The Principles of Advocacy

A Guide for Sexual Assault Advocates

Mending the Sacred Hoop Technical Assistance Project
S.T.O.P. Violence Against Indian Women

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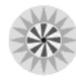
the Women before us whose experience and sacrifice we carry with us as we do this work.

 *TABLE OF CONTENTS*

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A Native Woman's Perspective on the Scope of the Problem: *Sexual Assault of American Indian and Alaskan Native Women*

As Native women and advocates, we know that in Native women's support groups or talking circles our discussions inevitably move to sexual assault. From the earliest stages of childhood to the later years of life as an elder, Native women experience—in epidemic proportions—sexual assault, sexual abuse, molestation, incest, rape, as well as other forms of sexual violence. So pervasive is this experience that the in-group dialogue generally concentrates on participants supporting one another and discussing the healing process rather than the criminal justice response. As we consider the issue of sexual assault against American Indian and Alaskan Native Women, a critical thinking analysis directs us to ask, within the context of the scope of the problem, what are the common denominators for Native women that put us at the highest risk of sexual violence? In which direction must we travel to find solutions to this epidemic?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics' Report on American Indians and Crime released in 1999, American Indians and Alaskan Natives experience violent crime at per capita rates that are double those of the U.S. resident population. The totality of this report exposes disturbing facts about American Indians and Alaskan Natives and crime. One of the most alarming revelations is that as Native women, we are over three times more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than women of other races.[1]

The epidemic of violence against Native women—particularly sexual assault—is a troubling trend that affects the health and welfare of current and future generations of women. Although research such as the BJS report is useful in exposing the gravity of violence reflected by reported crime, it is a statistical analysis that reflects only the end result of a more complex cataclysm. These statistics as they stand are staggering, but when we consider these figures in light of the fact that most sexual assaults are not reported,[2] this issue becomes a crisis of epidemic proportions for Native women.

This discussion focuses specifically on sexual assault against American Indian and Alaskan Native women because it is the single most critical issue facing Indian women not being adequately addressed by the criminal justice system, tribal governments, or society as a whole. The goal is to provide a better understanding of the far-reaching impact of sexual assault against American Indian and Alaskan Native women by exploring specific elements of perceptions, policy, and other key factors in order to determine the scope of the problem. It is hoped that examining this issue from a broader perspective will bring the critical need to develop strategies that address culturally appropriate and effective responses to end the sexual assault of American Indian and Alaskan Native women to the forefront. This approach acknowledges that the complexity of sovereignty and jurisdictional barriers deserves an intense analysis, much more than can be discussed in this brief overview; however the prosecution of sexual assaults against adult Native women is vital to

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[1] Bureau of Justice Statistics. American Indians and Crime. U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1999.

[2] Rennison, Callie M. National Crime Victimization Survey, Criminal Victimization 200: Changes 1999-2000 with Trends 1993-2000. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 187007. June 2001.

evaluating the scope of the problem. Jim Mancini of the Dine Bureau reports that rapes have jumped 40% on the Navajo reservation in the last three years, and describes the seriousness of ever increasing numbers of sexual assaults of Native women. Another notable fact is that sex crimes account for 70% of tribal investigators time.[3] In spite of the fact that research indicates a critical need for federal, state and tribal agencies to provide adequate protection to Native women, law enforcement resources in Native communities lag far behind such resources in other communities. Underlying these statistics is the vital question, "Who is responsible for the safety of Native women?"

Federal Indian Policy

The capacity to protect Native women from violence in the form of sexual assault is dependent on the coordination of tribal, federal, and state responses. Amongst the many public policy protocols addressing violence against women is the focus on developing a coordinated community response, particularly within the criminal justice system. This criminal justice emphasis has made great strides taking the issue of domestic violence out of the home and into the halls of justice, criminalizing the behavior and forging partnerships between advocacy groups and law enforcement. In theory and practical application, this coordination has provided an array of options for Native women wishing to leave abusive relationships.

Sexual assault, however, continues to be an area in which the criminal justice response to violence against women is lacking—especially for Native women. This is due, in large part, to the fact that the coordination of criminal justice institutions intersecting the lives of Native people lack resources and continuity. Although significant progress has been undertaken with the establishment of the Office of Tribal Justice through the U. S. Department of Justice, funding remains insufficient to adequately address the basic needs of tribal law enforcement, tribal courts, and correctional facilities on reservations, villages, and rancherias.[4]

As the increasing need for the administration of justice is justified through data collection and research, federal funding for Native programming has not kept pace—in fact, it has lagged grossly behind in providing adequate resources. According to recent research conducted by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, funding for Native programming has remained at an increase of 1 percent for the last six years (between 1998 and 2004). Additionally, during the period of 2002 – 2003, funding for Native programs decreased by 14 percent.[5] These statistics demonstrate a key contributing factor to the prevalence of violent crime against Native women—tribes are inadequately funded to protect Indian women. Native women's safety is further compromised by the fact that prosecution of felonies such as rape and sexual assault in Indian Country is complicated by jurisdictional restrictions that stand in the way of Native women's safety.[6]

