

LIVING ON THE FRINGE

by

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## Living on the Fringe

In today's modern society, with instantaneous connections between individuals of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and cultures – borrowing between these diverse peoples will occur. This phenomenon is hardly new and has impacted civilizations for thousands of years. Borrowing is a facet of life that will not vanish anytime soon. This interaction allows people to experience different foods, music, dance and art and greatly broaden their horizons, sometimes within the comfort of their very own homes. While appropriation in these vastly distinct fields has been examined from both negative and positive standpoints of constant interaction, the debate still remains about whether or not appropriation is inherently good, or fundamentally wrong.

Claiming that this borrowing is innately right is a belief held by some who see it as a way for individuals to experience differences they would never previously have had access too. In opposition to this, some see appropriation as a violation of another people's unique cultural symbols, objects, and motifs – a desecration of one society by that of another. While the argument pertaining to the ethics behind cultural appropriation will not cease in the near future, it remains a reality in today's society and therefore deserves discussion. However, while aspects of life from dance, art, and sculpture have undergone heavy and constant criticism in relation to appropriation, there is one realm of contemporary life that has been greatly circumvented. The arena of fashion has been sidestepped and ignored from this discussion.

Fashion has been excluded wholeheartedly from most critical debate regarding appropriation, regardless of the fact that this industry is a large perpetrator of this trend. Orientalism, Victorianism, Sari dresses, gypsy skirts – the list is extensive. Fashion has been allowed to say ‘inspiration’ instead of appropriation, but this industry needs to be entered into the cultural appropriation debate. No longer should fashion designers be allowed to claim that their creations are made for consumption alone and therefore not worthy of theoretical discussion. Fashion and designing is an influential part of the interconnected world. Regardless of whether fashion is considered art or merely consumptive, it challenges the minds of the eager audience, whether for a season, or a lifetime. Fashion designers need to be held responsible for their work; the creations used perpetuate century old stereotypes of many cultures, and ethnic minorities worldwide.

The world of fashion is a multi-billion dollar industry, it employs individuals in service, production, distribution, and retail avenues. It grips the mind of every generation and does not discriminate based on age, race, or sex. Anyone can partake in fashion shows as a designer, model, or audience and enter a clothing store regardless of their financial situation, gender or body type. Currently, gatekeepers in the fashion industry need not explain the flippant use of the term ‘inspiration’ to describe more than half the collections gliding down the runway of any given season. That time has changed; fashion can be considered frivolous no longer. Fashion holds too much control and garnishes too much worldwide exposure in order to claim ignorance to cultural appropriation any longer.

The blatant cultural appropriation by fashion designers needs to be critically examined, especially the popular native ethnic trend. The trends viewed as native

ethnic/Navajo/Aboriginal harken back to a distant past no longer truly relevant to contemporary Aboriginal people. The cultural appropriation of “historical” Aboriginal clothing by fashion designers creates a sense of Otherness between the inspired and the inspiration. The trend contributes to the static image of the traditional Aboriginal person, an inaccurate reflection of Aboriginal people today, and creates an even greater divide between two vastly different societies with an already immensely problematic past.

While Aboriginal people continue to fight for their rights in a land no longer their own, and while many struggle to make ends meet living on reserves in tucked away areas of Canada, fashion designers with household names are generating millions of dollars per season taking ‘inspiration’ from the past. The desecration of a culture’s symbolic goods, and attire is seen as pertinent for economic gain. History, power inequality, and current situations of Aboriginal people are all ignored in order to see a white model strutting down the runway sporting a Lakota inspired headdress or for the momentary glory of seeing a celebrity walking down a busy street wearing an haute couture overtly fringed dress. Fashion needs to be held responsible for its actions. Designer’s appropriation and exploitation of a disadvantaged group of people may not be as beautiful as a leather hide bikini, accessorized with a flowing feathered headdress and turquoise jewelry, ‘inspired’ by Aboriginal culture, may appear.

### Literature Review

The literature surrounding the relevant themes of ‘Living on the Fringe’ is sparse. The cultural appropriation of Aboriginal clothing is not an area that has previously been greatly explored, and since Aboriginal history is orally transmitted, there is little written material regarding traditional Aboriginal attire. Since these aspects were not greatly

available for research, it became apparent that the general public also would not have access to this data. So where were people getting inspiration for the native ethnic look? This is one theme where data could be collected.

Areas in popular culture that promulgate images of the stereotypical Aboriginal person have been explored. Advertisements, television series and Western movies have all been given as examples of the promulgation of the stereotypical Aboriginal individual. The author Gretchen Bataille edited *The Pretend Indians*, which describes how the image of the Hollywood Indian was created and perpetuated by Western filmmakers. The typecast of the Plains headdress, beaded, fringed and buckskin-wearing Indian became the example of Aboriginality. Bataille also discusses how this creation influenced the lives of modern Aboriginal people who were not considered authentic unless they donned a mask; an idea merely broached by the author and which would be further explored in 'Living on the Fringe'.

The authors Jacquelyn Kilpatrick who wrote *Celluloid Indians*, and Angela Aleiss who wrote *Making the White Man's Indian* also discussed in depth the caricature of the Indian. Both authors gave pertinent examples of Western movies from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day that depicted this distorted image. The work of Angela Aleiss also introduced the Marlon Brando Oscar rejection event, which is a part of history that validates the claim of Aboriginal inaccuracies displayed in Western movies.

The next overarching theme that contributed to 'Living on the Fringe' were the ideas generated about the voice and the representation of the Other. The author that shaped the analysis of this work was bell hooks. bell hooks is a feminist author who discusses marginalization in society. Although she does not specifically discuss

Aboriginal people, her work can be translated as inclusive of most societal minorities. The passion she presents in her works *Eating the Other* and *Marginality as a Site of Resistance* have been a constant source of inspiration for this topic. Her ideas of decontextualization, commodification of difference, and consuming the Other were continually utilized in ‘Living on the Fringe’ and were consulted in regard to the native ethnic trend in fashion. Another main author discussing Otherness was Deborah Root.

Deborah Root’s work entitled *Cannibal Culture* also discusses the notion of consuming the Other for the benefit of mainstream society. Root emphasizes how aesthetic difference of minorities is appreciated while traditions, and current political situations of the same group went overlooked. This idea was utilized in ‘Living on the Fringe’. Once again Gretchen Bataille, this time in her work, *Native American Representations*, also discusses the idea of the Other and how the typical image of the Aboriginal person was a colonial invention passed down throughout the generations. The works and ideas of these theorists allowed for a clear trajectory of how the images portraying native ethnic style would be analyzed. Music videos, magazine spreads, and fashion shows, would be the visual elements deconstructed in terms of the ideas generated by these authors.

### Methodology

‘Living on the Fringe’ will be analyzed through a postcolonial framework. Postcolonialism examines how the impacts of colonial relations continues to influence the interactions between the colonized and the colonizer – in the proceeding paper the relations between European/Western society and the Aboriginals of North America will be further explored. In modern society there continues to be inequality and issues of

imbalanced power relations between these two groups. Though colonialism no longer exists officially, the perceptions and representations of the colonized society by the colonizer is an ever-present dogma. Postcolonial theory scrutinizes the historical representations of both the colonizer and the colonized – the caricatures and occasional factuality – and how these perceptions continue to influence members of society today.

This paper will focus on the stereotypical portrayal of the Aboriginal person created through colonial discourse and how this image continues to be displayed as an authentic version of Aboriginality. The original inhabitants of North America, regardless of significant differences in attire, climate, and customs became molded into a caricature representative of all North American Aboriginal peoples, regardless of inherent differences. The Plains people, with their elaborate fringed attire and exuberant headdress became the epitome of difference; the great signifier between Us and Them and therefore became the mold into which all other Aboriginal people were pressed. The outcome of this caricature was a typical ‘Red Man’ wearing romanticized ‘Indian dress’—namely fringe, feathers, beads, and the headdress. This amalgamation will be further explored and it will be detailed how this image was perpetuated through the mendacious discourse written by the colonizers about Aboriginal people.

The dress of the Plains people became the stereotypical representation of all Aboriginal people, and this caricature continues to affect society today. This inaccurate representation is seen through various images produced and relayed during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper will focus on the examination of music videos, magazine spreads, and fashion shows from the afore mentioned time period. These specific areas will be examined because of the widespread constant and repetitive misuses of native ethnic

trends in popular Western society perpetuated in these spaces. The use of these spaces is especially harmful to the already fragmented image of the Aboriginal person because the audience viewing these native dress elements in music videos, magazine spreads, and fashion shows are more susceptible to the popular culture image produced about members of Aboriginal society. These areas will be looked at through an intense visual analysis.

### Constructed Image

There are over five hundred diverse Aboriginal tribes located across North America. The geographical location of these various communities contributed to each culture's unique history, language dialects, societal customs, and dress regalia. Aboriginal people living on the West Coast had completely different attire, symbolic artifacts, and even environmental conditions to combat then those living in the Plains, or in the Southwest, or on the East Coast. These were not simple societies as common history allows one to believe, but rather complex groups based on kinship, hierarchies, and trade relationships amongst particular communities. Diversity and distinctiveness characterized North American inhabitants prior to the homogenizing effects of colonization. How is it that these unique tribes all ended up under the same pan-Aboriginal umbrella in regards to their dress attire and occasionally their mannerisms?

In today's society, when one imagines an Aboriginal person, the overwhelming consensus is that Aboriginal people historically wore a headdress, fringed clothing, and moccasins, and occasionally could be found on horseback, war whooping. While in reality this image is correct for roughly two-dozen Plains tribes in the late 1800s, it is false for the remaining five hundred plus Native societies in North America (Churchill,

75). The proliferation of the image of the stoic Plains Indian warrior wearing a feathered war bonnet became the conventional identification for all Aboriginal people – only after colonization – and remains acceptable in modern society.

