrations, struggles against pollution and contamination of their lands, and in stopping resource extraction from their lands. (See Churchill and LaDuke, 1992, Churchill and Vander Wall, 1992) Native American women have paid dearly for the movement, losing families and children in their war with the US (Katz,1995, Brave Bird,1994)

Native American women are fighters, willing to risk everything for the survival and continuity of their people. The dedication to their culture and the importance of leaving something behind for their culture and their children means a great deal to many of them. As Madonna Thunderhawk states,

When I'm dead and gone, I want to leave something. I want my granddaughter to be sitting someday talking like I was about my grandmother. That's the kind of legacy I want to leave. I want my great granddaughter, great grandsons, too, to say, "My great grandma was a fighter. She did this and she did that to protect the land, to protect the culture, to protect the language, to maintain what we have left (Farley,1994,p.34).

At the root of their resistance is the tie to their land. Native peoples are distinct Nations, and it is this Nationalism that shapes their struggles. As Janet Hale Campbell elaborates when explaining the different relationships native people and ethnic

immigrants have with the land, "the most important difference is this: if Irish or Italian culture dies in America, it isn't any big deal. They still exist in Italy or Ireland. Not so with us. There is no other place. North America is our old country" (Hale, 1993,p.xx).

We are American Indian women, in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as people colonized by the United States. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as people colonized by the United States of America, not as women. As Indians, we can never forget that. Our survival, the survival of every one of us-man, woman, and child- as Indians depends on it. Decolonization is the agenda, the whole agenda, and until it is accomplished, it is the only agenda that counts for American Indian Women (quoted in Jaimes and Halsey,1992,p.314)

Native women's experiences during war and peace often conflict. Native American women's struggle makes the movement toward specifically "women's" issues seem at times secondary. The struggle to be free from external oppression seem to be the foremost fight for Native women. The fight to have treaty rights upheld, the fight to practice a specific way of life or religion, or the fight against environmental racism and "radioactive colonialism" take precedence over the struggle to end internalized sexist oppression in their lives.

US energy policy and the extraction of natural resources from Native lands is one of the key struggles of Native people (see Churchill and LaDuke,1992). The direct effects include the pollution of native lands and waters, and as well devastating environmental nightmares such as the testing of nuclear weapons and bombs on Western Shoshone lands, or the radioactive waste spill into the Rio Puerco river, the main water supply of

Dine' people from New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The disaster devastated the traditional Navajo grazing industry.

The secondary effects of uranium and other energy development include alcohol related crime, family disruption, and dependence on a wage economy that comes and goes. The traditional Navajo economy was disrupted by energy development, as was traditional family life. Esther Yazzie says, "Abused children and brutalized women are as much the victims of atomic energy as others who suffer and die as the direct result of the atomic bomb" (Yazzie, 1994, p.26).

In her essay, "Angry Women Are Building: Issues and Struggles Facing Native American Women Today," Paula Gunn-Allen describes how the issue of survival of Native American people becomes foremost in the lives of Native American women. As she says,

We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, forced sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones, destruction of our land, our homes, our past and our future. We survive, and we do more than survive. we bond, we care, we fight, we teach, we nurse, we bear, we feed, we earn, we laugh, we love, we hang in there, no matter what" (Gunn-Allen, 1993, p.34).

Women were, however, treated with more dignity and respect in traditional American Indian societies than in European-America (see Jaimes and Halsey, 1992). Until the 20th century, American women were not allowed to own property or participate in the political process, while Native women always had the right to own property, or in

societies where land ownership was communal, they often were responsible for working the land and delegating responsibility (see Kehoe,1995 and Sattler,1995). The home belonged to the wife in many cultures, including the Lakota, and the Pueblo cultures of the Southwest. As well, women in many cultures maintain a great deal of political power, as with the Six Nations women of the Longhouse who choose the male chief (see Hungry Wolf,1983; Jacobs,1995).

The educational system forced on Native peoples had much to do with the way in which men and women interact within Native society today. Obviously the Euro-American way of educating Native people has had a devastating effect on Native American's relational patterns. Regaining control over the education of Native children by Native people is crucial to the regaining of all of lost Native cultures. (see Noriega,1992 and Lomawaima,1994).

Native family structures have been seriously hurt by European morals and European family structures. Children are cut off the extended family structures that supported and nurtured children, and taught them how to in turn provide for their own children. Instead children grew up without these skills, and were unable to successfully parent their own children. Sherman Alexie aptly puts it when he speaks of this issue in The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight In Heaven.

On a reservation, Indian men who abandon their children are treated worse than white fathers who do the same thing. Its because white men have been doing that forever and Indian men have just learned how. That's how assimilation can work (Alexie,1993,p.34).

Louise Erdrich illustrates in her book Love Medicine, the other side of this issue. In this book, the experiences of the Kashpaw family with the assimilation processes are illustrated. This family perseveres, and have managed to stay together and support each other despite the system. They all have had problems, and deal with them in individual ways, but they are together, and have survived.

Native American women face a "post-war" era that continues to perpetuate systems of oppression. The Civil Rights movement and Nationalist movements such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) have delegitimized overt United States violence against Native Americans but the history of oppression of Native Americans continues to shape the post war period. Cynthia Enloe says,

For a post-war era lasts as long as people affected by a conflict employ that painful or exhilarating experience to assess their own current relationships and aspirations (Enloe, 1993,p.3).

Not only has the assault continued through the ongoing perpetuation of dangerous stereotypes, but European discourses and ideologies have carried over to Native men's ideas about what a "man" is and how he should relate with women.

In her article "Sexual Abuse, A New Threat To The Native American Woman: An Overview," Phyllis Old Dog Cross explains how the adverse effects of the pressure to "assimilate," or become "whitemanized," as Native people say, has had dire consequences in Native communities. Old Dog Cross says:

One of the major effects was the loss of cultured values and the concomitant loss of personal identity...The Indian was taught to be ashamed of being Indian and to emulate the Non-Indian. In short, "white

was right'. For the Indian male, the only route to be successful, to be good, to be right, and to have an identity was to be as much like the white man as he could (Old Dog Cross, 1981, p.3).

This often led to a distorted view of masculinity, one that was greatly different from traditional views of the relationship between men and women. Paula Gunn Allen attributes this skewed vision to the onslaught of American media (Gunn-Allen, p.35). This, combined with de facto and de jure discrimination and institutionalized racism, causes men to act in often violent ways towards women in their lives.

Not only are violent stereotypes such as the "blood-thirsty savage devoted to treating women cruelly" (ibid, p.35) continually fed to society at large to justify war and post-war policies, but the reality is that traditional men seldom were violent towards women. In fact, as Gunn-Allen also states, among most tribes, abuse of women was not tolerated, and child abuse and elder abuse were also extremely uncommon. "The lie about usual male behavior seems to have taken root and now bears its brutal and bitter fruit" (Ibid, p.35).

