

Foreword

Balance and *harmony* are two words often connoted with Indigenous feminism. Indigenous feminism values our inter-relationships with nature, between genders, across generations, and with spirit. There is harmony in respecting the gifts that each individual brings into this world. Connections are valued, and protection of our most vulnerable is prioritized. Many times, the strength, fortitude, and perseverance of Indigenous women set the tone for others. We nurture and we clearly set boundaries for safety and harmony within our group.

This book provides the reader with pertinent history through Indigenous eyes. Many of our Indian Nations were matrilineal. Women were valued as an integral part of leadership. In some traditional communities, women decided the fate of the person who assaulted them. There was a swift response to egregious behavior. Now we live by other laws. The authors examine the wounds of an imposed system of justice to help the reader better understand how to bring healing. We seek the same standards of protection under the law. We, too, want to be valued and to be heard.

Iva GreyWolf, PhD
President, Society of Indian Psychologists, 2019–2021

As Iva GreyWolf notes, throughout our histories, it has been strong Indigenous women who lead by example in our communities as they protect the most vulnerable among us. From time immemorial, our communities have loved, guided, and cherished our youngest relatives as essential for reproducing our knowledge, values, and ways of life that continue to characterize us as distinct and distinctive peoples. And yet, at present, too many of our Indigenous children are overlooked,

abandoned, or even harmed by adult members of their own families. This is not to say that parents who neglect or hurt their own offspring do not care for their children; rather, for most of these parents, their own prior experiences, injuries, or impairments undermine their ability to consistently convey their love in an ideal fashion. And so, others of us must watch for instances of child maltreatment, step in to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities, and structure opportunities to intervene in appropriate and responsive ways. Somehow, some way (in too many instances), we must strive to achieve this with little help and shoestring budgets.

In consequence, maltreatment of Indigenous children creates profound predicaments for us at our intersecting identities as relatives, professionals, and tribal members. One predicament follows from a widespread Indigenous commitment to protecting and preserving the autonomy of others, leading to an ethos of social interaction frequently described as “noninterference.” And yet, someone needs to interfere in episodes of child maltreatment, which themselves entail violations of personal autonomy. Indeed, as psychologists, we are professionally mandated to do so. Another predicament follows from the need to orient, educate, and mobilize powerful outsiders to help us remedy the realities of child maltreatment in our communities. And yet, sharing stories of such maltreatment threatens to reinforce the ugly stereotypes about our peoples that were created long ago to justify our dispossession and rationalize our subjugation in this nation. Indeed, we struggle today to publicly accentuate our strengths more so than our deficits, which can invite us to downplay or ignore pressing but unpleasant issues.

As you will discover in this volume, one strategy is to historicize and contextualize the legacy of Indigenous child maltreatment. One example comes from my own extended *Aaniiih*-Gros Ventre family from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in present-day, north-central Montana. The Gone family descends from my great-grandfather, Many-Plumes, born to Pipe-Sing and Yellow-Teeth near Chinook, Montana, in 1886. Around the age of five, he was sent to the government-run Indian industrial (boarding) school at Fort Belknap Agency. Operating under the slogan, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man,” the U.S. government created such schools to deliberately assimilate Indian children into the lower echelons of American society. These schools were frequently loveless settings with rigid rules,

heartless staff, and paltry funding, incubators (by default) of child maltreatment. Standard practice at these schools was to give pupils American names by adopting the father's Indian name as a surname and assigning a "Christian" name. At that time, Many-Plumes' stepfather was Gone-To-War; hence, he became Frederick Peter Gone.

Fred Gone was a student at the government boarding school for ten years. According to my grandmother, Bertha (Gone) Snow, he never returned home during this entire decade, "not one time." When he emerged in 1901, he learned that his immediate family were all dead, including his own mother. No one had bothered to inform him. Grandma also explained that he spoke little about his school days: "I don't think [former students] ever really discussed it. . . . No. Because it was a real traumatic ordeal." In other words, he suffered maltreatment at school, which explained why he "hated the United States government. He hated boarding school. He would rather see [his own children] dead than go to a boarding school." Grandma elaborated: "That's why my dad wouldn't put us in a boarding school. Never would. We were the only kids that never went to boarding school [from our settlement]. The Gones. He just flat out refused to put us in boarding school. They didn't have no 'day' schools, but they had to make day schools and let us go to day school because my dad wouldn't put us there." And so, while the details of his agonies in school remain a family mystery, Fred Gone responded by ensuring that the education of his own children would not be marked by such cruelties.

Many accounts of child maltreatment in American Indian communities can be traced to ancestral boarding school experiences. My point here is that child maltreatment frequently originates from older legacies of abuse, and the clear precedent for Indigenous communities in the USA is the longstanding violence of colonialism. This is not to minimize, excuse, or deny current child maltreatment, but rather to understand it before judging it, and to intervene in ways befitting that understanding. Such is the goal of this book, to face head-on the ugliness and horror of ongoing harm to Indigenous children, even while seeking to resolutely intervene with great sensitivity to the issues. It is concurrently to acknowledge this harm even while recalling the many strengths of Indigenous survivance, and to commit to remedy even while remembering that nearly all parents love their children even when they fail to express it. And, finally, it is

to recollect the Indigenous traditions surrounding child rearing that served our communities for so many millennia and that may (if we open our hearts and minds) continue to do so for many millennia to come. I am grateful to these authors for accepting this challenging task, and I am proud to commend their work to you.

Joseph P. Gone, PhD
President, Society of Indian Psychologists, 2021–2023

Preventing Child Maltreatment in the U.S.

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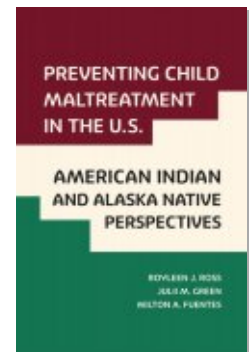
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