One of the reasons this falsehood reigned was because the European explorers who invaded this land came for conquest, colonization, and capture. Europeans fought for land, valour, and souls in each corner of the globe and the American continent was no exception. Europeans did not come to record the lives of the original inhabitants. Since documentation was not at the forefront of European thought, the dress and mannerisms of one tribe became the caricature representation of all Aboriginal tribes. The Plains people, who displayed constant courage and defiance to the encroachment of the Europeans, led a formidable resistance that made a lasting impression. “Once the genocidal whites came, whole tribes were snuffed out without any record of their inner life retained... Indian heritage was up for grabs to the nearest white consumer.” (Kaufman, 23) Europeans were able to fabricate the history and mannerisms of completely diverse peoples and create an overarching stereotypical image of the native person – headed by the impression left by the stoic Plains warrior.

The Aboriginal people could do nothing to stop this homogenizing caricature from occurring. “The indigenous inhabitants of North America can stand anywhere on the continent and look in every direction at a home usurped and colonized by strangers who, from the very beginning, laid claim not merely to the land and resources but to the very definition of the natives.” (Bataille, 14) Europeans fabricated an Aboriginal identity by providing all Aboriginal people with the same attributes. The identity given to the Aboriginal people during colonial times is one that continually influences attitudes

towards and about Aboriginal people today. Whether it is a mainstream colloquialism about their mannerisms, their livelihood, or their dress, Aboriginality remains a contested issue in modern society. “The Indian is a colonial invention, a hyper-real construct” (Vizenor, 14). A construct that needs to be made devoid of meaning but remains intact in today’s postcolonial world. The notion that five hundred distinct societies could be homogenized into one, and re-created, as an amalgamated version, is the paradigm still respected today.

The Plains people became the omnipresent example of Aboriginality attributed to all Aboriginals.

It seems fitting that the image selected by White Americans for its stereotype of Native Americans was a superficial visual likeness of the Plains Sioux – the last indigenous group capable of offering resistance and whose tribal feather heraldry offered a most striking contrast to European norms of appearance. (Churchill, 36)

Most other tribes were sidestepped and their attire was disregarded and replaced with the overwhelming image of the exotic Plains Indians wearing elaborate concoctions and dressed in buckskin. The saying “‘seen one Indian seen ‘em all’ correlated to the widespread colonial notion that all Indians wear feathers and ride horses” (Churchill, 37). Algonquin, Ojibwa, Cree, Cherokee and hundreds of other Aboriginal tribes were amalgamated and described as wearing Plains-like dress regardless of the veracity of the claim.

Diversity was ignored in the colonial past and continues to be ignored in the postcolonial present in regards to Aboriginal dress. “The ability to reduce one’s opponents to nonhuman terms and to mis-categorize diverse groups into homogenous lumps was paramount” (Churchill, 36). The capability of creating an omnipresent image

of Aboriginal communities influenced European mentality. One overarching dress element – namely the headdress – was used to simplify five hundred different groups, effectively twisting reality and fabricating a past upon which modern society bases its current assumptions regarding Aboriginal people. “In spite of centuries of contact and the changed conditions of Native American lives, whites picture the ‘real’ Indian as the one before contact or during the early period of contact” (Berkhofer, 28). Original explorers mistakenly, or purposely, created a homogenous Aboriginal person, and instead of correcting this image in the supposedly culturally relative present, individuals today continue to preserve this stereotype.

A distorted image of Aboriginal people remains reality today. The incorporation and explosion of the simplified version of the noble savage, dressed in Plains attire, riding bareback, continually infiltrates mainstream society. “Real Indian people are neither tin nor gold but flesh and blood, and it is time for popular images to recognize their living breathing presence among all other Americans” (Bird, 11). The living, breathing presence of Aboriginal people today is constantly ignored as individuals dig into a fabricated past to create looks that represent *authentic* Aboriginality. “The term authenticity becomes a definition imposed from the outside on a living culture so that the community will never be able to live up to the way it has been defined” (Root, 79). In order for an Aboriginal person to be recognized as authentic in today’s society they need to don a mask/costume. A costume involving fringe, feathers and beads in order to be considered a representative of the Aboriginal community; attire which is no longer truly relevant within today’s society and which may not even be entirely applicable to that specific individuals Aboriginal past.

Currently, individuals in the fashion industry are doing nothing more than preserving an idea created in the 1800s to describe an entire civilization. Designers are inspired from stylized images of 1800s Aboriginal clothing which are also the looks perpetuated in popular Western movies. “Consumers may imagine that the representations they encounter is all there is to the cultural tradition in question and reject other persons as inauthentic” (Root, 74). The fashion industry, and other media mediums, such as advertisements, television shows and Western movies, are performing the double harm of appropriating from a false example of Aboriginalness and affirming its accuracy.

The movie industry, and particularly the Western movie, is one of the largest perpetrators of the stereotypical Aboriginal image, an image engrained into the societal mind as the accurate representation. “Beginning with the Wild West shows, television, and literature the image of Indians has radically shifted from any reference to living people to a field of urban fantasy” (Bataille, xxii). The simplified representation of Aboriginal people has been passed from colonizers, to the white majority, to European filmmakers. The resulting invention is an imaginary Indian – not a group of widely diverse people – that could be easily digested by the consumer. (Kilpatrick, 35) The image of the stoic Plains Indian and the bare-chested Apache warrior were both constantly utilized in Western movies. However, the Aboriginal individual wearing an elaborate headdress was extremely popular with audiences, emphasized inherent differences between Us and Them, and therefore became engrained as a Western genre caricature which represented reality for the audience.

The headdress was worn by various Aboriginal – and in the movies non-native – people regardless of the fact that Plains Aboriginal men historically wore it exclusively. Among traditional Plains tribes, the feathered war bonnet held special significance and indicated social status. Plains men generally used eagle feathers to decorate their war bonnets since this bird was considered sacred. The eagle was considered the visual representation of the deity, Thunderbird, and this bird was admired for its hunting prowess, solitary dignity and courage. (Brasser, Oxford Art Online) Only individual warriors who had performed valiantly in battle were allowed to create and eventually wear the war bonnet. “The headdress made of eagle feathers was believed to protect the wearer against enemy weapons...and the shape and materials of an individual’s headdress often followed from instructions given by a spirit to the maker in a dream or vision” (Brasser, Oxford Art Online). Although the war bonnet had momentous personal, and religious significance for Plains men, as a result of increased interaction with colonizers, it became the prime iconographic symbol of the homogenous Native American.

The headdress became the main distinguishing reference point between a ‘Red Man’ and a ‘White Man’. It was elaborate, loud, and created a sense of exoticism devoured by European colonizers to enhance the notion of inherent differences between the two cultures. In order to create something magnificent and awe-inspiring reality needs to be bypassed and the fragmented, and stereotyped, yet colourful, versions would continue taking precedence. This trend continues in Western movies and has entered the realm of fashion with designers creating unforgettable and eccentric designs based upon the fictionalized lives of the Other.

In Western movies the Aboriginal sidekick, enemy, or bystander is often displayed wearing a feather headdress, reminiscent of the Plains people, regardless of the location of the storyline. In 1914 Alanson Skinner, assistant curator of the Department of Anthropology at the Ancient Museum of Natural History, wrote;

Most of the picture plays shown are ethnologically grotesque farces. Delawares are dressed as Sioux, and the Indians of Manhattan Island are shown dwelling in skin tipis of the type used only by the tribes beyond the Mississippi. If the Indian should stage a white man's play, and dress the characters in Rumanian, Swiss, Turkish, English, Norwegian, and Russian costumes and place the setting in Ireland, would their plea that they thought all Europeans looked alike, and that they had to portray the white man's life through standards of their own save them arousing ridicule? (Kilpatrick, 34)

Why is it acceptable to have a non-Plains Aboriginal person 'dressed as a Sioux' while this same Aboriginal actor's traditional dress, and histories are discarded, ignored, and relegated to insignificance? The historical lack of concern for the misrepresentation of Aboriginal people is seen in Western movies. Some designers occasionally use these same simplified versions as inspiration for seasonal runway fashions.

In Western's, there was a typical formula used to dress the Aboriginal counterpart. The typical Hollywood Indian man wore a long flowing feathered headdress, a breechcloth and moccasins and wielded a fierce looking tomahawk. Occasionally a man described as Sioux might have been found wearing a Navajo blanket (Kilpatrick, 51). While the Navajo blanket was a prized possession traded amongst Aboriginal peoples, not all Plains people would have the privilege of owning one, as the audience would assume from the extent this prop is portrayed in Western's. There was little regard for exactness. "The inarticulate caricature was presented to the American public in whatever combination of tribal dress suited the taste of the director with little if

any attempt to accuracy since most of the public would not know the difference.” (Kilpatrick, 34) These imprecise representations crystallized the image of the Hollywood Aboriginal. The simplified version created for, and dispersed by, Western movies, became preserved in the minds of the audience. Eventually the idea of the headdress and fringed dress wearing Aboriginal person would be included on the runways by designers believing in the exotic factuality of the Hollywood Indian.

This is not to say that these injustices went completely uncommented upon. The idea of the instant Indian – complete with tipi, headdress, and buckskin – did stir occasional controversy. Some individuals in the film industry took it upon themselves to try and rectify the fixed perception of Aboriginal people in film. Six decades after the first Western movies became popular – movies portraying images of the static Indian – Marlon Brando was one individual to publicly react. On March 23, 1973 Marlon Brando won best actor for *The Godfather* but refused to accept the award because of the ill treatment of American Indians by the movie industry in Hollywood (Aleiss, 119). Sacheen Littlefeather, an Apache woman in the film industry, was asked to present the rejection speech on behalf of Marlon Brando.