Unfortunately also for women, Native men have, through assimilation, learned the European way of treating women. Many Native women writers have made this observation (see Gunn-Allen, 1994 and LaDuke, 1994). Sexism in Native American communities has been attributed by some to colonization and assimilation. Sexism also has been a struggle for Native women with regard to cultural resurrection, as they come up against sexism in Native men. Mary Crow Dog discusses this in *Lakota Woman: the village*. She says,

The warrior's excuse for letting the women do most of the work was that at all times he had to have his hands free to hunt, if there was an opportunity, or to defend his family in case of a sudden attack by enemies. There was some truth in this, though the men overdid it with their "must have my hands free" business (Brave Bird AKA Crow Dog, 1993,p.180).

These processes of image casting and image-control create and perpetuate racist stereotypes. Images in the media and in educational materials profoundly influence all members of the population, especially with regard to individual actions, how we act, how we relate, and how we value ourselves. Also, as Gunn-Allen points out, " They [images] also determine to a large extent how our men act toward us, toward our children, and toward each other" (Gunn-Allen,1993,p.36).

However, not all Native women may be aware of misogyny at the same level. Many Native American women activists feel that raising the consciousness of Native women who are enmeshed in this cycle of internalization and violence are some of the important ways that Native women can empower themselves (La Duke,1988, Old Dog Cross, 1984). The means are different in many communities, but the link in consciousness raising in Native communities is outreach and education (Souers,1993)

Cultural Appropriation

Many Native American women are denouncing Eco-feminism, and other "New Age" oriented feminisms. These Euro-American oriented feminist practices are "chock full of colonialist content, not only on the material level, but as well on the level of cultural imperialism" (Ibid,p.333) Andrea Smith, a Makah writing in *Indigenous Woman*,

recently denounced New Age feminism for "ripping off" Native ceremonies for their own purposes, putting them on notice that "as long as they take part in Indian spiritual abuse, either by being consumers of it, or by refusing to take a stand on the matter, Indian women will consider white "feminists" to be nothing more than agents in the genocide of Native people" (Smith,1991,p.19). Further, as Senogles explains:

The difference between Native peoples and New Age people is that New Age people want spiritual experience in the same way that Americans want to go out and buy something. It is part of their culture of wanting things without the responsibility. They have been ripped off their source. The difference between Natives and Europeans is the fact that religious freedom is something that Native Americans still do not have, despite the Religious Freedom Act of 1978.

This law has no "teeth," no way of being enforced, and with the two recent Supreme Court decisions: *Lyng vs. The Northwest Cemetery Protection Association*, and *Smith vs. The State of Oregon*, religious freedom continues to be eroded for Native people in connection to the sacred use of peyote as well as the use of sacred sites.

Smith's point about the fact that white feminists and other European-Americans take on only parts of Native spirituality is particularly important. The fact that Native spiritual practices are taken out of context, without regard for community responsibility and the struggles Native peoples have waged to maintain their spirituality further perpetuates systems of oppression, and distorts Native religions. Smith makes the important point that spirituality can be shared, but needs to be on Native terms. This, however can only be done when non-Natives are willing to be a part of the larger struggle

for the human rights of Native peoples, and not just a part of the spiritual practices.

Because Native spirituality has been so important for survival and resistance, Smith

argues that it cannot be separated from the larger struggles of Native Americans. Andy

Smith provides an excellent analysis of cultural appropriation, one I hope many Euro-

American "New -Agers" take to heart. The problem of "white shamanism" is particularly

problematic when the context of Native people's existence is understood.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This particular study addresses the issue of feminism and its relationship to the issues and struggles facing Native American women today. The primary data collecting tool was fifteen oral narrative interviews. Individual Native women were interviewed to determine whether they believe feminism as they understood it can be incorporated into their worldviews. The open-ended narrative interview turned out to be the best approach to take when interviewing Native peoples. The oral traditions of the various tribes, their use of storytelling to teach, and as a mechanism for sustaining cultural continuity, makes the oral narrative interview an excellent approach, both in facilitating the sharing of information and providing a culturally compatible context within which to learn about Native women. Oral narrative interviews are interviews that allow the interviewee to elaborate on questions and allow more freedom within the interview process. The women in this particular study used the questions as guides and elaborated in great detail how these were applicable to their lives and experiences.

The potential benefits of this study are many. The main benefit as subject is the opportunity it provides for passing critical life experiences and wisdom to the next generation. The study will potentially enhance the pool of knowledge Native American women have access to in fulfilling their traditional roles within their cultures, and will

hopefully provide the opportunity to reflect, remember, and collaborate in a woman-to-woman context. The study will also provide an opportunity for Native American women to author their own stories with their own voices, as well as assist feminists, especially feminist outsiders, to learn more about strategies for resistance and change.

The oral narrative method allowed me to explore the difference in experience that leads to difference in ideology, lifestyle and worldview of Native American women. I am concerned with weaving their individual experiences within the larger political, social and historical framework. In this way, it is my hope that a broader understanding of the concerns of Native American women, and their views about feminism will be addressed.

Since Native American women have not had the access or the privilege of being able to write and publish their views as often as Euro-American women, there is a comparative absence of work by them and for them. A narrative approach to interviewing, with a focus on the telling of Native women's lives will best address this omission and facilitate this process by giving Native women a voice in academia with the publishing of this paper. Given the historical silencing of Native American women, and the overall push for social justice by Native Americans in general, greater access to the views of these women is very important.

Sample

My primary concern was with analyzing the individual experiences of Native women within a larger political, social, and historical framework. In doing so, it is my hope that a broader understanding of the concerns of Native women will be directly addressed. My sample size is small: I interviewed 15 Native American women. Adult women were interviewed, because their ideologies and outlooks on life and relationships are developed, compared to younger Native women who are less inclined to have firmly entrenched world views. Women from a range of different educational and economic backgrounds were selected from a pool of Native women living in the Northwest. Several were chosen from the Oregon State University campus community as well as through personal contact with Native women activists of the Northwest. I explored specific explanations and interpretations of the meaning in terms of the divisions among Native American women in their perceptions of "feminism" and its relationship to the struggles of Native people. My analysis is interpretive and phenomenological.

Since my focus is on Native women and their relationship to feminism, I interviewed women of Native American descent who are actively involved in political and social change within their communities. I put up flyers around OSU for interested participants to contact me, as well as around the Corvallis and Eugene, Oregon communities. An advertisement was also placed in *the Barometer*, the university newspaper, asking for voluntary participants in the study. Finally, I also sought participants from the Native American Student Longhouse at Oregon State University as

well. The most fruitful sampling technique was the snowball method where after contacting Native people that I knew myself, they provided me with introductions to active women they knew within their own communities.

Two of the women interviewed were introduced by friends. Four more were contacted through their tribal offices, and two more resulted from these interviews. One woman was suggested by a professor at the University of Oregon, and she introduced me to four other women. One woman I contacted by phone after a suggestion from one of the previous women, and she introduced me to another one of her friends.

Interview Protocol

Most interviews were done in person with the help of a tape recorder. Each interview was transcribed and participants were asked if they would like to use a pseudonym. Further, all participants were given the option to remain confidential, and if this option was chosen, a pseudonym was used throughout the project combined with the region she considered her homeland. One participant objected to the use of a tape recorder, and I took notes. Two interviews were done by telephone, which changed the dynamics somewhat. Using the telephone had its drawbacks, as there was less flexibility in terms of the narrative process, and questions were less direct. The other thirteen interviews were conducted face to face, and were done at either the woman's home or the woman's workplace.

