

THE POWER OF SILENCE AND THE PRICE OF SUCCESS:  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AS TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE  
FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN

(Spine Title: Transformational Resistance For Aboriginal Women)

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by

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### Abstract

Using an anti-racist feminist framework, and revised concepts of resistance, this qualitative study utilizes traditional Aboriginal Sharing Circles and personal interviews for a culturally sensitive exploration of the experiences of successful Aboriginal women in mainstream post-secondary institutions. The research focuses on two questions. What barriers confront Aboriginal women in mainstream post-secondary institutions generally, and how were these particular Aboriginal women able to overcome the challenges they faced, i.e. what coping strategies and support mechanisms had, in their experience, facilitated academic achievement and persistence?

Analysis revealed how experiences of discrimination, and an awareness of societal inequities, in combination with a belief in the possibility of social change, appeared to increase motivation and persistence. Coping strategies commonly included: ‘passing’ as non-aboriginal, becoming strategically invisible and/or deliberately silent, learning to “play the game,” and learning how to pick the battles worth fighting when avoidance was not possible. Aboriginal families generally, and mothers, grandmothers, and other female kin specifically were found to encourage and support academic achievement. Women-centered networks, positive relationships with both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal faculty and staff, a demonstrated institutional commitment to Aboriginal initiatives, and the creation of Aboriginal specific spaces provided important sources of support in mainstream institutions. This study reveals how, rather than being seen as assimilation, achievement in mainstream educational institutions can be interpreted as a form of covert internal resistance for Aboriginal women. [Aboriginal, women, academic achievement, post-secondary, resistance, transformational resistance, race, gender]

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