Hello, my name is Sacheen Littlefeather, I am Apache and I am president of the National Native American Affirmative Image Committee. I am representing Marlon Brando this evening and he has asked me to tell you in a very long speech which I cannot share with you presently because of time, but I will be glad to share with the press afterwards, that he very regretfully cannot accept this very generous award and the reasons for this being are the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry (pause) and on television, in movie reruns, and also with recent happenings at Wounded Knee. I beg at this time that I have not intruded upon this evening and that we will, in the future, our hearts and our understandings will meet with love and generosity. Thank you on behalf of Marlon Brando. (Oscars, 2008)

Although her speech did meet with applause in the audience, it could not cover up the audible booing from members in the crowd. Not all agreed with the need to create awareness about the inaccuracies of Aboriginal representation in film that Marlon Brando and Sacheen Littlefeather were advocates of.

After her display of solidarity with the Aboriginal cause at the Oscars, Sacheen Littlefeather experienced rejection and exclusion from the industry she was trying to succeed in. She was belittled, sent death threats, and was called an Aboriginal impersonator, some even claiming that the dress she wore to the Oscars had been rented (Gilio-Whitaker, 2012). Sacheen Littlefeather decided to don traditional attire for her fifteen minutes of fame at the Oscars. She wore her hair parted and clipped at the sides with beaded elastics with the beads dangling to the ends of her hair. Her dress was a traditional Apache design with fringe on the arms and on the hemline, and there were beading embellishments around the neckline and down the arm on her buckskin dress (Figure 1.1). Did she believe that she had to ‘don a mask’ in order to recount a speech written about Aboriginal people?

Sacheen Littlefeather wore traditional dress to the Oscars. “The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity.” (Loomba, 137) The Oscars is an event attended by designer clad men and women. These members of Hollywood have been saturated with images of the traditional Aboriginal individual whether it be in a movie they had seen, filmed, or starred in. Sacheen Littlefeather decided to provoke the sensibilities of this particular crowd by wearing traditional attire and refusing an Oscar on behalf of Marlon Brando, which leads one to question the reasoning behind her clothing choice. Did she merely

want to display her native heritage? Or did she feel like she had to in order to be recognized as authentic, and speak on behalf of the Aboriginal community? While Sacheen Littlefeather continues to receive constant criticism, in 2012 a slur about her was passed during the Jay Leno Show, Marlon Brando received scant abuse for his refusal of the award for the inaccurate depictions of Aboriginal people.

Although this speech was made in the seventies, little noticeable change has occurred in the film industry. Misperceptions about Aboriginal people run wild in Western movies, stereotypes of stoic or savage tribes dominate the screen, and many of them do so while wearing the time honoured signifier of Otherness – the headdress. As recently as Summer 2013 a remake of *The Lone Ranger*, originally a Western T.V. series, has been proposed for the silver screen. Tonto is the Aboriginal sidekick to the Western hero in this movie. Johnny Depp – a non-native actor – was chosen for the Aboriginal role of Tonto. For the part, Johnny Depp is costumed in excessive black and white war paint and a black crow headdress adorns his head (Figure 1.2). The main oddity with the 2013 representation directed by Jeremy Bruckheimer is the immense difference between the Johnny Depp portrayal and the original T.V. Tonto version performed by Jay Silverheels. Jay Silverheels is of Aboriginal descent and in the T.V. series, which ended in 1957; he was costumed wearing no face paint, and no headdress (Figure 1.3). The more recent portrayal, which should focus on accuracies and be sensitive to filmic mistakes of the past, costumes Tonto in offensively stereotypical attire.

These static images, the theme of cowboys and Indians, the Wild West, and the headdress are constantly used as fashion designer inspiration for the runway and in popular culture. The current trend is that the more Aboriginal people protest the various

injustices done to their culture, the more likely it is for their concerns to be ignored, and for Aboriginals to be placed back into playing a caricature role by mainstream society. The caricatures include the inaccuracy that all Aboriginals – men and women – wear a headdress. All Aboriginals dance the powwow, live in tipis, and are extremely close to nature. As a society we have whittled down more than five hundred diverse Aboriginal tribes to one stereotypical element of clothing – that of the Plains headdress.

The headdress was originally a symbolic piece of clothing worn exclusively by Plains men. The headdress eventually became a pan-Aboriginal symbol attributed to all Aboriginal groups, regardless of the tribe or community to which one officially belonged. Even though the headdress became the overarching symbol of Aboriginal unity – and amalgamation- it remained a male headpiece and Aboriginal women were only allowed restrictive access to this symbolic artifact. Once the film industry gained hold of the headdress however it lost its symbolic relevance and became nothing more than an elaborate accessory worn by the Aboriginal (or non-native) actor.

The decontextualization of this artifact allowed for non-Aboriginal males and females to don the headdress in modern society with no regard to offenses committed. The fact that Europeans modified the history of the headdress, and made it a stereotypical accessory worn by people in the Aboriginal community, allowed for it to be used and abused in modern society. Many trendsetters have taken it upon themselves to accessorize outfits with none other than an elaborate headdress, believing themselves daringly fashion forward. If individuals complained about the inappropriate use of the headdress, the perpetrators merely claimed ignorance of the importance of the piece, which is shameful in the information-saturated world of today. Once the offenders

realized the history behind the item and the importance it holds to a minority group, the wrongdoers would apologize profusely, but only once the Aboriginal community voiced their concern.

The use of the headdress and native ethnic designs in music videos, magazine spreads, and at photo-shoots creates a static image of a primitive Aboriginal person unable to escape from the boundaries of the past.

### Native Stereotypes in Music Videos

In some cases individuals in the Aboriginal community have been whitewashed and removed from their community and heritage to such an extent that the colonial stereotypes are the images creating an impact on their lives. “Media portrayal of traditional stereotypes not only affect how outsiders view the culture under inspection, but the insiders of the culture begin to see themselves as others do, and the culture can be inherently distorted.” (Young, 25) The pop singer Cher and her inaccurate utilization of her heritage illustrates how media distortion of Aboriginality affects individuals within the community. Cher is partly Cherokee and therefore has claims to an Aboriginal heritage. In 1973 she released the song ‘Half Breed’ as an expression of the experiences she had growing up as part of this marginalized group. The chorus and part of the lyrics are,

My father married a pure Cherokee  
My mother's people were ashamed of me  
The Indians said I was white by law  
The White Man always called me "Indian Squaw"  
[CHORUS:]  
Half-breed, that's all I ever heard  
Half-breed, how I learned to hate the word  
Half-breed, she's no good they warned  
Both sides were against me since the day I was born  
We never settled, went from town to town

When you're not welcome you don't hang around  
The other children always laughed at me "Give her a feather, she's a  
Cherokee" (CherChannelHD)

She discusses the common words and attributes accredited to her culture – namely calling her an “Indian Squaw” and the fact that she was given feathers to symbolize her lineage. Although her lyrics provide insight into a very real, continually modern portion of Aboriginal life, the more shocking aspect of the release of this song was the music video itself.

In the music video Cher is seen on a horse, in a beaded bikini wearing none other than a long flowing feathered headdress (Figure 2.1). In the background burns an eternal flame and in the forefront is a totem pole. (CherChannelHD) A totem pole is an Aboriginal symbol of the West Coast and it is an extremely important symbolic artifact that connotes clan unity and describes generational stories. The totem pole has much meaning for the people living on the West Coast, much like the headdress has symbolic value for Plains people and should not be used as a mere symbol to connote Aboriginality in a music video.

The headdress is a symbolic artifact for Plains men, and only became a pan-Aboriginal symbol when Europeans decontextualized it. Although Plains men may have lost their exclusive hold over the headdress, and it became an artifact worn by all Aboriginal men to symbolize belonging and unity, it was not worn by Cherokee women. Cher’s costume of the beaded bikini plays to the stereotypical image of the promiscuous Indian Squaw. The amalgamation of various Aboriginal symbols and Cher’s use of them as an Aboriginal woman is striking. There is a continued tendency to see indigenous culture as true, pure, and static no matter how false or chaotic the image produced may

appear (Goldie, 236). Cher fell victim to the stereotypical media images relayed through Western movies and the general media about her culture. Her perception has not changed regarding the headdress as she continually performs 'Half Breed', on-stage, wearing this item, to nothing but applause. Some may claim that Cher's Aboriginal heritage saves her from severe criticism. However, since she is neither part of the Plains tribe nor a member of the Cherokee tribe, her utilization of this piece should be questioned. The fact that she is part of this disenfranchised group should put more pressure on her to act with respect and knowledge of her Cherokee traditions – not perpetuate European constructed 'pan-Aboriginal' ideas about Aboriginality.

Moving out of the 1970s and into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, three various non-native artists have also used the headdress as a statement accessory. This use "throws new light on the process of recontextualization whereby foreign goods lose, at least in part, the values that were given them by their cultures of origin, and are assigned meanings and uses by the culture of reception." (Howe, 5) This historical artifact, worn and cared for with such regard by a particular culture, became an item donned in passing. The headdress in mainstream society, taken out of context, is nothing more than a fashion piece worn by individuals in the limelight known for their eccentric or trendsetting attire.