Before each interview, each participant was given a personal overview of the project, and a written review of the proposal. Each was informed of her rights under the human subjects research agreement and controls, including privilege of editorial control over final transcriptions and the freedom to withdraw at any time without suffering punitive measures. An Informed Consent document was provided (See Appendix A) and reviewed with each individual prior to the interviews. Each informant was able to edit the typed transcriptions of the interviews and was asked to return them to me for editing. Each woman received copies of the completed thesis, their original transcripts, and tapes of the interviews after completion of the project.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a narrative style. The interviews began with very general questions to break the ice, and to get the informants talking about themselves. I began by asking the women to tell me about their families and their heritage. Guided interview questions were used as "probes" to fill in the gaps of women's specific narratives. These include the following:

1. Name and Age
2. Tribal affiliation
3. Where are you originally from? Where did you grow up?
4. Describe your family.
5. Describe your education.
6. What is your life like now?
7. Will you talk about a woman's place in your community.

8. How do you feel about the women's liberation movement?
9. What kinds of encounters, if any have you had with white feminists? With Native n feminists?
10. What kinds of issues having to do with Native Women are you interested in?
11. Some Native women are a part of the larger women's movement and some are not, how do you feel about this?

I followed the suggestions of Anderson and Jack (1990) regarding the interview process. They suggest both listening to ourselves as well as listening to the narrator. Beginning with personal questions facilitated the exchange of information. I was able to convey the message to each of my informants explicitly that I was there to learn and listen respectfully, as is the tradition in many Native American societies, especially when listening to elders. My focus was, as Anderson and Jack suggest, "on interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint" (p.23). By shifting the focus of this study from the gathering of information to the interactive process, Native women were better able to share their life experiences in a positive way.

One limitation of the narrative interview is that often it is difficult to provide a macro analysis from a series of individual interviews. Rather than a broad picture of the socio-political problems facing Native Americans, narrative interviews tend to provide a narrow picture. To address this bias, I interviewed a broad range of Native American women, from a variety of tribes. I also placed the interviews within a broader socio-historical framework, and did an extensive literature analysis.

Another possible limitation of the narrative interview is that “objectivity” is compromised. However, while objectivism as a perspective was rejected, methodological objectivity was closely followed. Interview protocol was consistent in avoiding leading questions and other such biases. In addition, the researcher always will bring herself to the interview and the interpretation of the narrative. I acknowledge this bias, but as a feminist researcher, I want my self and my worldview to be apparent in my work. My politics and perspective have shaped the way I have seen and approached this issue from the beginning, and will be part of the finished product. As well, the fact that all humanistic and social science research in general is largely subjective, and very much influenced by the outlook and worldview of the researcher and the researched does not limit the possibilities for action and change. What becomes necessary, is a wholesale acknowledgment of this subjectivity at the onset of the research. In acknowledging the subjective nature of the interview in the first place, a vast array of possibilities arise. In terms of interviewing Native American women, the narrative interview is culturally compatible, providing a space where Native women can voice their experiences and stories on their own terms.

The fact that many layers of interpretation and voice come through in the text is an important part of what I am trying to do with this study. By acknowledging that many voices, mine as well as the participants, will be contributing to the final product, I hope to show that the subjective component of the narrative interviewing process is a strength rather than a weakness. The interactive approach is more consistent, in fact, with the

more circular nature of Native American worldview. Rather than seeking a linear analysis and conclusion, my intent is to show the different way of seeing the world that shapes the experiences and perceptions of Native American women.

To assure that my own views and perceptions do not dominate the study, I plan to put my transcriptions and the final analysis through mutual validity checks. I will reconnect with my interviewees at various levels of the process and go over my analyses with them carefully. As Borland says in her article,

I am suggesting that we might open up the exchange of ideas so that we do not simply gather data on others to fit into our own paradigms once we are safely ensconced in our university libraries ready to do interpretation. By extending the conversation we initiate while collecting oral narratives to the later stage of interpretation, we might more sensitively negotiate issues of interpretive authority in our research (Borland, 1988, p. 75).

By negotiating the meaning of Native women's words with them, I can attempt to avoid the problem of an unequal power distribution in the researcher/researched relationship, as has historically most often been the case.

The women were interviewed between May 1996, and October 1996. They ranged in age from 20 years old to 82. The sample was small as compared to the over 450 Native Nations in the US. I chose a small number comparatively, so that I would have a good chance of getting very quality and in-depth, detailed interviews. I started out randomly choosing the number 20 for my interviews, but after doing fifteen, I became overwhelmed with the amount of information I had received. Luckily at this point I had by chance a well rounded and relatively good mixture of Nations in the United States.

Women from all over the country were represented and drawn from the diverse Pacific Northwest communities of Native people, both urban and rural. More important for the study than generalizations over a wide range of Nations, and recognizable commonalities or differences were the woman's voice being heard, and the individual experience and story being conveyed on her own terms. Interviewing fifteen women in depth and giving them an opportunity to reflect on their life experience and share that in a woman to woman context was more important than asking 200 women the same questions and looking for set patterns across all of Native America.

Two of the interviews were done by phone, which limited personal contact in some ways. On one level, there was no physical familiarity between I as researcher, and they, as participants in the study. However, I found that these two women had no problem opening up about themselves due to the fact I was not physically present. Fourteen of the interviews were taped, one was not. All women were given the option to decline taping, and one woman did.

All fifteen of the women identified themselves as "Native American" or defined themselves as members of a particular tribe. The women were all voluntary participants in the study. All considered themselves "activists" or "active in their communities." either their tribal communities or their chosen communities. All women were given the option to remain anonymous, with their identities remaining confidential. All chose this option, feeling that they would be able to be more "open." All have been given first name pseudonyms followed by the region in which their tribe was affiliated.

None of the Native women interviewed self identified as "feminist" although I argue that they all do possess a "feminist consciousness." As well all fifteen of the women articulated broadly that Native women's issues and Native men's issues were not separate from "Native American" issues. The foremost struggle for women and men was articulated as being "survival of the people," "community healing," "family healing," "caring for the children and elders," "regaining lost traditions."

The sample was small, and while it was representative of different regions of the US in terms of Native nations, none of the women interviewed claimed to speak for all Native women. These interviews only represent a few different voices in native America. The women came from different places, different experiences, and different classes, and occupations, and were not in the least homogenous. In Native America, there are over 400 tribal groups that reside within the borders of the United States, and a growing population of over one million. I tried with my small sample to include someone from each region, and unfortunately for the study, a few places were not represented. For example, I never came into contact with women from the east coast tribes, or from the South. All other regions were represented in some way. One woman was Haudenosaunee from New York state, one from the Great Lakes region of Minnesota. Four of the women were from Northwest tribes, one from Yakima, two from the Puget Sound area, and one from the Oregon Coast. Three women were from the Midwest, one from a Plains tribe in South Dakota, one from Iowa, and one from Missouri. One woman was from Florida, and one from Colorado. Two more of the women were from the Southwest, one from

Arizona, one from new Mexico, and one from Oklahoma. One woman was from California.