According to Sarah Deer of the Tribal Law and Policy Institute, tribal nations' ability to exercise self-determination and jurisdiction has been negatively impacted by laws such as Public Law 280 and the Major Crimes Act. Because of the myth that certain federal laws have stripped power over

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[3] Gallup Independent. August 2003. http://www.gallupindependent.com
[4] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country. July 2003.
[5] Ibid.
[6] National Sexual Violence Resource Center. *The Governance of Indian Country: A Jurisdictional Maze*. Sexual Assault in Indian Country. 4/23/04: http://www.nsvrc.org/indian.html

sexual assault from tribal governments, the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault crimes may be limited to federal and/or state authorities, [7] severely limiting tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The protection of Native women from serious crimes does not lie in the hands of their sovereign nations but is governed by state, federal, and congressional interpretation: tribes are dependent upon separate intersecting entities. The coordination of these governing institutions requires a systematic response that is clear and concise—where all interested parties react through a common protocol or policy that supports sovereignty and the historical government to government relationship between tribes and the U.S. government. Currently, the criminal justice response to violent crime against Native women tends to zigzag through a maze of federal/state/tribal policy that obscures the application of an adequate criminal justice response. In addition, a Native woman's ability to access justice is exacerbated if she is sexually assaulted by a non-Native perpetrator on tribal land. These offenses often become mired in federal and state litigation, if they are charged at all. The coordination of an effective criminal justice response must prioritize the cooperation of all federal/tribal/state interests. These intersecting agencies must prioritize a clear and consistent application of investigation, prosecution, and conviction strategies if Native women are to be protected from sexual violence. We must identify the barriers that hinder aggressive prosecution of sexual assault against American Indian and Alaskan Native women and include making the prosecution of non-Native perpetrators a priority.

Sovereignty

Upholding the sovereignty of tribal governments is crucial to effectively addressing violence against Native women. As tribes begin to restore traditional methods of justice, the federal government can support diverse efforts by tribes to determine effective strategies governing their own members and addressing criminal acts committed against members by non-members. The ability to protect women through the establishment of tribal codes and mandates not only promotes indigenous values and self-governance, but in a broader perspective also creates acknowledgement and respect in mainstream society for tribal nations. It is through exercising sovereignty that tribes establish leadership and change for Native women. The ability of a nation to govern its own people by establishing standards of conduct is inherent to the health and progress of that nation. The lack or loss of self-governance creates ambiguity and limits the ability of tribal nations to ensure survival by protecting the rights and privileges of their members. As Tex G. Hall, President of the National Congress of American Indians said in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the United States vs. Lara, "In order to maintain law and order and public safety in our homelands it is critical for tribes to have this authority. This authority has been an inherent right of tribes. The ability to protect the health and safety of our people is our most basic and important right."[8]

The federal government's promotion of tribal sovereignty would have a far reaching impact on the development of strong, sound relationships between tribal, local and state governments. As an example, the Office of the U.S. Attorney in the Western District of Michigan has strengthened both its office and relationship with eleven tribes by aggressively prosecuting violent crimes committed by Native and non-Native perpetrators. The ability to recognize and respect the sovereign status of individual nations as well as understanding the principles of a government-to-government relationship has demonstrated a model relationship that builds sound collaboration

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[7] Deer, Sarah. Email conversation MSH-TA. 7/21/04.
[8] NCAI News. 4/19/2004. www.ncai.com

and cooperation in the area of addressing violence against women. Establishing relationships based on respect and acknowledging the distinction between tribal sovereignty, the federal government and state government creates a model of self-determination. Tribes have the ability to integrate individual cultural values into the tribal governing structure in a way that promotes accountability for perpetrators of violence against Native women in any form.

Native women expect no less than the equal protection from sexual violence experienced by women of other races. Our sacredness and our self-worth should not be negotiated away by jurisdiction or boundaries and the race of the perpetrator should not be a factor in prosecution. The experience of sexual assault is experienced by a Native woman as it is experienced by any woman, regardless of race—as a horrific, traumatizing violation. For Native women the brutality of sexual assault is compounded by their experience of institutions whose track record of justice is often distorted by the lens of bias and misperception. Native women must organize to challenge the societal perceptions that pervade mainstream and tribal communities. These perceptions are a great barrier to ending violence against Native women.

Perceptions Shape Cultural Tolerance

American Indian and Alaskan Native women have endured common stereotypes that narrowly portray them as either an "Indian princess" or "squaw". The concept of "princess" did not evolve from indigenous thought; it arose out of a first contact European desire to idealize. This stereotype defines Native women in a way that is acceptable to dominant culture—pure and noble, untouched yet desirable, and affords a measure of "respectability". However, the images of the "American Indian princess" in history books and popular media—often light skinned, complete with the appropriate model buckskin dress and feather, is not one of respect but of acceptability, with a subtle touch of eroticism. The use of the term "squaw" is at the other end of this spectrum and is intended to define Native women in a derogatory manner—imaging them as subservient and uncivilized. The word is a corrupted version of the Algonquian term for woman, and was used by colonizers as a deliberate denigration of Native women, deteriorating their traditional status within their communities and nations.