On February 8, 2004 OutKast starring Andre 3000 performed live at the Grammys. Before the duo arrived on stage, there was buildup to their appearance. On stage, there was a voice over discussing the situation in 2999 the eve of the year 3000, as a faint echo in the background one can hear the repetition of the words 'Hey Ya!' sung in a stylistic Aboriginal manner that gradually increases in volume. To set the prominently Aboriginal scene further, thirty seconds later, a flying tipi lands on stage and out steps

Andre 3000 and backup dancers. All individuals on stage are wearing green-fringed buckskin outfits and the female dancers are wearing a stereotypical solitary feather headband (Figure 2.2). In the background the DJ is seen spinning while wearing a full feather headdress. (Paraguas Reloj) Not one member of OutKast is Aboriginal and there is no Aboriginal content within the song 'Hey Ya!' and yet the group decided that this would be the perfect dramatic rendition of their song.

This unnecessary, static portrayal resulted in much criticism from the Aboriginal community who demanded an apology for the unethical appropriation of the headdress, the tipi, and the sexualization of the backup dancers dressed as promiscuous squaws. Andre 3000 claimed that the scene was meant as an American Indian 'inspired' performance (CBS, 2004). Almost a week after the performance CBS apologized for allowing the group to perform the number onstage and were very sorry if anyone was offended. This, of course, was not the end of the misuse of Aboriginal culture on stage and was continued by Ke\$ha during her performance on American Idol.

On March 17, 2012 Ke\$ha performed "Blah Blah Blah" featuring 3Oh!3 live on American Idol. She originally came onto the stage wearing a metallic tube top and black shorts paired with converse boots, an outfit seemingly appropriate for the place in which she was performing. In addition to her attire, she also sported a corresponding metallic design over her right eye. Halfway through the song she stepped backstage to allow her counterparts, the 3Oh!3s, the chance at a solo performance. A few seconds later, after 3Oh!3 had concluded their section, she returns to the stage with an addition to her wardrobe (Figure 2.3). Ke\$ha decided to add a long, flowing, feather headdress to

complete her costume (GENEVIEVEBX3). She wore the headdress until the completion of her song almost a minute later.

The song “Blah Blah Blah” does not have any Aboriginal references in the lyrics. Ke\$ha herself does not claim to have any relation to the Aboriginal community, and yet she decided that it was necessary to parade around in a headdress. Interestingly, since this performance was on a show with a very large viewing audience, there were no complaints about her attire. There was no formal need for an apology from Ke\$ha or from American Idol as the OutKast performance required and it seemed like no one took much notice of this situation.

In this performance the headdress is a fashion symbol worn by an eccentric young performer. It is completely devoid of symbolic importance, the West has erased the history of this item and allowed it to be worn without consequence. “Incorporate the objects and sensibilities into the dominant, Western based culture sometimes by domesticating and sometimes by erasing the origins of these objects.” (Root, 78) Did Ke\$ha realize that the headdress has a very real, living, history behind it? Or had she merely seen a movie, an advertisement, or a fashion show and decide to include the piece into her wardrobe? When one claims ‘inspiration’, especially from an ethnic minority, there is always the potential of causing undue pain to the community and of using an image or an artifact that would have been better left untouched.

When appropriating or claiming inspiration from another culture one needs to be careful and sensitive. One of the main fears of appropriation is that one could misrepresent the culture of others in a harmful or offensive manner (Young, 9). In 2012 the multicultural pop group No Doubt released the video for their single ‘Looking Hot’,

which focused on the historical tension between cowboys and Indians. The video begins with a scenic shot of the plains with tipis in the background. The next image one sees is that of a very pale Gwen Stefani wearing a feather headband and clothed in a beaded top and white-fringed pants (Figure 2.4). After galloping off on a horse she is caught by cowboys and tied up in the town square. As she is tied up she sings the lyrics,

Go ahead and look at me  
'Cause that's what I want  
Take a good look won't you please  
'Cause that's what I want  
I know you wanna stare  
You can't help it and I don't care  
So look at me  
'Cause that's what I want  
Do you think I'm looking hot?  
Do you think this hits the spot?  
How is this looking on me, looking on me? (Merriweather, 2012)

Gwen Stefani plays a native woman. A native woman trapped and exposed by a member of colonial society – namely the cowboy. There is extensive evidence of sexual abuse of Aboriginal women at the hands of males in positions of imperial power. The fact that No Doubt believed it appropriate to act out this scene shows a lack of regard to the history and the continual stereotyping of the image of the promiscuous squaw within mainstream society.

The next scene shows a free Gwen Stefani decked out in black printed pants, sequined crop top, and she has traded in her solitary feather headband for a full, cascading black and white feather headdress (Figure 2.5). While wearing this outfit she is out in the open field stoking a fire using a patterned blanket. Interspersed with this in a back and forth motion is another image of Gwen Stefani in a tipi wearing a monochromatic red dress, accessorized with a multi-coloured choker necklace, and

braided hair (Figure 2.6). After these scenes, the natives, including Gwen Stefani, dance around the fire while the cowboys in the town drink and party. The next day the natives stage a full attack on the cowboys in the town and many of the people are captured, including Gwen Stefani, who is lassoed and dragged away. In the end one of her fellow imprisoned natives throws a tomahawk, frees her restraints and she runs away.

This video was aired for less than a week before the native community asked for it to be taken down. The reasoning behind their demand was because of the inaccurate and insensitive appropriation of Native American culture combined with the fact that a captured native woman was singing “look at me, cause that’s what I want, do you think I’m looking hot?” After the music video was removed No Doubt apologized for its creation.

Our intention with our new video was never to offend, hurt, or trivialize Native American people, their culture or their history... We sincerely apologize to the Native American community and anyone else offended by the video. Being hurtful to anyone is simply not who we are. (Anderson, 2012)

While their apology rings sincere, it is unfortunate that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century there remain misconceptions about proper and improper use of traditional Aboriginal regalia and constant sexualization of female ethnic minorities. No Doubt is an international pop music group; their attire, mannerisms, and music are inspiring to a susceptible generation. Therefore they should be more careful with how they present themselves and what they consider proper behavior for their impressionable fans.

#### Wild Savage: Native Ethnic Trends Glamourized in Magazine Spreads

It is not just the music industry that has decided to capitalize upon the native ethnic trend. It is seen in various photo shoots from international *Vogue* and *Glamour*

spreads. “Exoticism in its commodified form appears as a sophisticated appreciation of other cultures or as an aestheticized nostalgia for a different place or time, but the context of exotic images links it closely to colonialism and to contemporary systems of economic and cultural domination.” (Root, 29) It is Westerners and Europeans who are gaining economically from the commodification of an Other’s history. Aboriginal people rarely see the proceeds of successful photo-shoots, music videos or fashion shows based/inspired/appropriated on the pertinent images of their historical life.

For April 2011, *Vogue Spain* decided to include a photo-shoot entitled Wild Savage. In the spread Toni Garrn – a non-native model – is seen wearing an array of Aboriginal inspired fashions. The clothes are predominantly taken from the fashion lines of Ralph Lauren, Roberto Cavalli, and Emilio Pucci and styled together to create a native look. In order to go along with the wild savage theme the photos are shot in black and white and the model’s hair appears matted, unwashed and heavy.

The first photo from the shoot has Toni Garrn wearing oversized jewelry paired with an unstructured cropped shirt. Both sleeves are heavily overemphasized with the shoulders greatly expanded. The cusps of both shoulders are embroidered and have fringe dangling from the ends. She is also wearing a thick belt with massive amounts of fringe that hangs to mid-thigh. The belt is barely covering a pair of undergarments and that sums up the extent of the clothing worn in the photo by the model (Figure 3.1). The second photo has her hair styled in a braid with a feather haphazardly clinging to her hair but once again she is wearing little clothing. A pair of undergarments is once more displayed beneath a chunky decorated belt and her bottoms are combined with a simple tank top. Over the tank top is a fur vest with fringe dangling from the ends. She is

wearing oversized jewelry – bracelets, rings, and earrings - and her necklace contains a fur and bead piece. She also has a white kerchief tied around her neck (Figure 3.2). The most striking of the collection is the last photo. The last photograph is an upper body picture. Her midriff is exposed and one sees a snakeskin-like bikini top. Once again she is wearing oversized jewelry and multiple necklaces. The necklaces she is wearing show a metal feather, a piece of rock and a shorter medallion like piece. She is staring straight into the camera with a fierce look. However the most arresting element of this final photo is that she is wearing a full-feathered headdress with an animal fur tail framing each side of her face. There is embroidery on the front portion of the headdress and her hair is once more braided (Figure 3.3).

Toni Garrn is a white model wearing appropriated Aboriginal fashions. She is wearing a headdress which has symbolic significance to a culture far removed from her own. The Aboriginal society was not included in any significant way in the creation of the Wild Savage magazine spread. The model, the fashion designers, and the creative director all fall into a purely European background. Aboriginals have not benefited from the shoot inspired by a historical representation of Native American life. In fact, the use of the headdress is disrespectful to the Aboriginal community and if this issue of *Vogue Spain* had been readily available in Canada, there probably would have been backlash from Aboriginal individuals just as the OutKast performance and No Doubt video demanded. However these particular images remain somewhat ignored. This appropriation reduces the living people and cultures to the status of objects (Root, 72). The Aboriginal person – the wild savage – is represented, contained, and maintained within eight boxes of native ethnic fashion worn by a white model.

This is not a solitary occurrence. In March 2011 *Vogue Russia* also decided to run a Wild Western inspired photo-shoot featuring the American model Jacquelyn Jablonski. This shoot played upon the Wild West movie themes and harkened back to a cowboy and Indian mélange of fashions. The pieces were taken from the creative minds of Blumarine, Pamela Love, Stetson, and the notorious appropriator Ralph Lauren. Although this creative display played to the cowboy-look, there were clothing pieces with native ethnic elements. While the model occasionally wore a cowboy hat to play up the Western caricature, her hair was extremely dark and long, almost touching her knees, and if it was not free flowing, it was tied up in two Pocahontas-like braids.