Chapter Five: Voices of Freedom

Native American women have broken out of stereotyped invisibility and forced silence and are making their voices and experiences heard and known to the rest of the world. Native women have in the past within their individual tribes held a tremendous amount of power and autonomy and were in positions of great authority in their communities. The strength and determination of Native women was evident in all of the interviews. Women have made important strides in re-establishing their voices, leadership, and traditional positions in their chosen communities. Myra, an elder woman from a Plains band said this,

I learned a lot from my elders. The most important thing I learned was the word self-determination, and that was something I could and did exercise. Women in my family have self-determination, and the backbone of any struggle is the women.

The fifteen oral narrative interviews also were very telling in terms of the ways that Native American women perceived the term “feminism” and the struggle for women’s rights. All of the women were very well acquainted with the derogatory connotations and stereotypes surrounding the term “feminist”, and all of the women were reluctant to label themselves as such. Linda, a middle aged woman from New Mexico said, “white feminists were not forced to wear bras and heels, they like their stereotypes. White women want to be equal as men, yet unequal as women.” From an analysis of the

data, certain important reasons for this reluctance besides this one were articulated that specifically relate to the experiences that Native women have had with colonialism. In addition, the participants work towards women's equality in their communities played a role in their perceptions of feminism, as well as the women's level of assimilation into the larger society's economic and social structure.

The women interviewed came from different socio-economic backgrounds and heritage's. Six of the women were college educated, five of the women had high school diplomas, and four did not complete high school. Seven of the women were between the ages of eighteen and thirty, four of the women between thirty and fifty, and four over the age of fifty. Nine of the women had children, four of the women had grandchildren as well, five women had no children, and one woman had experienced the loss of a child. All who had jobs outside the home were contributing financially to a family, whether it be nuclear or extended.

Nine of the women linked feminism to colonial domination of Native people. This was emphasized in the interviews in different ways, but many things tended to overlap. For example, of the nine women who directly stated that they believed feminism to be an extension of colonialism, five women felt that feminism would divide their communities by putting a barrier between men and women, and would further divide Native Americans as colonial patterns of domination have in the past. These women felt that instead of creating further divisions between the sexes, women and men must work

together to rebuild the relationship between the sexes. Two of the nine women also made statements that in Native communities, human rights in general were of greater importance than women's rights only.

There was also a distinct relationship between the women's beliefs about feminism and their ages and levels of education. The younger women (20-30) seemed to be open to building coalitions with white feminists where issues overlapped with their activism. For example, Sarah, a college educated woman working in New York's inner city described the problems that young Indian women have in their relationships with men. Many she believes have fallen prey to media images of what it means to be a "real woman", and this is an area where she articulated that women need to band together to resist these expectations. She says,

You could not believe how many Indian girls want to be like the models in the magazines. I know its like that for all girls in the U.S. today. This kind of thing is so destructive to men, too. The young guys these girls are involved with are worse than the girls. They tell the girls that if the don't lose a few or whatnot, then they won't stick around. The sad thing is they don't stick around anyway. Women have to stop buying this crap, it is so damaging!

In relation to feminism, three main themes arose from the interviews. The first theme discussed is the relationship between feminism, colonialism, and Native women. Next, the relationship between Native women's activism and feminism is discussed. Finally, the relationship between assimilation and the feminist perspective is examined.

Colonialism and Feminism

Colonialism has had an extreme impact on the lives of Native women, and while the effects of colonization are not as readily apparent in modern times, Native women still feel the effects. The words of the American Indian women interviewed reflect Jaimes and Halsey's (1992) assertion that "the disempowerment of Native women correspond precisely with the extension of colonial domination of each indigenous nation" (Jaimes and Halsey, 1992, p.323). While the government's focus during the first half of the twentieth century was on developing "the mechanisms of control over Indian land, lives, and resources through such legislation as the General Allotment Act, the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934" (ibid, p.323), its focus in the latter half of the twentieth century has been more insidious.

The purpose of legislative actions in the first half of the twentieth century was to systematically deny native peoples the use of the lands, hence denying women their traditional work, survival, and traditions. Women, in general, were the keepers of the land, and if there were property rights incorporated into the social structure of particular tribes, women decided what was to become of the land, or in the case of the eastern Cherokee, the property passed through the female line. (See Sattler, 1995). In the latter half of the twentieth century, Native people still have very little control over their lands (See Churchill, 1992), and women became separate from their traditional survival mechanisms and their traditional economies (See Murphy, 1995). Often it is argued that Native American people have retained control over some of their native homelands, yet

the reality is that large energy development corporations, and multinational companies obtain contracts from the federal government to develop Indian lands for resource extraction. These contracts are approved by the Federal government, and Native peoples rarely reap economic or any other rewards from this relationship often referred to in the literature as “resource colonization, or “radioactive colonization” (See Churchill and La Duke, 1992).

As women began to lose the opportunities to practice their traditional economies, and became forced into low paying jobs, or dependent on government aid for survival, they quickly fell into the lowest paid sector of the American economy, and very often live in the poorest parts of the country. “Peoples that had been entirely self-sufficient for thousands of years- indeed- many of them had been quite historically wealthy- had been reduced to abject poverty” (Weatherford,1989,p.6). The irony is that economic development programs designed to increase jobs and financial opportunities for Native people often do not end up being healthy for Native communities (see Yazzie, 1990).

To better understand native women’s reluctance to label themselves as “feminist” it is important to discuss the intersections of race, class, and gender in terms of differing life experience in Native women’s and white women’s lives. As Jaimes and Halsey discuss, the combination of poverty and despair and racism and colonialism breed such insidious forms of oppression, that are internalized by Native women, and often this oppression can manifest in a number of violent ways, not very many of them a traditional part of Native society. In Native communities, for example, violence against women was

rare in pre-colonial times. This is not to say that violence did not occur, only that it manifested in other ways, depending on the tribe. For example, in Lakota society, violence directed at the family was censured by the whole community, and a woman had rights and was supported if something did occur (White Plume, 1989).

In addition, Native women are most often than not left to care for their families.

Amott and Matthaei write,

In 1980, nearly one in four American Indian families was maintained by a woman (over twice the rate for whites and Asians), and 47% of these single -mother families were considered poor by federal guidelines. Among women with children under six, the poverty rate stood at a shocking 82% (Amott and Matthaei, p.59)

For the purposes of this study, and in order to better understand the reasons for Native women's hesitation to label themselves as feminist, it is extremely important to consider the issue of class and its relationship to colonialism in Native country. For many Indian women, the label of feminist is entirely associated with middle class white women's experiences. For example, simply examining Native women's labor force participation gives important insights into the difference in experience in Native women's lives that is based on poverty. This poverty shapes their world views, outlooks, and their existences. Much of the history and experience of Native American women is based on their experiences with colonialism and racism in relationship to larger society. According to Amott and Matthai,

Native American women's labor force participation rates rose sharply between 1970 and 1980, from 35%-48%. Those who held full-time, year

round jobs earned nearly 89% as much as white women... Despite these gains, nearly 3/4 of American Indian women were employed in the secondary labor market in 1980, compared to two thirds of European American women, and One third of European American men. Repressive, inaccessible, and inadequate education bears much of the blame for this low occupation status, along with discrimination by employers and fellow employees and stagnation of the reservation economy. Almost one-quarter of all American Indian women had not completed high school in 1980, compared to 16% of white women (Amott and Matthaei, 1991 p.58-59).