This dominant culture imagery of American Indian and Alaskan Native women has long been a bitter root for Native women, who must fight against the stereotypes used to marginalize them. Historical photographs of Native women in museums and private collections show our grandmothers—Lakota, Ojibway, Navajo women—standing strong, proud and beautiful, but the descriptive captions read: "*Squaw* with Papoose", "Lakota *Squaw* Attending Sheep" and we are dehumanized, objectified, and categorized as less than human. Perpetuating this imagery fosters a misconception of Native women that contributes to our experience with institutions that apply dominant culture bias to our bodies. These misperceptions allowed the coerced sterilization of thousands of Native women,[9] fostered our experience of sexual abuse in boarding schools, and figures heavily in the fact that we are 3.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women of other races.[10]

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[9] Define, Michael Sullivan. *A History of Governmentally Coerced Sterilization: The Plight of the Native American Woman.*, Native American Political Issues May 1, 1997. www.geocities.com

[10] *Supra 1.*

The sexual exploitation of Native women is not relegated to the history of 500 years ago but continues to be prominent in today's majority culture, which negatively portrays Native women in ways that foster indifference to the violence committed against them. Images of Indian women in movies and mass media reinforce dominant culture beliefs and stereotypes that objectify Native women as promiscuous, sexually available and therefore rape-able. These stereotypes create an indifference toward the violence Native women experience in a variety of ways. For example, the recent events of missing Native women in Anchorage, Alaska and the more recent news stories of raped and murdered Native women found along the highway in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi who are now thought to be the victims of serial killers lacked an early media focus and a concerted law enforcement response. This lack illustrates the low priority violence against Native women is given in society, especially when compared to the attention given to cases of violence against women of other races: the media attention given to the abduction and murder of Dru Sjodin, a young white woman abducted from a North Dakota shopping mall, was instrumental in expediting community and national focus on the case. The media does not react in the same manner to the missing Native women across North America. Nor does the criminal justice system utilize the same level of resources to adequately address investigating suspicious circumstances surrounding missing and murdered Native women.[11] When the issue of media bias was put to a reporter following the story of Dru Sjodin, he commented that the story made good newsprint because she was a young, white, college student. [12]

The promoted superior status of dominant culture creates the norms by which all other cultures are judged. This perceived superiority has created a tolerance of sexual violence against Native women both in Native and non-Native realities. This is epitomized by today's news stories of the sexual exploitation committed by religious and spiritual leaders in Native communities and the response of spiritual and cultural "authorities" to these crimes. For instance, the superior of a priest who sexually assaulted several children in an Alaskan community stated, as a reverend and anthropologist, that the sexual abuse would have a minimal impact on the Native children assaulted because Athabascan Indian and Yupik Eskimo cultures are "fairly loose on sexual matters."[13] The other face of this paradigm is Native spiritual leaders, who use their status to prey on women, exploiting traditional ways and corrupting the sacredness of these practices. Additionally, the result of our common histories as Native people is our own internalized oppression—the behavior that results from that oppression is often played out in familial, intimate and social relationships. A wave of grief overcomes us when such behavior comes from one of our own.

Conclusion

If as American Indian and Alaskan Native women we are to change the "scope of the problem" of sexual assault, where must we start? The first step is to reclaim the sacred status of Native women within tribal communities and dominant culture society as a whole. This has already begun in the form of the development of tribal coalitions across the United States. In each of the four directions, Native women are organizing in a multi-level approach that focuses on the issues of

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[11] Lewin, Sam. *Author Claims Media, Police Ignore Native Women.* Native American Times 3/1/2004. http://www.nativetimes.com

[12] McColl, Katy. *If Two White Girls Had Been Butchered, There Would Have Been Arrests That Night.* Jane Magazine, March 2004.

[13] Joling, Dan. *Former Jesuit Supervisor Claims Cultural Differences in Molestation Lawsuit.* Alaska Associated Press, March 2004: http://www.adn.com/alaska_ap/story/4820606p-4760255c.html

domestic violence and sexual assault. Expanding the leadership of Native women by building relationships with one another and our respective tribes and communities is crucial to the restoration of justice and is of great significance for Native families. The recognition and promotion of our own cultural expertise brings us together to share and develop solutions to fighting violence against Native women. Identifying problems and the solutions within our own value concepts and languages promotes the self-determination of indigenous ways of thought. As a movement to end violence against Native women, we must take this approach to affect lasting change.

As Native women, in which direction do we travel to end the violence against us? First, we must stand in the center—trusting our instincts and knowledge and developing strategies built on our own successes and failures. Seek out women in your own communities and include their stories and visions for ending violence against Native women. Visit and spend time with elders whose valuable experiences and perspectives are rich in history—our elders' contributions can guide this restoration of honoring the past, present and future belief that *Women are Sacred*.

Principles of Advocacy
An Overview

The battered women's movement began at the grassroots level, organized by women whose quality of life was defined by the violence they experienced at the hands of their partners. At that time, there was little distinction between survivors and advocates. Many advocates were survivors. Many survivors were advocates. We looked at one another and saw ourselves, our sisters and mothers—our relatives. Our solidarity grew out of the common experiences of women and provided the foundation for what we today know as advocacy.

