



Status Symbols

Dear Dr. Per Cap:

My sister and her boyfriend are always bragging about stuff they buy - new truck, nice furniture, trips to Disneyland. And she constantly posts on Facebook about their perfect life. I love her but she makes me feel crappy. How can I deal with these negative feelings when I can't afford the same things?

Signed, Can't Keep Up

Dear Can't Keep Up

It's good that you're able to acknowledge the frustration and pain you feel over your sister's boasting. Flaunting material possessions and other status symbols is truly annoying, but sadly very common these days. Some Native folks are eager to play the Keeping up with the Yazzie's game. Back in the day it was a little easier to turn a blind eye, but that's harder now with social media blasting us from all directions.

I also think we have a habit of dismissing unabashed consumerism as traits more common in white society. However, I've been around long enough to see that for better or worse many Natives have bought into the American Dream hook, line, and sinker. Fancy cars, clothes, electronics – Indian Country I'm talking to you.

But let me focus on your sister. For starters don't believe everything you see on people's social media. Research shows people exaggerate, embellish, and in some cases just plain lie on social media to make their lives appear more exciting, glamorous, and happy. Let's also think about what's really driving her behavior. She might not have the perfect life she's trying to project and overcompensates by spending money and posting pictures. Not sure that makes you feel any better but hopefully it's a start.

I also know you might not be able to ignore her. You probably can't just unfriend her and she probably even expects people to like her posts and not doing so could cause issues. When all else fails there's also the novel idea of telling the truth "Hey, I'm happy you are doing so well and can enjoy so many nice things. But it makes me feel bad when I know I can't afford those things. Could you maybe ease up a bit?" Yeah, I'm thinking that's a pretty risky approach too.

I really do think people like your sister are searching for validation and acknowledgement. Somewhere inside they feel like they don't have that great of a life....ok, enough of the arm chair psychology.

Here's my advice. Keep living smart, save money when you can, don't believe everything you read on Facebook, and remember the important things in life don't come with leather steering wheels and 4K resolution. It's also better to have \$500 in a \$20 purse than \$20 in a \$500 purse. Just sayin'.

Ask Dr. Per Cap is a program funded by First Nations Development Institute with assistance from the FINRA Investor Education Foundation. For more information, visit www.firstnations.org. To send a question to Dr. Per Cap, email askdrpercap@firstnations.org.