As of 1976, the federal government officially acknowledged that Native Americans were by far the most impoverished ethnic group in the United States, living in conditions resembling those of developing third world nations (see Statistical Portrait of the American Indian, 1976). This poverty and inequality of opportunity underlie the outlooks of the fifteen women that were interviewed, despite their classes, and even if the women were college educated, they were aware of the workings of colonization, especially in terms of how it affected their opportunities in the workforce. In this sense, they felt that they had much more in common with American Indian men in their struggles in a European American dominated society in terms of how much they could be earning comparatively, as well as how difficult it was to find good jobs. For example, Judith, a 40 year old woman said this about working,

Oh- its hell out there if you're an Indian, man or woman. You walk in somewhere- clean and dressed up and ask for an application or drop off a resume and people eye you like you're up to something, you're drunk, or you'll steal everything they have. They look at you so cold and fake, like "yeah right, we're really gonna hire an Indian!" I have a college degree! I have experience! It really makes no difference. I feel like it is a never ending battle, a fine line between the welfare office and a paycheck.

Some of the struggles of commonly associated with white middle class feminists, such as equal pay for equal work, abortion rights, and equality with men in general are often simply irrelevant or are not as paramount to Native women, and while she may agree that women should be paid equally for the same job, often the reality of her life dictates that other more important things, such as day to day struggles for survival within the family or reservation context, or the reality she may never have a child due to forced sterilization, or the fact there are so few of her family and people left that the child she is carrying is very precious, despite the fact she may be too young to be a parent. Abortion, for many Native women often is not an option due to a history of genocide. (See Crow Dog, 1990 or *The Theft of Life*, 1977). Since the dominant stereotypes surrounding the label of “feminist” have carried through to many women, Native included, that feminists are bra burners and man haters, often there is hesitation to associate with “feminists” as they are stereotypically seen. As well, many Native women, particularly those who practice and live following the old ways, feel that they have always been equal with men. Margie, an elder Plains woman this sentiment:

In my grandmother’s day, and even when I was a girl, men treated women different. I ‘m not talking about white men, you know, but in our tribe. They always asked us about things, and a lot of the time, we were in charge of our families. We didn’t lay this kind of “you are the man, you bring in money” thing on our men like in white families. We were dirt poor, and we all worked together to eat every day.

Annie, a Blackfoot woman in her fifties describes her feelings about this:

Its been my intent to try and live like my grandma did. If my husband was still alive, we'd probably be back home doing it. It really takes at least two to make it on your own out in the boonies. But I tell ya, it is the way we were meant to live and it just feels right someway. But always with my husband, we each did our things, but the work always got split up equal. If the wood had to be chopped I did it, or say when we when hunting together. Men did what they had to, so did we.

Myra from the midwest expressed this sentiment in a different way:

I didn't know women were supposed to be weak! I guess in white life back in the forties and fifties that was how women should have been. Maybe they really were weak in the outside world, but we weren't! I come from a family that was run by women and that is what I am all about.

Within Native communities, life spans are short. In 1980, the average life span for men was 44 years, for women, 46 years (Wood,1990,p.54). As well Native people in the US have the highest rates of death from malnutrition, exposure, diabetes, tuberculosis, typhoid, diphtheria, measles, and even bubonic plague. Infant mortality among reservation based Native Americans is over seven times the National average. (ibid., p.54). "The despair experienced by American Indians of both genders has manifested itself in the most pronounced incidence of alcoholism of any ethnic group in the United States. In turn, the cycle of drunkenness results in vastly increased rates of death, not only from ailments such as cirrhosis of the liver, but from accidents, often but not always resulting from automobiles." (quoted in Jaimes and Halsey,1992,p.325). Other aspects of

colonial induced despair include increased incidence of children with fetal alcohol syndrome, child abuse, violence against women, and high rates of teen suicide.(Asetoyer, p.87-92).

One woman, La Donna, in her fifties, worked in the social service program run by her tribe in the Southwest. She illustrated the ways that these problems manifest in their community.

Often what we find in our communities is this dejected attitude that comes from being worn out by trying to make it every day. My people have enough problem just finding enough to put into the kids mouths every day. a lot of the time we have a real issue with violence, not just in the immediate family, but also because of the high incidence of alcohol abuse. We see a lot of debilitation because of alcohol and drugs. These are the things that help people escape from a not so pretty reality.

Nine of the fifteen women interviewed felt that feminism was directly linked to colonialism as Jaimes and Halsey (1992) assert in their study, or felt that feminism was something that was for white women only, and did not address their concerns as Native people. For example, several of the women directly connected issues of colonialism and class when articulating their reasons for not labeling themselves as feminist.

As Judith, a middle class 40 year old Northcoast tribal elder articulated,

Where I come from, women and men are free. Women hold responsibilities, men hold responsibilities. That is the way things just are. When Native women began to have difficulties was when a Euro-American system of living was forced on us. We could not do our traditional things, and we had trouble holding up our end of the responsibilities to our families, our communities, and our earth. For white women, who have not been free for a long time, and continue to struggle to be like the men, creating something like women's rights makes sense. But I am not a part of that, I have always been on equal terms with the Native men in my community.

In some cases, while the women were aware of feminism and feminist ideals, they very explicitly associated them with white women and their struggles. Similar to Alice of the Northwest, Cindy, a 43 year old from a Florida tribe said this,

In college I took women's studies classes, but for me it was like learning about another culture. I could relate to the women we studied about in part, but as a whole the focus was on women who were not like me.. As far as feminism goes, I would not call myself a feminist, not because I do not believe in women's equality, but because in my work people have to work together, not create a separateness. The feminism I know is very separate, women are encouraged to connect together, which is good, but they are told they have to disconnect with the men. This doesn't work in Native places, where we have too many problems to deal with together than to separate.

Linda, a middle aged woman from a Southwest tribe expressed,

I come from an area where we have mostly matriarchal societies. The mother is the pillar of the community. The concept of woman is different than a white woman's place where she is a possession. The women's liberation movement is not my problem. I've been free my whole life. Most minority women have been free. White women want to be equal as men, yet unequal as women, this is really strange. I avoid white feminists like the plague. They want to empower Native women, but how can they empower when they have no power themselves?

Native Women's Activism and Feminism

Despite their reluctance to label themselves as "feminist" explicitly, all of the women espoused outlooks that could be considered either "womanist" or "indigenist".

Audre Lorde (1980) defines a womanist as being someone who is woman centered and

woman identified. Annette Jaimes (1992) defines "indigenist" as one who is wholly aware of and involved with the struggles of Native people. Both are broad, inclusive terms that better describe the wide variety of experience of Native women. All of the women interviewed fell into these categories.