As Native women this concept is customary; time honored relationships have been developed through the insight of solidarity. Native women understand sharing resources and experiences with other Native women, it has long been the way in which we have survived. It is also an acknowledged method in organizing to promote the sovereignty of tribal Nations and particularly the sovereignty of Native women.

As advocates we are guided by certain principles in our support of women. In an effort to share our philosophy, we have developed touchstones to direct our work. These touchstones originate from the collective voice of Native advocates from diverse tribes throughout the country. The following *Principles of Advocacy* are intended to provide a basis for a consistent advocacy response. They establish a common ground from which to work, reinforcing our responsibility to act in a way that balances knowledge and action. As advocates, it remains our primary responsibility to share our knowledge of institutions and the way in which they work with survivors. When shared, this knowledge benefits all of us. It provides valuable information for survivors to make informed decisions about their lives— promoting self-determination and sovereignty.

There is a custom in Indian Country that says we are all related. Many times you will hear someone use "from all my relations" as a salutation. This concept is the guiding force behind these principles. We hope that you will use them as teachings, as core concepts to work by—as standards to uphold when advocating for Native women who are survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence.

PRINCIPLES OF ADVOCACY

- *CREATE* an image of hope.
- *HONOR* Native sovereignty within the context of safety for Native women. The health and safety of our nations depend upon the health and safety of our women. They are the life-givers, who provide for the perpetuation of our nations.
- *PROMOTE* self-determination of Native women experiencing violence by ensuring their freedom to control decision-making processes and determine their own future.
- *RELATIONSHIP*—Reestablish her humanness.
- *RECLAIM* and establish the status of Sacredness once held by Native women.
- *ASSIST* Native women with getting their basic needs met.
- *ELIMINATE* compliancy (accepting things the way they are). Develop methods to eliminate internalized and historical oppression. Actively confront oppression/subjugation as it pertains to all sectors of society.
- *ACKNOWLEDGE* that the struggle for human rights of indigenous people begins with protecting Native women.
- *MOBILIZE* our communities and change community perceptions about violence against Native women through awareness and education.
- *PROMOTE* a social justice and social change response to ending violence against Indian women.
- *HONOR* our tribal legacy and incorporate traditional ways of helping and healing from sexual violence.
- *PROTECT* women's right to confidentiality and privacy when seeking safety.
- *DEVELOP* policies, protocols and practices that safeguard sexual assault advocates and women who have been sexually assaulted.

An Advocate's Role is to act as the ***biased*** supporter of Indian women experiencing violence, advocating for their ***expressed*** interests, including safe space and other resources to regain control over their lives; to provide expertise founded on women's experiences within justice, social service and medical systems; and to prioritize women's safety and offender accountability in all aspects of advocacy, including maintaining confidentiality.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #1: CREATING a Vision of Hope

> *"As a survivor of sexual assault, you have died a 'little death', yet you are here intact and untouched. The body is a cloak – the spirit cannot be harmed. You are on a healing journey. Many helpers will come into your life. Some you will like and trust others you will not. Each has a gift of healing to offer – accept these gifts as lessons toward a healing way."*
>
> *-Eileen Hudon, Sexual Assault Advocate, Survivor and Activist*

Our parents, grandparents and our other ancestors survived a holocaust and we are here. Our ways have been trampled, yet our traditions, language, and culture survive in beauty, and we are here to keep them and to protect them. Though our healing ceremonies were stopped for one hundred years by public policy, they are now at our fingertips. Our relocated community members are returning home. Our children, removed from their families are returning home. Those things that had been thought lost are returning or we are finding they never left.

As Indian women, we are survivors. Our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers are survivors. We stand in a long line of immensely strong women. Many of us are survivors of sexual assault—as victims we embarked on a healing journey toward survival and found helpers along the path toward healing. We became our own image of hope, and as survivors we help create that vision for others. Our healing, our survival says, "We are still here—with our spirits intact."

The message to victims, their families and their helpers is that one can and does heal from rape and sexual abuse. The journey can be both rewarding and challenging, but there is no clear roadmap—it is a personal process. It is important that families and helpers understand this, and know the healing experience is distinct to the individual. We must also realize that each of us has the capacity to help another heal from this devastating experience and to support and encourage a victim in positive directions of healing.

Many of the women and men involved in the effort to end violence against Native women are themselves victims and survivors of sexual violence or have loved ones who have survived an assault and thrived. While there is still great social stigma attached to being a victim of sexual abuse and rape this view is deteriorating through the organizing and education occurring in Native communities.

After sexual assault, one's perspective can be shaded by trauma. One can feel hopeless when experiencing the lack of understanding and isolation that frequently follows this experience. We are socialized to accept the stigma of being a rape victim, but we must remember and look for the inspiring and heroic stories of healing experienced by individuals within our communities.