The audience first glances upon a print of none other than a cowboy hat wearing, gun totting, Jacquelyn Jablonski. In this photo her hair is free floating and wind swept with a noticeable braid of feathers spryly placed in her hair. She is wearing a leather fringe vest over an open light denim shirt that reveals her midriff-bearing top. The cropped top is slightly embroidered at the neckline. She is also wearing black pants and a leather belt with two guns and a star motif located at the center buckle and attached to the belt are two shiny holsters holding loaded guns (Figure 3.4). While the first image is clearly a stereotypical representation of 1800s cowboy style, there remains a hint of native influence (with the feathers and the fringe detail). The second photo sees Jablonski lose the cowboy hat and she now sports long braided hair. Once again she wears a denim shirt open to just above her midriff, but this time her chest is easily exposed rather than covered as previously. She is wearing a pair of khaki belted pants and a leather purse with a skeletal bullhead at the clasp. The necklaces she wears include a silver feather and a replica of either a tooth or an animal nail. On top of her shoulders

she carries a blanket (Figure 3.5). What has happened to the cowboy theme of this photo-shoot? Jablonski has gone from a gun-wielding cowgirl to become an exposed woman with more prominent native ethnic elements (braids, feathers, and references to animals.)

The last frame of this spread features the model Jablonski juxtaposed almost completely with the first image from the collection. While originally she is portrayed as a cowboy – ready and able to defend herself – the last picture shows her with no visible means of protection. Her hair in this photo, while not braided, is used to cover her completely naked upper body. The only adornment she is wearing is an ornate necklace and a zippered bullhead with crystals for eyes around her neck. Her brown leather pants are barely seamed together with visible patches of skin showing through. Included over the buckle of her belt is the pelt of a fur animal (Figure 3.6). By the time this shoot is over Jablonski has turned from a civilized cowboy into a woman turned somewhat wild. Her progression (or digression) from town life to that of an uncivilized person is documented. The wild has taken its hold on this model and the exotic has reared its head and consumed her. One cannot simply document the cowboy without describing the nemesis of town life – the Aboriginal. This is displayed wholeheartedly in the transformation ascribed to Jablonski and documented by the creative director Jason Kibbler. In order to effectively articulate the life of a 1800s cowboy, one needs to include images of the Other. “One’s sense of self is always meditated by the image one has of the other. I have asked myself at times whether a superficial knowledge of the other, in terms of some stereotype, is not a way of preserving a superficial image of oneself.” (Ashcroft, 217) In order to understand one’s role in society one needs to have an image with which to contrast it. “The construction of the exotic is a mechanism for

reinforcing a strong sense of identity for the individual or the community that is doing the viewing.” (Santaolalla, 23) The cowboy dressed and acted in a particular way to further differentiate his/herself from the exotic, backwards, wild people one needed to protect the town against.

*Vogue* was not the only major fashion magazine capitalizing on the popularity of the native ethnic trend. *Glamour* magazine also took up the torch in April 2010. *Glamour*'s photo-shoot featured a pictorial story of a young white model with nothing but sand and sky in the background. This native ethnic representation was aptly called Little Indian Girl or Eté Indien. Once again the culture is neatly packaged for the consumers convenience (Root, 70). The main pieces were taken from the fashion minds of Isabel Marant, Dolce&Gabbana, and Yves St. Laurent; designers who continually use Aboriginal clothing as inspiration for their runway shows. The outfit collaborations created by the stylist were rendered as pieces with ‘exotic’, and ‘neo-Pocahontas’ qualities.

The opening image is a full body shot of the model with dark braided hair leaning against a dead tree. She is wearing a khaki trench coat overtop a skin-tight black dress. The black dress splits up at the bottom to reveal a blue fabric layer beneath. Halfway down the dress begins uneven crisscrossing of off white fringe detailing which eventually spills over the dress and hangs loosely. The sandals she is wearing are heavily embroidered and her jewelry has turquoise elements (Figure 3.7). The second image has her again stylized in the same manner – loose, solitary braid, and leaning against the same tree with a sandy backdrop. She is wearing a black blazer over a simple black tank top. The blazer is embellished with fringed beading detail on the edges. This element on

the jacket brings in the completely beaded belt she is wearing. The belt is the focal point of this image. The shorts that complete the outfit are also black which creates nothing more than a silhouette outline for the belt. The central portion of the belt is an ornate seven-pieced object encircled by a dense blue band, the middle of the belt seems to have crocheted elements, and white beads frame the completely beaded belt. A pair of buckskin moccasins finishes the outfit (Figure 3.8). Neo-Pocahontas elements are brought in through the outfits, the backdrop, and the stylized image of the model's hair and make-up.

As these three photo shoots display, with titles such as Wild Savage and Little Indian Girl, the audience should be prepared for the images they are about to be bombarded with as they flip through their magazine of choice. Once the title is absorbed, one expects to see exoticism, differences, the Other. One expects to see a desert setting, or a forest, or non-industrial landscape. One expects to see clothing pieces that scream Native American, or tribal, or ethnic. These photo shoots played up too their respective titles perfectly. "In order to work, the objects, events, and experiences that are commodified and marketed as cultural difference are dependent on concepts of cultural and aesthetic authenticity." (Root, 69) The static image crystallized in the mind of members of mainstream society is what one expects to see when the words native ethnic, or Wild Savage are utilized. Anything outside the normalization of equating Aboriginal people with the headdress, fringed clothing, moccasins and the fixity of their primitive life, trapped in the 1800s, would be considered unacceptable, disingenuous, and most importantly *unrecognizable*.

Fashion designers, and magazine editors turn a blind eye to the Aboriginal person inhabiting modern spaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They do not want to see the Aboriginal individual participating in society today. They do not want to claim inspiration from Aboriginal activists, mothers, or residential school survivors. Difference itself is able to produce intense excitement and pleasure at the cost of negating the people or culture that is the source of interest (Root, 30). These present-day individuals, in the eyes of popular culture and fashion designers, do not represent the 'true' image, the authentic version of Aboriginal life that has been wholeheartedly consumed and recycled by modern society and the generations preceding.

Regardless of the notion that society's change and adapt to new situations, fashion designers do not allow modification and reality to encroach upon the stereotypical portrayal of Aboriginal society. Aboriginal people have been depicted as headdress wearing, and fringe loving for centuries, why represent the changes that have occurred, when the exotic and the stagnant is what will sell?

...those doing the saving choose what fragments of a culture they will salvage. Having done this they become both the owners and interpreters of the artifacts or goods that have survived from that dying culture, artifacts that become rare and therefore valuable.  
(Root, 74)

While magazine spreads are able to dedicate whole shoots to the stereotypical display of Aboriginal society, bathing suit advertisements and haute couture fashion designers have been seen to occasionally 'borrow' the headdress and other various Aboriginal attributed styles to characterize their shoots as different, original, and exotic.

Unique? Just Add a Headdress

The headdress has become the stylized article of choice used by individuals in nearly every creative facet of the fashion industry. The headdress represents uniqueness and exoticism. It is an item of a culture from supposedly far away and long ago. The stylized headdress connotes a notion of constant primitivism, regardless of the reality that Aboriginal people are not part of a pristine, crystallized past society. Native Americans rather live and breathe in the same world as the fashion designers using an Other's history for inspiration. Fashion designers create further injustice by claiming that Aboriginal culture exudes uncomplicated naturalism in relation to the fast-paced narrative of modernity. Aboriginal societies, and the individuals within them, face the same predicaments and maybe more issues than the average modern citizen. This reality is hardly recognized when the message dispersed about Aboriginals, through the clothing pieces chosen to represent them, is of a people lost in the past.

Continuing to spread images of non-Aboriginal women wearing the various styles attributed to the Aboriginal community allows for notions of difference and exoticism to flourish. White women are the prime models used to showcase Aboriginal fashions. Whether it be in a music video, or a magazine spread women flaunt native ethnic trends. Straight, white men do not wear the elaborate headdress, it would be a fashion faux pas that would spark criticism and derision rather than the admiration it has currently garnished worn by blonde, doe-eyed females in the world of fashion. Although the headdress traditionally is a respected symbolic artifact worn by Plains men, its significance has been diluted to such an extent that it has become nothing more than a frivolous fashion item worn exclusively by the 'puerile' half of society – mainly the female half. Women are considered more likely to embrace unique and exotic styles in

order to peacock in the crowd. What would make one stand out more than an elaborate, full-length flowing feathered headdress? Fashion photo shoots are no different and perpetuate the association of the image of women in a historically male Aboriginal headpiece.

Fringe, moccasins and extensive beading are also elements used and reused by fashion designers to expand upon the dissimilarities between the Red Man and the White Man and between male level-headedness and the excessiveness of women. “Mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and propagates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference.” (hooks, 1990, 179) Exoticism sells. Differences sell. Consumers want novelty and change, and one way to provide supposed originality is to distribute borrowed images of a primitive past that are not widely accessible in ‘civilized’ society. “This fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence.” (Bhabha, 86) The subject of the discourse – the fashions of the Aboriginal people – allows Aboriginals to be entertaining subjects of creativity for mainstream society. Clothing from the past is nothing more than a fragmented version of Aboriginal society. Fashion designers are capitalizing, and continuing to profit, on the artificiality of the dispersed image of Aboriginal people.