All of the women interviewed were highly active in their communities, working with community elders, children, and teens, involved in politics, involved in environmental activism, involved in land rights struggles, or working within tribal administrations in community development programs. Several women talked about the difficulty of being a woman in a male dominated profession or activity, although the women were clear to identify their problems with sexism on the job to white men rather than Native men. All three women explicitly emphasized they had never come across the same attitude in Native American men. Katy, a middle aged woman from a Northwest tribe in reference to her activism around issues of Native grave repatriation said:

Well, I really have not had a lot of negative type responses, even though I do feel sometimes with Non- Natives that "oh-its just a woman, what does she know, or what is she talking about, or its more of a feeling you get, or a look on their face or a "why do I have to put up with this" Its more unspoken than anything.

Sarah, a 22 year old from New York City talked about her work in the inner city;

We have a white board of directors who dole out the private and public contributions as well as the government, state and local grants. They also oversee a few other projects. At one particular meeting, I was asked to talk about how I thought the program was a community and re-learn how to interact with one another in the old ways, the positive ways, the ways that we know are best for everyone involved. As Native people, our

numbers are so small, we have no choice but to dedicate our lives to the survival of the community, as women, as men, and as children. We all need each other- it's not just a men's issue, or a woman's issue.

Other Native women expressed that they had sympathy for the women's movement, but were uncomfortable claiming that they were oppressed compared to Indian men. Many of the women elaborated on the idea that Native men's and women's rights went hand in hand, and that oppression affected men and women both within Native American communities.

When asked about her opinion of feminism and the women's rights movement, Alice, from a Northwest tribe, had a different perspective, connecting the struggle for women's rights as being a human rights issues, rather than a separate "women's" issue. This was also brought up by several other Native women as well.

It's not about rights of women, rights of men, it's human rights. So, umm, I guess I have not been as involved with women's rights as separate, it is just the rights of humans. We deal with so much prejudice and racism- that is what our big issue is, and then when our children go to school and having to deal with it. So it simply just does not have to do with male/female.

The interviews with Native women suggest that feminism is not entirely incompatible with Native women's activism as Jaimes and Halsey (1992) assert. While none of the women labeled themselves explicitly as feminist, most of them espoused what could be called a "feminist consciousness" in that they were all aware of the

struggles Native women face in terms of race, class, and gender inequity. As one young woman, LeeAnn, 20, from the Midwest stated:

I get so fired up when guys tell me I'm "just a girl," therefore entirely worthless. Its really bad around here. Now that I have kids its even worse. Their dad only shows up when I get my check and expects royal treatment until there's no money anymore. What a sexist pig! He told me the other day that I was only good for two things since I was an Indian and a woman. I don't need to say them, you know what I mean.

Importantly, each woman, whether she could be considered "traditional", in the sense that she lived by her peoples cultural codes and traditions, or whether she was considered "assimilated"; meaning she had been educated in a European school system and was involved in Euro-American society; did embrace the views that women and men should be equal in terms of equality of opportunity. This outlook was either reinforced by a belief that women have historically been powerful within their own tribal social systems, or was reflective of a knowledge of different ways that interlocking oppressions worked against them in dominant society in the form of racism, classism, and sexism.

Tina, a 25 year old California woman said:

You know, I think about these things all of the time, and I really do understand why white women have to fight for freedom. But- I come from a tribe where the women are very powerful and free, and for me- getting back to the ways of my ancestors will solve these problems for me. But as a whole, my major problems stem from racism first, being poor second, and third being a woman.

As Mary, a 30 year old member of a Great Lakes tribe stated,

Now don't misunderstand me here, I am not saying when I tell you I am most definitely not a feminist, that I do not understand what those women are fighting against. Ask any Native woman about patriarchy, and she will tell you how it works. But I really hesitate to label myself a feminist, even though I am educated about and aware of feminist issues. I live with racism, classism, and sexism every day, it is a real thing I feel and see, not just some concept learned in a classroom.

This type of outlook can be considered "feminist" in terms of a broad and loose definition of the term. In some cases, women expressed that they hesitated to label themselves as "feminist" because of the derogatory connotations of the term in their communities. From the interviews, I feel that although native women did not label themselves as such, this did not however mean that they did not have a feminist consciousness or a complex understanding of the ways that oppression manifests in their lives because of the fact that they are women in a patriarchal society. Rather they were responding to their perceptions of feminism as a white and middle class movement.

As Linda expressed when asked if she knew any Native feminists,

I don't know any Native feminists, but the feminist movement robs us of our best and brightest. Feminism is demeaning to Native men, women moving to the feminist side creates one more burden for him. Feminists enlist minority women into their cause to justify their claim to oppression. We're used as pawns by the feminist movement. White feminists have claimed to have achieved something for Native women and it is a lie. I don't believe you can draw a line between Native women and men. We have to stand together

Assimilation and the Feminist Perspective

Jaimes and Halsey (1992) assert that despite the fact that there are Native American women who label themselves with the “feminist descriptor,” feminism and colonialism go hand in hand. As well, they assert that feminism diverts attention from what is really important to Native people despite the fact that on the surface, feminism and Native activism could be seen as compatible. The authors argue though, that those Native women activists identified as “feminist” have “tended to be among the more assimilated of Indian women activists, generally accepting of the colonialist ideology that indigenous nations are now legitimate sub-parts of the US geo-political corpus rather than separate nations, that Indian people are now a minority within the overall population rather than a citizenry of their own distinct nations” (Ibid,p.331). As well they argue that feminist Native activists are more devoted to “civil rights” than to Indian liberation, and the more “sovereignist” oriented Native women activists are more skeptical of feminist alliance and politics. As Lorelei Means stated:

White women, most of them very middle class, and for whatever they think their personal oppression is, as a group they are obviously the material beneficiaries of the colonial exploitation their society imposes on ours... they come and they look at the deformity of our societies produced by colonization, and then criticize the deformity. They tell us we have to move “beyond” our culture in order to be liberated by them. Its just amazing... They virtually demand that we give up our own traditions in favor of what they imagine their own to be, just like the missionaries and the government and all the rest of the colonizers (quoted in Jaimes and Halsey,p.332).

Mean's assertions reflect a feeling that embracing European values means assimilating into larger society and giving up traditional ways of life. In this sense it is understandable that traditional women are more concerned with self-determination and the survival of their families, communities, cultures, and traditions.

However, it was clear from my interviews that while at least six of the women could be considered somewhat assimilated, they still maintained cultural connections, identified as Native American, and had devoted their lives to the survival of their peoples. This challenges the assumption that having an education and having a job within the confines of American society at large removes one from their roots completely. These women were indeed concerned with issues that are considered "feminist" in nature, especially with regard to their jobs, yet all of them were working towards the freedom of indigenous people and women in some way. For example, one woman was the director of social services for her tribe, one was a cultural coordinator and worked to have graves repatriated and remains returned from museums. One was a college professor and an activist for Native land rights, another worked with inner city youth. The diversity in experience of native women was certainly evident from the interviews.