These stories can hold out a vision of hope to women who are struggling to heal from sexual violence. They tell survivors, their families and loved ones that healing is possible, that it is within the survivor's power:

> *The most valuable lesson of surviving a devastating sexual assault came after the initial crisis period when I could begin to see the opportunity in the situation. The slate had been swept clean through violence and torture. However, I had the power to choose what I placed back my life. I had the opportunity to begin life anew. Today, the life that began after that sexual assault is the one I am living. While I despise the violence that is in our communities, I know the choices we make after the violence have the power to enrich our lives beyond what we expect.* [14]

Stories like this one need to be heard. Our communities have an obligation to seek them out and to honor those who can demonstrate positive role modeling to healing. If we obtain their permission to use elements of their healing journeys to offer guidance to others who have been victimized, if we share our own stories of survival and healing, we create a vision of hope that can become a reality for Native women struggling to heal from sexual violence. As survivors and advocates, we know the power a woman has to choose what she places in her life comes from self-determination—having a vision of hope starts with a woman's ability to take personal control. When we begin to conduct our own personal inventory of what we need to reclaim, or ways to restore that which was taken from us—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually—we begin to see things differently. It is through this perspective that we really start to see the power we possess for healing. Our ability to transform from ashes to activism is unique. Our triumphs as women need to be recognized as both individual and community victories—as a means to creating a vision of hope.

[14] Eileen Hudon. MSH-TA, 2003.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #2: HONOR Native sovereignty within the context of safety for Native women. The health and safety of our Nations depend upon the health and safety of our women. They are the life-givers, who provide for the perpetuation of our Nations.

> ***A Native woman's sovereignty resides in her body, mind and spirit. In her Body, which creates Life and perpetuates the Nation, in her Mind, which perceives and shapes knowledge, passing it down to her children and grandchildren so that they can live and thrive, and in her Spirit, which listens to the whispers of the Ancestors. She connects the past and the future in her Being. To honor her is to honor Life. To fail to honor her is to fail as a Nation and a People.***

Too often, Native women's safety is considered within the context of tribal sovereignty. This principle asks that we turn that thinking around and look at tribal sovereignty within the larger context of honoring the women who create and sustain our Nations. To provide for the safety of Native women, tribes must consider the issue of tribal sovereignty as something that arises out of our acknowledgement of Native women's sovereignty; the honor that we accord the Mothers of our Nations—our grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters and partners. When Native women's sovereignty is honored, we and all the women in our communities control our lives, we are free to walk our paths as we see fit. We are revered as the givers of life. The Sacred Circle National Resource Center defines tribal and personal sovereignty as:

Tribal Sovereignty: All Tribal Nations possess or have a right to:

1) *A land-base.*
2) *Self-government.*
3) *An economic base and resources.*
4) *A distinct language and cultural identity.*

Personal Sovereignty: a woman's possession of, or right to:

1) *Her own unique path in Life without fear, but with freedom.*
2) *Self-governance: the right to make her own decisions without other's approval or agreement. This includes spending money, having or ending relationships (including sexual), choosing what support she wants, choosing what ways and when support will be given, and also how she dresses and where she lives.*
3) *Resources she needs in order to walk her path in the way she wants. This includes housing, food, clothes, transportation, and other necessities, as well as the right to accurate information and respectful, non-judgmental support. It means access to resources that support her chosen life way, including the practice of her spiritual ways.*

4) *Speak freely for herself in her own way, to define her own reality, experiences and self-identity. This includes interpreting womanhood for herself.*

Violence against women and victimization in general means that power and control over an individual's life and body have been stolen.

As relatives of women who have been victimized, it is our right and responsibility to be advocates supporting every woman's right to power and control over her body and her life (her personal sovereignty).[15]

As Native women, we carry the sovereignty of Nations within our bodies, but this sacredness is threatened by the violence we experience in our communities. We are sexually assaulted at over three times the rate of women of other races: our daughters are gang raped, while we, our mothers and sisters are sexually assaulted by the men that share our lives. Our grandmothers, aunties and other relatives are still trying to heal from the sexual violence that they experienced in silence at the hands of teachers, priests, grandfathers, uncles and strangers. When our communities do not break the silence, the violence continues as it has since colonization and our sovereignty—personal and tribal—continues to erode. When our communities do not stand strong against the epidemic of violence perpetuated against Native women, we all participate in the destruction of our people. The health and safety of Native women and tribal sovereignty are not separate issues. Native women sustain our Nations—if we aren't safe from violence, we are not healthy, and if we are not safe and healthy, how will our Nations continue?

Safety is:

Being protected from violence in all forms, everywhere. It means having power and control over your life and body. It includes respectful support, access to resources and no barriers. It means having your personal sovereignty honored.[16]

And sovereignty is:

…the act. Sovereignty is the do. You act. You don't ask. There is no limitation on sovereignty. You are not semi-sovereign. You are not a little sovereign. You either are or you aren't. It's simple.[17]

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[15] Role of Shelter and Advocacy Training Institute: Advocating for Women Who Have Been Battered, Glossary. Sacred Circle National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women.
[16] Hill, Brenda. *Including Native Communities*, Glossary of Terms. 7/16/2003: http://www.vawnet.org/vnl/library/general/DVA

[17] Oren Lyons in Indian Roots of American Democracy. Jose Barriero. Akwe: kon Press, Cornell U., Ithaca, NY. Quoted in Cultural Competency and Native Women: A Guide for Non-Natives who Advocate for Battered Women and Rape Victims. Sacred Circle, p.2.