While fashion designers and stylists gather fame and fortune for the utilization of unique elements – fringe, beading, feathers, the headdress – the culture from whom these ideas have been taken is sidelined. Aboriginals are made to watch from a distance while their traditional pieces are decontextualized, adorned by the nearly nude non-native female body, and exploited, once more, for the gain of the colonial society. Aboriginal people, and all Others, are treated as objectified, passive sources of inspiration rather than

participants in an exchange of ideas (Root, 72). The outcry that occurred over individuals in popular culture misusing the sacred regalia of Aboriginal people is merely one example of the constant lack of communication between the living culture and the appropriators. “These practices objectify native peoples, resulting in strained relationships between the presenter and the represented rather than any real communication.” (Bataille, 4) People are not interested in the accuracy of the representation; they merely need to see a headdress, or other native ethnic elements in order for the exotic Aboriginal message to be blatantly obvious. This can be seen in the One Teaspoon 2011 swimsuit shoot, the 2012 Balmain resort collection, and the shameful display of exoticism presented at the 2012 Victoria’s Secret pre-shoot.

In 2011 the company One Teaspoon decided to diversify their enterprise and include a swimsuit line. The line would include casual beachwear, bikinis, and traditional one-piece bathing suits. The creative team at the company thought that the best way to sell their product would be to have a photo shoot with their chosen model wearing the various bathing suit styles, cuts, and patterns. The background scenery for each of the pictures was a beach. No people, no umbrellas just water, waves, and sand, the model is not even sitting on a beach towel. The creative director behind the shoot decided that one more element would make each and every one of the photos stand out and make people take notice, that item was none other than the headdress.

Every photo of the blonde haired, white model is of her wearing a One Teaspoon bathing suit and a Plains inspired headdress.

The commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only

displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization." (hooks, 1990, 186)

This company has no ties to the Aboriginal community, the bathing suits do not even have specifically native ethnic prints, and yet a headdress was deemed suitable for this advertisement.

One of the photos has the model kneeling in the sand with her face slightly averted. She is wearing a one-piece bathing suit that has a severely deep V shape neckline. The print on this lilac and off-white bathing suit could be considered leopard and the whole outfit is of course completed with a headdress (Figure 4.1). A second photo from this collection features the model close up and staring directly into the camera. She is lying down and you can barely see the bikini she is supposed to be selling. The string bikini bottoms appear to be red and the tube bikini top is red as well. The more prominent item in this print is the headdress. The headdress frames the side of her face and is styled to look like it could be part of her hair (Figure 4.2).

The headdress in this case has been normalized. It is nothing more than a statement piece that can be added to any creative outfit and used in any situation. "The indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chessboard under the control of the white sign-maker." (Goldie, 232) During the era of frequent Western movies the headdress denoted the Aboriginal actor, it was a signifier of the differences between the colonized and the colonizer. In 2011, for One Teaspoon, the headdress has lost all meaning. It is no longer a Plains symbol, nor is it a marker of the stoic or the savage Aboriginal person as displayed in Western movies, neither is it an indicator of native ethnic exoticism. This particular headdress is devoid of meaning; it is a mere accessory that can be worn like a bracelet, a necklace, or a cute pair of socks. "Societies drained of their essence, cultures

trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out.” (Cesaire, 21) One Teaspoon exemplifies the trend of undermining an entire civilization and emptying its sacred artifacts and regalia of meaning. Haute couture fashion designers with shows in Paris, Milan and London also utilize this trend.

In 2012 Oliver Rousteing presented his first solo collection for the Balmain line. For the 2012 resort show he decided to dig deep into the past and pull together an ensemble mixing different Aboriginal pieces. “Within commodity culture ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.” (hooks, 1990, 179) Ethnic appropriation is nothing more than a face-value appreciation of difference. Artifacts are taken out of context and appreciated solely for their beauty, exoticism, and difference rather than their history and symbolism. These items are then removed from their natural environment and revamped, stretched, and worked to create something new but still remain reminiscent of its ethnic origins. In this fashion it was used to better serve the mainstream culture with little regard to how this modification might upset or belittle the original community.

Rousteing saw prints and patterns that he admired and decided to include them in a line that needed something different and creative in order to flourish after a period of resounding minimalism. A period of simplicity in fashion is always followed by overabundance, whether it be in prints, volume, or layers. In Rousteing’s case he decided that bold, native ethnic prints, would be the appropriate approach. The same white, blonde haired model wore over twenty different outfits. Many of which had distinct native ethnic influences.

One of the first designs showcased was that of a mini dress. The dress has very strong, squared shoulders and the skirt flares out at the end. The dress also contains two white belts cinching in the waist. The embroidery on the dress is done on soft camel coloured leather. While the dress is beautifully structured the main element is the embroidery itself. The designs are rich in colour with red, gold, black and white predominating. The various patterns in the embroidery connote a 'neo-Pocahontas' feeling. A pair of black suede heels with a gold caper at the toe completes the outfit (Figure 4.3). The second dress also has native ethnic elements emphasized by the lavish embroidery on the piece. The dress once again has strong shoulders but is rather body hugging and has a deep V indentation in the chest. This piece also has the two white belts cinching the waist but the colour of this dress is much lighter than the first. The designs on the right and left panels of the dress are symmetrical and a plethora of triangles and zigzags dominate the print. A pair of similarly embellished and coloured heels finishes the look (Figure 4.4). The last ensemble examined is a strong shouldered, long sleeved, body hugging mini dress. Extreme amounts of embroidery cover every facet of the dress. The dominant colours are red, gold, black and white. Light camel fringe is also noticeable below the shoulder and the fringe concaves the stomach therefore the belt accessory is not needed. Black suede pumps complete the piece (Figure 4.5).

An observer viewing the pieces of this collection would have no trouble spotting the native ethnic elements in the various designs. The colours, the patterns, the embroidery, and the fringe are all constantly used to perpetuate an image of Aboriginality in fashion.

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. (hooks, 1990, 343)

For the Balmain 2012 resort line, native ethnic prints are reinterpreted for a consumer audience. The prints are seen, translated, and modified to make them suitable for a Western eye. The authentic histories behind the pieces are lost. The meanings behind the colours, the fringe, and the patterns have been re-presented by the observer to the eagerly awaiting audience. The Aboriginal person has no need to be seen, nor heard. The important elements were taken and reinvented. “There is a fear that cultural, ethnic, and racial difference will be continually commodified and offered up as a new dish to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.” (hooks, 1999, 193) The Balmain resort 2012 collection consumes the Other, appropriates the sellable design elements, and does not actively credit the Aboriginal community with ‘inspiration’ for the collection.

The native ethnic trend though reinvented and played with by various European and American fashion designers, does not stray far from the static image of the Aboriginal stereotype. Most styles contain large bold prints, fringe detail and experimentation with the buckskin dress. Many haute couture designers have been inspired by Western themes of the promiscuous squaw, Wild West shows and other various images to create styles representative of the homogenous Aboriginal. These designers are perpetuating the notion of a crystallized, inaccurate portrayal of Aboriginal people frozen in time. A recent abuse of this trend was seen on the Victoria’s Secret runway in 2012.

Once a year Victoria's Secret, a leading retailer in women's lingerie, puts on an elaborate fashion show. The show depicts leading industry fashion models wearing the company's trademark lingerie. In 2012 the models strutted on the runway and wore outfits related to various overarching themes. The themes ranged from the opening number Circus, Angels in Bloom, PINK Is Us, to Calendar Girls. The Calendar Girls section of the show featured twelve models wearing different outfits to connote the different months. The young model Karlie Kloss presented the month of November. November was meant to portray a Thanksgiving theme. The creative directors behind the show decided that Thanksgiving and harvest coincided perfectly with first contact; therefore an Aboriginal inspired lingerie outfit was deemed appropriate and fitting for the stage representation of November.

This outfit gained particular notoriety. Karlie Kloss appeared on stage wearing a tiny leopard print bra and underwear set. The underwear was worn beneath a silver belt with interlaid turquoise stones with fringe hanging from the ends. She was also wearing a large assortment of turquoise necklaces, bracelets, and rings. The shoes worn also had fringe detail around the ankle. The whole outfit was completed by the addition of a full-length black, red, and white feathered headdress (Figure 4.6). The inappropriate use of the Plains headdress in a clearly sexual manner did not go unnoticed for long. The Aboriginal community broadcasted the inappropriateness and disrespect of using the headdress in a blatantly sexual manner and Victoria's Secret representative's later apologized for the misuse.

We are sorry that the Native American headdress replica used in our recent fashion show has upset individuals. We sincerely apologize, as we absolutely had no intention to offend anyone. Out of respect, we

will not be including the outfit in any broadcast, marketing materials nor in any other way. (Hawks, 2012)

Karlie Kloss also apologized for wearing the outfit during the fashion show and stated that she agreed with the decision to remove the outfit from the broadcast.

It is much easier to apologize after the fact, if anyone dares complain about the particular appropriation, then think of a creative and original fashion design to begin with. Taking a ready-made image without thought to the culture and the history behind the item has become too commonplace in mainstream society and has gone unnoticed for too long. Only recently have individuals begun to speak out about inaccurate representations and question the ethics behind the use of certain trends. It has become acceptable and almost commonplace to allow a static image of an Aboriginal person donned in ‘authentic’ attire to be used haphazardly as inspiration in fashion, and other creative disciplines. One Aboriginal storyteller Lenore Keeshig-Tobias states,

Culture industry is stealing – unconsciously, perhaps, but with the same devastating results – native stories as surely as the missionaries stole our religion and the politicians stole our land, and the residential schools stole our language. (Young, 20)

Fashion designers are unethically borrowing elements from the history of a living culture without any consideration of the meanings specific designs might have for the culture it is being taken from. The adverse effects these trends have on the minds of the susceptible viewing society are seen in the inappropriate promulgation and popularity of native ethnic trends on the streets. Appropriation perpetuates ideas of difference taken from a minority group and occasionally harmfully appropriates sacred regalia with little reflection on the significance of the object.