Of the fifteen women that were interviewed, six of them were college educated. Five of these women expressed that "gender equity" was indeed a key concern in their lives, particularly in their tribal political and economic structures. These women all expressed that men had more privileges and held the higher paying jobs that required college education. These women felt that they were often given the "soft" jobs, more

social service oriented, rather than management or leadership positions. Alice, from the Northwest described the dynamic that works in her tribe:

You know, the higher paying jobs are most often held by Indian men, and non-Indian people. A lot of the time, when tribal women are working their wages are always lower than men's. This is a real problem, and reflective of larger society's values, I think, not our traditional ones.

Gender equity was indeed an issue with the other women with higher education.

The women expressed that they often felt as if they were "second guessed" by their male superiors, and that this was stressful or otherwise made an impact in their lives.

Judith says,

One of the worst things about my job is the way the boss treats me. I have been in my job for longer than he is and I know every person, every family in my whole community. He constantly questions my abilities and makes himself look like a real jackass in the process.

As well, Cindy talked about the problems in her position when it came to promotion. She discussed in her interview the different ways that men and women are promoted in her agency. She felt she had been not considered for a promotion due to the fact that she was a woman first, and an Indian woman second. Linda from the Southwest was the only woman who had an advanced degree that did not feel that gender equity was the problem. As was previously described, she felt that Indian women have always been "free", and that being equal with a white man simply was not something she was interested in.

In an interview with *News From Indian Country* (mid February 1996) Winona LaDuke succinctly explains why “gender equity” is a non-issue for many Native women activists. She describes how at the women’s conference in Beijing in 1995, native women finally had a chance to articulate their problems with the so-called “mainstream” women’s movement. She describes how the context of women’s issues versus women’s rights was broadened at the conference, particularly the idea that women’s rights are human rights. She says, “the rights of women, like the rights of indigenous people, are not within the purview of domestic nations. Its not just that nation’s business, but is an international human rights issue” (Caldwell, 1996, p. 11A). LaDuke, speaking for the Indigenous Women’s Network, forwarded a position that stated that they did not support the mainstream women’s movement position of gender equity. Instead they stated that they supported a woman’s right to self-determination.

The difference between gender equity and self determination is also clear to several of the women that were interviewed as well. Rather than being equal with a man, women should be able to exercise her right to choose what she wants to do with her life. LaDuke describes how under international law there is no precedent for “gender equity”, but there is a precedent for people’s rights to self determination. This sentiment was echoed by Cindy.

Honestly, why do white women want to be like white men?
Yuck. To be honest, I don’t want to be like an Indian man, either.
Now in my culture, I will hold onto my roles because that is what I want to do.

Winona LaDuke agrees,

In my cultural context, I do not want the roles of a man. I want to have my own role as a woman. I want to have that valued and have the right to determine what role it is I want in my society. That is different than gender equity. It is a woman's right to self-determination (Caldwell,1996,p.11A).

In this study, assimilation was related to level of education, particularly secondary education, and while it seemed that a woman who articulated concepts that could be thought of as "feminist" was more assimilated, it did not seem to play a role in her acceptance of the label "feminist." On the surface my research supported Jaimes and Halsey's assertions regarding assimilation. Some of the women discussed the fact that Native women did have a burden to bear in terms of their gender, and these women tended to be those who were educated and working in jobs that required college education. The lower class Native women were by no means unaware of sexism, but dealt with it at a different level. Alice best describes this sentiment:

I believe that in larger society there are real issues- such as inequality between men and women in the job market- and they affect all races- its not just a Euro-American issue but it affects everyone. Like I said earlier- the highest paid people we have here are men, but a lot has to do with our leadership at this time, too, and if we had different leadership it could be different. In the view of in the eye of the beholder- technical aggressive behavior is valued- and even in the view of other men- these qualities are not much valued.

that this is most definitely true in every case. Further interviews will need to be done before this can be decided. What was interesting to me as a feminist researcher was the fact that none of the women labeled themselves as feminist but almost all of the women could be associated with viewpoints, issues, or struggles that are focused on ending the oppression of women. In most cases I feel that not self labeling as “feminist” was reflected as one that meant that the women interviewed could not identify with the stereotypical vision of what it meant to be a feminist, due to stereotypes of feminism and feminist backlash in greater society.

The fifteen narratives provided strong messages about Native women’s autonomy, and their work in their communities to reestablish themselves in working towards the survival of their cultures and traditions. The interviews also provided validation for the phenomenon of women claiming their voices and making differences in their individual tribes and communities. They are looking to the past for strong figures and role models to live by, and are looking to the future and a time when their communities, Nations, and tribal groups will be healed and healthy.

Chapter Six-

Conclusion

The literature suggests that Native American women have differing views on feminism, especially with regard to the roles feminism may or may not play in their lives and in their activism. Assimilation seems to play a key role in whether or not Native American women would consider themselves to be feminist. In this study, assimilation was related to level of education, particularly secondary education, and while it seemed that a woman who articulated concepts that could be thought of as “feminist” was more assimilated, it did not seem to play a role in her acceptance of the label “feminist.” Additional research, and, in particular, field research, is needed before it will be possible to definitely conclude that assimilation is the key measuring point, although it seems from the interviews that this could possibly be the case.

The narratives also give important clues that may help to explain why native women and many other American women often reject the label of “feminist”. Susan Faludi (1995) explains the phenomenon as “feminist backlash” that she defines as “a powerful counterassault on women’s rights, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women” (p.422). Just as women are about to achieve some goals towards equality and women’s rights, the

threat causes fear in the patriarchal structure with the threat of change. Myths are constructed that keep women from connecting with one another, and labels such as “feminist” become dirty words. I believe that these perceptions were in place in at least half of the women I interviewed. They fell into the trap of blaming feminists at least covertly for the problems that white women experience, and were unable to relate to wider definitions of what it means to call oneself a feminist. In this context it is important to think about Faludi’s assertion, “to blame feminism for women’s ‘lesser life’ is to miss entirely the point of feminism, which is to win women a wider range of experience” (p.425).

While the interviews failed to yield results that would test the connection between feminist labeling and assimilation definitely, the research process and results are very important to the growing body of literature by and for Native women. The process of interviewing, while following strict protocol, was done in a culturally appropriate way, and every effort was made to accommodate women in their daily lives and busy schedules. Native women were given a safe space to talk about their experience with and their feelings about feminism, and providing the option of anonymity helped women feel as though they would not be judged by others in their communities and in larger society for their words.

While most of the women that were interviewed were often not on the front lines and in the press for their activism, what they do in their everyday lives constitutes some

of the most important and underappreciated activism. The women that were interviewed often work diligently forward toward wholeness and healing in their communities, whether it be grave repatriation, social services and volunteering in their communities, running elder support programs, keeping native languages alive by teaching it at tribal colleges, or working with inner city native youth, these women are on the forefront of a changing definition of Native American activism.