When a tribe expresses its sovereignty by making the health and safety of its women a top priority, everything else falls into place and a natural balance of relationships is restored. We return to our tradition of honoring women as the creators of life and the backbone of our communities. Our Nations are strengthened and we begin to rebuild, healing from the long centuries of destruction and enculturation by reclaiming our own ways of honor and respect.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #3: PROMOTE the self-determination of Native women experiencing violence by ensuring their freedom to control decision-making processes and determine their own future.

As Indian women, we know what it is like to have an outside force dictating what will be done in our lives and how our lives will be managed. For generations now many of us haven't been allowed to make choices about who raises our children (boarding schools and foster care), about whether or not to have children (coerced sterilization [18]), where or how we go to school (again, boarding schools), where we live (Indian Reorganization Act – Termination and Relocation), how we practice our spirituality (the Religious Freedom Act wasn't passed until 1978), where we work (general racism and sexism), whether we're beaten or raped, or what happens after such violence occurs. Social change involves reclaiming our right to self-determination, reasserting the right to determine our future and control our decision-making processes. We must recognize and support this process not just for ourselves individually, but for all Native women.

As advocates it is important to remember that it is never our job to get a woman to do *anything*. It is our job to provide women with information and resources and then to support them—whether they decide to use that information or not. We must constantly remind ourselves that it is *never ok to rape a woman, no matter what*. We must remember that advocacy is not about what *she* was doing when she was raped, or what *she decides* to do afterwards; advocacy is about *how we support her and her decisions*. When we lose sight of this, it can become too easy to indulge in blaming her for the assault. We might find ourselves wondering, as we work with a survivor:

> *"Oh, she's been here before…often – she was the one they coined the term 'multiple victimization' for! When we worked with her, we tried and tried to give her tools so she would stop being a victim all the time, but she just refused to use them. Maybe someone can get her to make some changes and follow a safety plan."*
>
> *- Sexual assault advocate, referring to a rape survivor accessing services at an SA program*

- Why did you go to that party?
- Why do you hang out with those people?
- Why do you insist on spending time in that part of town?
- Why do you drink/use drugs so much?
- Why do you dress that way?
- Why didn't you lock your door?
- Why won't you seek therapy?
- Don't you understand how to protect yourself?
- Why don't you just leave him if he keeps raping you?

When we allow ourselves to have this mindset, we forget that it is not the behavior of women that invites sexual assault and we lose sight of the fact that it is not our job to change the behavior of

[18] *Supra 7.*

women. It is our job to change a society that uses a woman's behavior/dress/attitude/age/sexual orientation/race/gender as an excuse to violate her.

For example, the rape kits used by hospitals can be crucially important pieces of evidence in prosecuting sexual assaults—if they are not done then, that evidence will be lost.[19] As advocates, we might feel that it is our job to ensure every woman who is raped has one of these examinations done. We would be wrong. It is our job to provide a woman who has been raped with information. We need to let her know what a rape kit is and how it works, explain why the timeline is important, what evidence will be collected, and what will be done with it. We need to reassure her that her confidentiality will be honored whether she uses the rape kit evidence or not, as well as what might happen if she does not have one done and if she doesn't want to hear about it, it is our job to respect that. This means if you are working with her in a hospital setting and the medical personnel are pressuring her to do a kit that she adamantly does not want, it is your job as her advocate to step in and make them leave her alone. You must do the same if the police are pushing her to get the examination against her will. She has the right to decide what will be done. She has already had her right to self-determination violated by a sexual assault; her right to control what happens to her in the aftermath must be upheld by the advocate, the police and hospital personnel.

As advocates we must recognize that each woman we work with is the *only* true expert on her own life. While we might have access to some information and tools that she doesn't yet have, we have no way of knowing how she will use them once we've shared them with her or how they will truly affect her life. This is the point at which we must promote her self-determination by honoring her decisions and upholding her right to control her future.

Any woman who has been raped has a right to: [20]

Life without violence.	Regardless of other lifestyle choices, including how a woman dresses, where she chooses to socialize, live, or work, what her spiritual practices are, or whom she chooses to love.
Safety at all times.	This includes freedom from physical, emotional, cultural, spiritual, financial, sexual, and verbal abuse.
Know that you are not responsible, or at fault in any way, for being raped.	Even if you were drunk/high, flirting/coming on to the perpetrator, married to the perpetrator, sleeping, etc.

[19] Marks, Sue. Program to Aid Victims of Sexual Assault, Duluth, MN: 7/21/04.
[20] Adapted from the *Bill of Rights for Women Who Have Been Battered or Raped.* The South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

