

We Are Not A Costume

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Even during a time of reconciliation, Indigenous people are faced with having to defend their identities from being mocked, used as a trend or form of entertainment every single day. The highly inaccurate and dehumanizing representations of Indigenous peoples in sports, on television, on the runway, or in costumes on the shelves of a Halloween store shape much of what people know and think about us.

While people who wear "Indian Maiden" costumes often do not have racist or harmful intentions, their actions contribute to larger challenges. We're placed in the realm of cavemen, trolls, and woodland fairies, and that affects how society understands the real social, political, and economic issues we face. Not only do these costumes paint all Indigenous people with the same Spaghetti-Western brush but, many of them also objectify, victimize, and romanticize Indigenous women and girls as an exotic other.

While someone may think they look supercute as an "Indian Princess" or as "Reservation Royalty" for a fun and harmless evening, they have the privilege of removing that costume at the end of the night.

Indigenous women and girls do not.

We have to deal with ongoing marginalization and the lingering effects of colonization, like a culture that normalizes violence against us.

That's why I spent Halloween weekend campaigning against offensive "Pocahottie" and "Indian Warrior" costumes. The goal: to plant a seed in the consciousness of more Canadians about cultural appropriation, Indigenous representations, and identity. Sometimes you have to ruffle a few neon plastic feathers to get your message out.

Illustration by Karlene Harvey (Tsilhqot'in/Carrier/Okanagan)