Native American women are marginalized in our society, so it is entirely possible that they would be reluctant to embrace feminism as it is often associated with white middle class women. However, more recently, women of color have embraced a feminism that was created by and for themselves (See hooks,1992, Anzaldua,1994). It is this recent trend to which this study will contribute. Native American women can grasp feminist and womanist ideas, and build bridges with other women particularly on an international level, thereby strengthening their struggles against oppression.

All of the women that were interviewed for the study were very active in their communities. In terms of making alliances with Native people, it becomes crucial that those working towards social and economic justice find ways to include and work with Native Americans in their struggles. A realization and a conscious effort must be made to learn about each other's history and cultures so that a common ground can be established. Also women across races must realize that oppression knows no cultural boundary, and is pervasive towards women in all walks of life. To create change that is sustainable we need to be able to understand one another, and work hard together.

White women must take the time to educate themselves about the struggles of Native women both in their historical context of genocide and oppression and colonialism. As well, white women must be aware of and understand cultural appropriation, and respect and learn from Native people and their religions, rather than take without an understanding of the whole context of what it means to be Native in the USA in the 1990's. Many Natives argue that conditions are not much better than they were in the 1890's. In addition, Native people and organizations must learn to take first steps and small risks by trusting in another groups that may be able to share knowledge and resources in Native struggles.

Learning about and being aware of white privilege and racism and how Native people are affected is key to building bridges with Native Americans. In addition, learning to communicate in positive and proactive ways is also very important. Within the discipline of Women Studies, we have to be able to incorporate "other" feminisms into our curriculums and our definitions, even when those "feminisms" may not be explicitly labeled as such. As well, we as researchers, native people, and feminists must go beyond words and their meanings and build bridges between theory and practice in our every day lives to become active in our communities by sharing our strengths and skills. In addition, strategies for eliminating systems of oppression must be incorporated into all aspects of our everyday lives. By naming racism or sexism, these systems can be recognized. By learning about the history of Native people, we can empathize and appreciate the historical reasons oppressive policies were carried out.

The methodology of oral narrative interviewing was culturally appropriate in terms of Native people's long traditions of passing on and sharing knowledge that is key to the survival of communities and tribes. I believe that the most crucial and important lesson to be learned with the undertaking of this particular study is the fact that Native American women come from traditions where, despite the system of government, or whether the society claimed descent through the male or female lines, women's roles were flexible, women were autonomous and made their own decision, and women held positions of power in their families and communities.

As the literature illustrated, there is a range of viewpoints concerning Native American women and feminism, feminist theory, and feminist praxis. My data suggests that there are definitely schisms that are present in Native communities with regard to beliefs about the issues and struggles of the women's movement, and their relationship to white women in general. While some Native women activists in the literature consider themselves feminists, the women I interviewed declined to label themselves as such. Yet, despite the reluctance, the women were all aware of women's oppression.

In terms of colonization and conquest and the loss of land, culture, and identity, Native women in many cases were forced into silent and subservient molds with attempts at assimilation and cultural genocide that kept them cut off from their traditions. To understand this context is crucial when attempting to understand why Native women refuse to separate their issues from those of Native Americans in general, and men and

family in particular. These themes are also key to women of the third world in their quests to reshape and redefine their lives on their own terms.

Charlotte Bunch (1995) addresses the claiming of feminism all over the world by and for women in their struggles. She discusses the importance of feminist movements that are developing that address women's regional and cultural concerns. This "global feminism" as Bunch defines, requires that "we learn from each other and develop a global perspective within each of our movements. It means expansion of our understanding of feminism and changes in our work, as we respond to the ideas and challenges of women with different perspectives. It means discovering what other perspectives and movements mean to our own local settings" (p.429).

Joanna Kerr (1993) places feminism and international women's rights within a human rights framework as many of the women I interviewed did as well. It seems that this perspective is common to many indigenous struggle the world over according to Kerr. Often this perspective is very much based on survival, as it is in native communities, and traditional human rights frameworks deny the fact that women are experiencing human rights abuses daily. This often in the case in Native America, as well, where women are being agents of social change and are actively changing the dynamics of their communities based on a demand for their basic human rights.

So, while some Native women were receptive to the ideas of feminism as it is defined in the literature, none of the women self identified as such, based on the conception that feminism was directly associated with colonialism, and that feminists

could only be middle class and white. So, while feminists the world over are often struggling as indigenous peoples for sovereignty, the insidious tools used to discredit feminism have worked their way into Native American communities, even though Native people have a long history of oppression and freedom, and Native women have been at the forefront of struggles to end oppression and human rights abuses, and have much in common with “feminists” the world over. Important issues and questions remain unanswered, such as how important are labels and their meanings in the holistic context of the relationships between native and non-native women, and in what ways can we re-educate ourselves to be more inclusive in our outlooks and worldviews?

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APPENDIX

Document Of Informed Consent

Thank You for agreeing to speak with me. Before we begin the interview, I am required to explain your rights regarding your participation in this study. It is my duty to explain why and how I will conduct this research. As well, it is your written agreement to participate in the study. A copy of this document will be provided to you as well as a copy of the interview transcript, the cassette recording of our interview, and a copy of the final thesis after it has been completed. You will have editorial control over the information obtained in the interview, and nothing will be included that you do not specifically agree to. Access to the transcripts and tapes will be limited to myself and my thesis committee to verify findings.

There are no foreseeable physical or mental risks to your participating in the study, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without punitive measures. Participation in the study is voluntary, and will entail one hour and a half interview, as well as a follow up session to go over your interview transcripts at a later time. As well you have the option of keeping your identity confidential.

This project "Native American Women and Feminism" will be a thesis for a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. This is a study about Native American women and their relationship with feminism, in theory and in practice. The significance of the thesis "Native American Women and Feminism" will be to provide Native American women of different tribes a voice in academia regarding their perceptions of Euro-American society. Native women's struggles share many of the characteristics of women's struggles associated with feminism in the larger society, yet many Native American women explicitly reject the label of feminism. This thesis will explore the reasons why some Native women do associate with feminism and why some do not. Through an analysis of the limited literature and cross-cultural research done on the topic, as well as oral history interviews I will seek to find if feminism is compatible with Native American resistance and worldview. The goals of this project are to both broaden the dialogue between feminists and Native American women, as well as to give voice to those women who have been historically silenced on a larger societal scale. By addressing this imbalance directly in this thesis, I hope to help to shift the power imbalance and place Native American women on center in research and analysis. To this end, I hope to open the space for bridge building between white feminists and Native women by telling Native women's lives. By placing Native American women on center in this research, it is my hope that later readers of this research will come away with a sense of what it is like for Native women to live in this society, and the value of their experiences to those working towards social justice.

The potential benefits of this study are many. The main benefit to participants lies with the passing of critical life experiences and wisdom to the next generation through the telling of Native American women's life stories. As well, the study will potentially enhance the pool of knowledge Native American Women have to fulfill their traditional

roles within their cultures, as well as will provide the opportunity to reflect, remember, and collaborate in a woman to woman context. Finally, the study will provide an opportunity for Native American women to author their own stories through their own voices.

Questions about the research or your rights should be directed to Janet Lee at (541) 737-6132 or Spirit Cole at (541)686-3461.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Participant