Be believed and treated with respect.	Women are sacred and have the right to be treated as such.
Freely make decisions for yourself and your children based on your beliefs and experiences.	Staff, volunteers, institutions and community are all responsible for supporting a woman's decisions.
Be accepted for who you are and how you feel.	Women have the right to be respected for who they are as women, as well as their tribal affiliation, sexual orientation, economic status, age, abilities, education, marital status.
Respectful advocacy.	The role of the advocate is to pro-actively support women in their decisions without imposing their own values and beliefs. Women have the right to ask for what they need.
Credible information about sexual violence.	Credible information does not blame women for the violence done to us or label us as unhealthy, co-dependent, or sick. Responsibility for the violence is placed on the rapist, and violence against women is recognized as a system of behaviors and tactics used to gain and maintain control.
Confidentiality.	The right to choose what information will be shared, with whom it will be shared, and how it will be used.
Protection under the law in a timely, respectful manner.	This protection should be provided regardless of the jurisdiction where the crime happened, the race or tribal affiliation of the rapist.
Access to resources, and the right to refuse them.	This access is regardless of income, age, emotional or physical state, education, tribal affiliation, sexual orientation, etc.
Comprehensive medical services.	Women have the right to have physical complaints (whether or not they are the result of violence) taken seriously and not dismissed as being hysterical, psychological, or as a result of being an over-emotional woman.
Community support.	Communities must provide support through encouragement (not blame), acknowledgement (not denial), assistance (not neglect), and protection (not collusion through silence or inaction). Community includes: family members, friends, co-workers, law enforcement, tribal institutions, medical personnel, schools and the judicial system.
Accountability for non-Native men.	Even when the crime happens in Indian Country, and regardless of the severity of the crime, women have the right to have the perpetrator prosecuted.

Maintain a relationship with the rapist without giving up any other rights.	When a woman is raped by someone she knows she has a right to do whatever she chooses with that relationship.
Spiritual and religious freedom.	Women have the right to be supported in whatever spiritual practices they choose – or don't choose.

In order to have the freedom to protect our own future, we must have laws and policies in place that guarantee our ability to have the crimes committed against us brought to justice. Women have always been part of decision-making processes in our communities; we must make certain we honor the leadership and participation of women in order to ensure the laws and policies we implement maintain the self-determination of Native women.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #4: RELATIONSHIP—
Re-establish Her Humanness

> *"Women are created with the ability to produce life. Women have a special tie to the Earth Mother. They have something in common. They are the source of life. The Earth Mother gives songs to the Woman to sing. These songs are about life, about beauty, about love, about family, about strength, about caring, about nurturing, about forgiveness, about God. The World needs to pay attention and listen to Her. She knows.*
>
> *Great Spirit, let me listen to Her songs."*
>
> *-Elder's Meditation of the Day, White Bison Inc.*

Women are the heart of our communities; they are our mothers, our aunties, our grandmothers and daughters, not only life-givers, but sustainers of life. All too often, however, Native women are crudely labeled to fulfill the fears and fantasies of the dominant culture.

One such prevailing label is the term squaw[21] (often translated to mean vagina), which has been used by the dominant culture as a means of sexual/racial objectification. Referencing Indian women in this way isolates and targets Native women sexually. Objectifying Native women as squaws was an attempt by the invading culture to reduce them to a sexual convenience for men. Yet it is used commonly—landmarks and places are named after it—Squaw Lake, Squaw Knoll, Squaw Mountain Resort, Big Squaw Mountain—forcing people who would not normally use a word that so crudely refers to a woman's anatomy and sexuality, to use it. Brenda Commander, Chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians tells of "one experience that is burned into my memory . . . coming home one day (as a child) and seeing a big road sign at the end of our road that said Squaw Knoll. When I entered my home, I found my mother in tears, she was so humiliated."[22] Dominant culture took the word *esqua, squa, skwa, skwe*, which traditionally means the totality of being female,[23] upholding Native women's sacredness as the gateway of life, and denigrated it to "squaw" referencing a Native woman as a walking sexual part. Acceptance of this term supports a society that perceives Native women as sexually loose, deviant, obscene,

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[21] Note: *Squaw* is **not** an English word. It is a phonetic rendering of an Algonkian word that does not translate to "a woman's private parts." The word "squaw" - as "esqua," "squa," "skwa," "skwe" and other variants - traditionally means the totality of being female, not just the female anatomy. The word has been interpreted by modern activists as a slanderous assault against Native American women. But traditional Algonkian speakers, in both Indian and English, still use words like "nidobaskwa" = a female friend, "manigebeskwa" = woman of the woods, or "Squaw Sachem" = female chief. When Abenaki people sing the Birth Song, they address "nuncksquassis" = "little woman baby." –Marge Bruchac in *Reclaiming the Word Squaw in the Name of the Ancestors*.

[22] Carrier, Paul. *Squaw Humiliating Says Indian Women*. Portland Press Herald, January 29, 2000.

[23] Bruchac, Marge. *Reclaiming the Word Squaw in the Name of the Ancestors*., Cherokee Voice: http://www2.enia.net/users/dpanther/page10.html

impure, unclean, indecent, and creates a legacy that makes all Native women and girls vulnerable to epidemic sexual, physical and verbal violence. Referring to Native women as squaws ultimately legitimizes rape.