Not only is mainstream society misusing the symbolic regalia of a group who has suffered greatly at the hands of domineering colonizers, but they are also placing Aboriginal people within precarious positions by believing that they are promulgating a realistic image of Aboriginalness. The demand for authenticity denies fourth world citizens a living, changing culture. “Their culture is deemed Other and must avoid crossing those fictional but ideologically essential boundaries between Them and Us, the Exotic and the Familiar, the Past and the Future, the Dying and the Living.” (Fee, 243) The static image is rigid. An Aboriginal is represented one way (horseback riding, moccasin wearing, with the ever present war bonnet) but in reality no culture is inflexible. “Such a thing as a stone age culture (static and unchanging) is a myth created by those who should know better and still put forth by those who should know better.” (Mudrooroo, 228) Every culture changes, every culture adapts, disallowing change and perpetuating an image of a traditional, historic society presents a colonial mindset.

One of the main issues with the continuation of these inaccurate portrayals of Aboriginal people is that, in order to claim legitimacy, the Aboriginal must play the role attributed to them by mainstream society. “The Aboriginal is turned into a historical artifact, a remnant of a golden age that seems to have little connection to anything akin to contemporary life.” (Goldie, 236) In order to be considered genuine one must don the mask of the fabricated reality created by colonial European society. “In order to be recognized, and to thus have a voice that is heard by those in control of power, the Native must step into that mask and be the Indian constructed by White America.” (Bataille, 17) The Aboriginal person remains trapped within a stereotype. If one tries to remove oneself from the unchangeable/static image they lose authenticity.

They are no longer considered a true representative of that culture if they do not wear the traditional disguise – whether that item is the headdress, or fringed clothing, or long flowing hair. “The native must pose as the absolute fake, the fabricated Indian.” (Bataille, 17) By perpetuating these images of a spiritual, headdress wearing, nature-loving native, we are ensnaring Aboriginals further into maintaining the fixed image created of them, for them. “For North Americans the only burden of expectation is that he/she put on the constructed mask provided by the colonizer, and the mask is not merely a mirror but more crucially a static death mask to which the living person is expected to conform” (Bataille, 17). Images provided to mainstream society of traditionally garbed Native Americans fixes Aboriginal people within the construed image. By positively reinforcing the image produced by colonial society in music videos, glamourized in magazine spreads, and fashion shows we are endorsing the notion that there is a crystallized, authentic version of Aboriginal life.

### Conclusion

The idea of homogenous Aboriginality was invented during colonial times. The ‘Red Man’ became stereotyped as brave, proud and constantly wearing fringe, feathers, beads and the headdress. Although this representation could only be accurately ascribed to the Plains people, the Europeans who claimed North America for the motherland dispersed this one solitary image of Aboriginal people as truly representative of all. This inaccurate representation continues to infiltrate the minds of members of today’s society. Aboriginals continue to be stereotyped by this general categorization regardless of the changes to their livelihood, their society and the circumstances overcome in hundreds of

years of interaction with Europeans. In order to be deemed authentic, Aboriginal people need to don a mask or a costume of a culture devised to be representative of all.

The continuation of the inaccurate portrayal promulgated and made standard in Western movies became part of popular culture. The image of the static Aboriginal, trapped within an unchanging society, became the norm used for inspiration by those in the creative fields. The reality that no society is unchanging and fixed is ignored when it comes to the Aboriginal minorities of North America. The struggles faced by Aboriginals today are sidelined, their recent history and the injustices towards them are constantly overlooked, as inspiration from their distant past becomes the fodder used to create and perpetuate Aboriginality. This is exemplified by the use of stereotypical designs, materials, and the headdress in mainstream society to create a sense of the exotic Other. These elements have been used in a variety of popular culture venues including music videos and performances by celebrities, in magazine spreads typifying the static image of the 'Wild Savage', and in various fashion shows which appropriate from the Aboriginal past with little regard of the effects this borrowing has on the minority.

The study of the appropriation of Aboriginal fashions in popular culture can still be further explored and the research conducted in this paper can, and should, be expanded upon. The data collected for 'Living on the Fringe' was based primarily on theory and visual analysis. This framework needed to be conducted since this subject has previously garnished little attention. However, now that issues of the Other and the stagnant image have been raised and identified as a constant reoccurring offence made by Western individuals of the Other's history, further research into this topic can be broached. One area in which this research can continue is through the impact this appropriation has on

the Aboriginal community. In order for this topic to be richly detailed, interviews with members from the Native American community need to be conducted. Conversations with members living on and off reserves and with Aboriginal designers would provide insight into this topic. Some of the questions that would need to be answered would include; what is the general consideration of the use of the headdress and other native ethnic elements by an outsider culture? Do Aboriginal people see the appropriation, specifically of the headdress, as a violation or as an appreciation of their culture? Does this answer vary depending on the level of involvement of the interviewee with the Aboriginal community? If the resounding response is that some believe it is a violation how can this injustice be rectified?

The second area that this research should be further explored in is that of the juxtaposition between the reality of the popularity of native ethnic trends for almost a century and the fact that Aboriginals were told until 1996 that their culture, their clothing and their lifestyle were unacceptable. How can one even begin to rectify the injustice of being told that one's traditional attire was inappropriate, and being forced to don Western dress to later see a Western individual casually strolling down the street wearing native ethnic print?

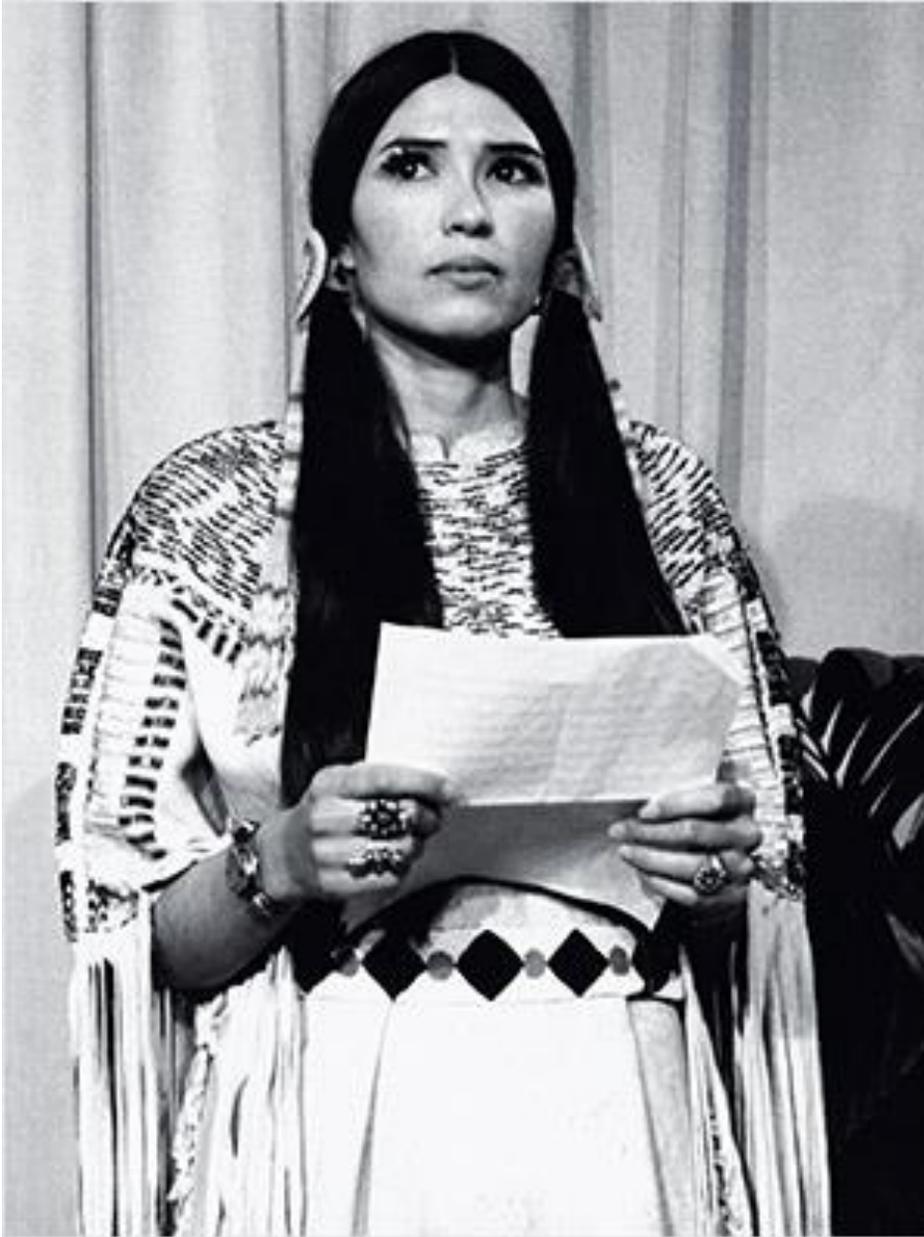
Research on residential schools, its students, and the abuses that occurred is still lacking today. In order to do justice to this topic research on residential schools; the common practices, the dogma, and the uniform of the students would need to be explored. This topic would be examined through a detailed visual analysis of school photos, before and after pictures of students and hopefully material analysis of the uniforms themselves. Interviews with Aboriginals who were forcibly entered into

residential schools would also need to be conducted in order to do justice to this sensitive topic.

The injustices suffered by Aboriginal communities in North America have been constantly overlooked and this trend needs to end. The use of sacred regalia by fashion designers and in popular culture is a trend that cannot be tolerated any longer. Research about the clothing of Aboriginal people can lead one down a very treacherous and emotional path, but it is one that needs to be travelled in order for injustices of the past to be displayed and to finally give credit to the pain suffered by the original inhabitants of this vast territory. While Aboriginals continue to live on the fringes of society in remote reservations, fashion designers are making millions per season on the popularity of fringe detailed dresses. This situation needs to be brought to light; fashion designers and members of popular culture need to begin taking responsibility for the promulgation of stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginality. Designers need to take responsibility for the haphazard decontextualization of a minority culture, and should open their eyes to the present reality instead of gazing intently into a fabricated past of a people constructed.

Appendix

Figure 1.1



Sacheen Littlefeather presents Marlon Brando's Oscar rejection speech on March 27<sup>th</sup> 1973

Figure 1.2



Tonto from the 2013 adaptation of *The Lone Ranger* played by Johnny Depp

Figure 1.3



Tonto as played by Jay Silverheels in the T.V. series that ran from 1949-1957

Figure 2.1



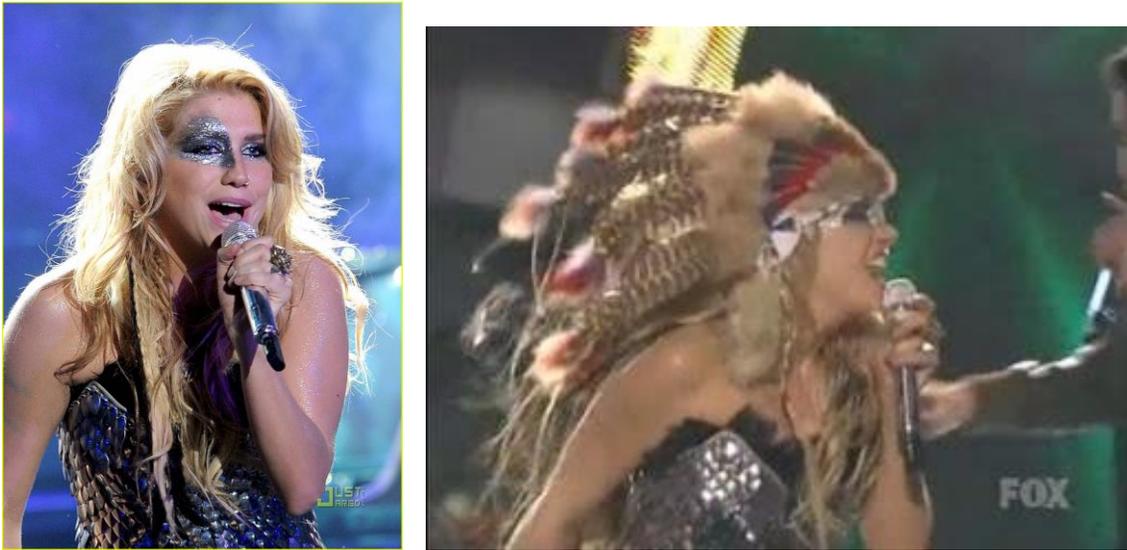
A still from the music video 'Half Breed' featuring Cher's outfit which prominently displays the Plains headdress

Figure 2.2



OutKast performs live at the Grammys in full green-fringe outfits. The backup dancers are wearing green-fringe two pieces and wear a feather in their hair.

Figure 2.3



Ke\$ha's performance on American Idol. Halfway through the show she came on stage wearing a headdress

Figure 2.4



Gwen Stefani of No Doubt in the music video for 'Looking Hot'

Figure 2.5



Gwen Stefani of No Doubt wearing a full headdress for the music video 'Looking Hot'

Figure 2.6



Gwen Stefani of No Doubt dancing in a tipi with her hair in Pocahontas-like braids for the music video 'Looking Hot'

Figure 3.1



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CON PRIN  
Chaqueta de s  
con flecos, de E  
(1.890 €); cinturón  
ante con flecos  
Roberto Cavalli  
precio; braga  
biquini en piel  
cocodrilo, de Lan  
(440 €). Los des  
credito, en  
Este Nóm

Toni Garmn wearing native ethnic styles for the Wild Savage photo shoot for *Vogue Spain*

Figure 3.2



Toni Garmn wearing an outfit photographed for the April 2011 issue of *Vogue Spain*

Figure 3.3



Toni Gann wearing a Plains inspired headdress for the Wild Savage photo shoot

Figure 3.4



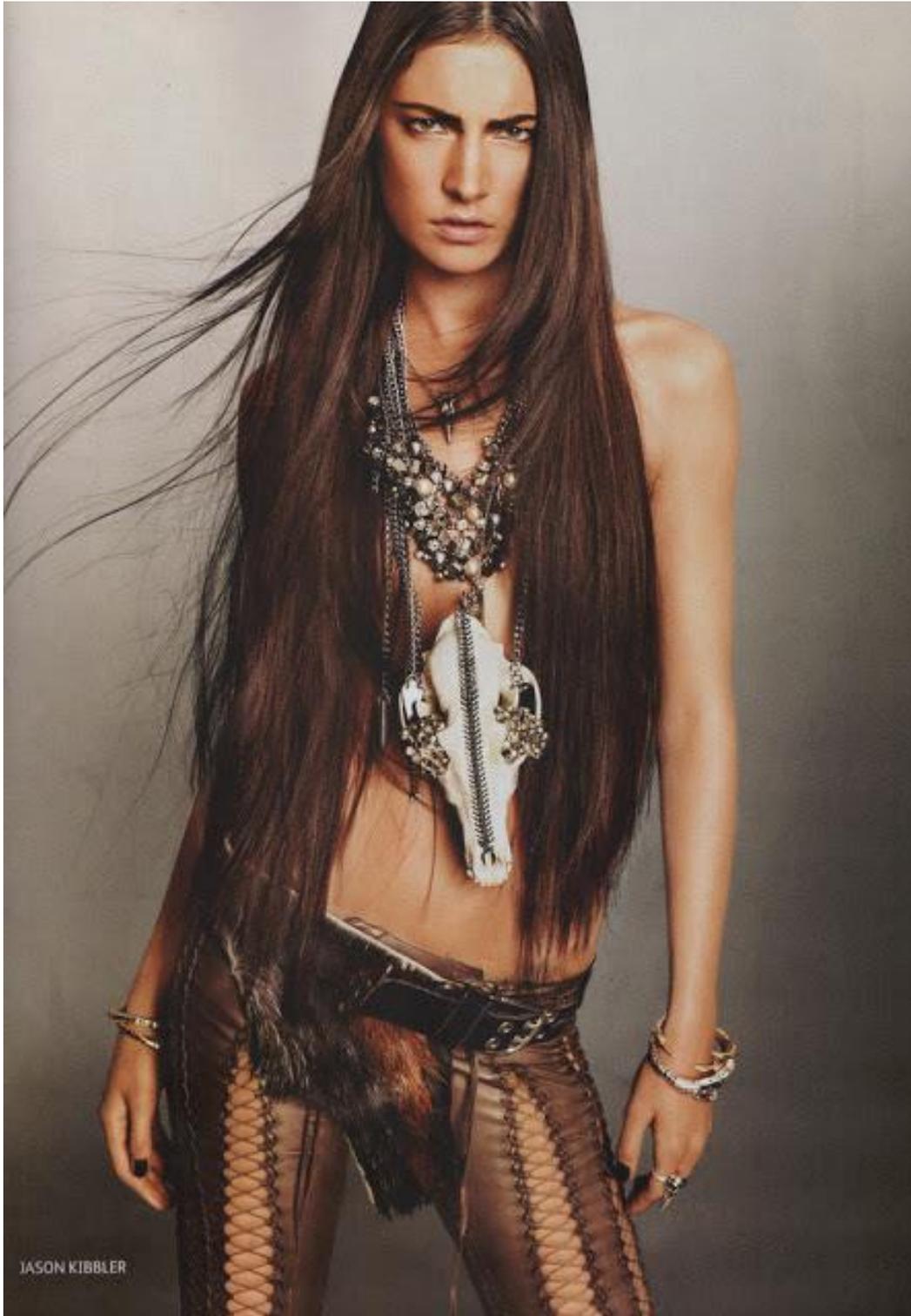
The opening pages of the photo shoot featuring Jacquelyn Jablonski for *Vogue Russia* March 2011

Figure 3.5



Jacquelyn Jablonski modeling a native ethnic inspired outfit and sporting Pocahontas-like braids for *Vogue Russia*

Figure 3.6



The last photo from the *Vogue Russia* photo shoot sees the model Jablonski completely transformed from a gun-totting cowboy to a woman gone wild

Figure 3.7



The opening page to the *Glamour* native ethnic photo shoot from 2010

Figure 3.8



An outfit featuring distinct native ethnic elements from the fringe, to the beaded belt to the moccasins from the *Glamour* photo shoot  
Figure 4.1



Image from the One Teaspoon 2011 swimsuit advertisement with the model wearing a Plains inspired headdress

Figure 4.2



Image from the One Teaspoon 2011 swimsuit advertisement  
Figure 4.3



Design from the creative mind of Oliver Rousteing for the Balmain Resort 2012 collection  
Figure 4.4



Outfit from the Balmain 2012 Resort collection

Figure 4.5



Outfit from the Balmain Resort 2012 collection

Figure 4.6



Victoria's Secret fashion show and the representation of November by the use of the Plains headdress worn by the model Karlie Kloss

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