> *As a young girl growing up on the reservation, I was often called 'dirty squaw', which would reduce me to tears of pain and anger. And as I grew older, I came to realize that many of the town boys thought 'squaw' was synonymous with sex. I came to hate the word 'squaw' and the people who used it.* [24]

While using the label "squaw" denies a Native woman's humanity through degradation, dominant culture's alternative portrayal of certain Native women as "princesses" or "maidens" denies their humanity by elevating them to an ideal—royalty or Madonna. These labels define Native women as noble savages, beautiful, self-sacrificing, welcoming and accommodating, and have created an American mythological history based upon the fantasies of colonizers. For instance, here is how one explorer describes a particular Indian "maiden":

> *Sacajawea was not shy, but appealing soft of speech and manner. And she was gracefully feminine beyond any woman I had seen . . . her head was not elongated, as so many of the Indians, but rather small and round, caucasian in shape. So, too, were her features Caucasian. Sacajawea was not only an uncommonly pretty young girl. She was a regal woman by any standard of any race. No man who ever knew her, was quite the same again. Grace was hers, and good manners. Intelligence she had and a quick and lively tongue. Dignity covered her every move. She could look like a queen while gutting an elk. She had no crown but her auburn hair . . . but Sacajawea was a ruler of men's hearts by God's will.* [25]

In dominant culture mythology, the Indian princess/maiden falls in love with the white man, saves him from danger, guides him, sides with him against other Native people (the myth of Pochahantas, for example), bears his child, and dies. These are great romances (from a white male perspective) but for Native women this label is similar to "squaw" in that the Indian princess/maiden is sexually available to white men. The dominant culture image of the Indian princess/maiden has become even more prevalent and sexualized in current society. Under the guise of romance, we see depictions of barely dressed Indian maidens with curiously Anglo features, hair blowing and waiting for conquest, mass marketed as dolls, plates, and cartoon characters, to name a few. Dominant culture has two roles for a Native woman—if she is not a savage sexual squaw, then she is a noble savage, a seductive Indian princess/maiden.

These dominant culture labels create a world in which Native women are culturally acceptable targets of sexual violence. According to dominant culture, an Indian woman can be either one of two stereotypes, both sexual, both a denial of her humanness. There is no other choice, and a woman must navigate her everyday world as one or the other. "So as a teenager I avoided lipstick, never wore my skirts too short or too tight, never chose shoes that looked the least 'hooker-like'. I never moved in ways that might be interpreted as loose. I would become the Indian princess.

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[24] Attean, Rene. *Penobscot Woman from Old Town*., Portland Press Herald. June 29, 2000.
[25] Henry, Will. The Gates of the Mountains. New York: Random House, 1963.

Squaw is to whore as Indian maiden is to virgin. Squaw is to whore as Indian Princess is to lady."[26]

Stereotypes like savage maiden, princess, temptress, or squaw allow Native women to be treated as objects for pleasure and profit, their humanity does not have to be considered; it is deliberately denied. These labels are dominant culture's weapons against the status and power women traditionally hold in Native communities. Women become things, objects, not the Mothers of Nations. Women's choice is removed and replaced with what others choose for her. Taking away her humanity makes it easy to dismiss the violence against her. She becomes generic, objectified, deserving of what she gets. Native women become a "them" or "that woman". In considering how labels deny women's humanity, consider:

- What does it mean to be human?
- How do you make someone less than human?
- How do we dehumanize women by categorizing them?
- What are the advantages to dehumanizing women and categorizing certain women?
- What is the damage done when women are portrayed as a group rather than as individuals?
- How do you or your organization label certain women in your work? Does it make it easier for you to refuse advocacy?
- Are certain women exempt from our services and other available services in the community? Why?
- Do you see your work as "helping" her, or do you see yourself as working with her?

Labels take away a woman's right to shape her own existence, she is forced into a category where she is less than, not valued. Negative social categories exclude her and rob her of the power and dignity of life balance that she holds. Dumping Native women into a convenient group gives the dominant culture control, it tells Native communities that a Native woman is not worthy of respect, justice and recognition. She becomes a thing, a rape-able commodity, less than human. These beliefs pierce Native communities and hold them hostage to dominant culture values; they disrupt the natural balance and harmony between all beings, humans, land, plants, animals, and the physical and spiritual worlds.

We must recognize that in the ongoing battle for our true identities, each Native woman must be respected. We should arm ourselves with the knowledge that in spite of the objectification of Native women, we as a People are reclaiming the status and respect that women hold in our communities. We are strong, and we continue to "struggle on every front for the survival of our children, our people, our self-respect, our value systems, and our way of life. The past five hundred years testify to our skill at waging this struggle; for all the varied weapons of extinction pointed at our heads, we endure."[27]

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[26] Dumont, Marilyn. *A Really Good Brown Girl*. Squaw Poems. London: Brick Books, 1996.
[27] Gunn, Paula Allen.

When we do grassroots organizing that addresses sexual assault in our communities, we confront injustice and resist the dominant culture's attempt to destroy us as a People by targeting Native women through sexual violence. When we organize, we reassert Native women's rights, reclaim matrilineal and matri-focal traditions and demand self-determination as a way of reclaiming our status in our communities. What is your community doing to foster change? What are your neighboring communities doing? What ceremonies exist to take away the pain and assist in her healing? How can you challenge the dominant culture's view that Native women are rape-able?

- Promote the diversity of Native women. Each woman comes from a different background.
- Dispel the myth of the generic Indian woman—she varies in size, color, feature, and distinction.
- Honor her right to define what it means to be a Native woman for herself.
- Recognize and embrace individuality, acknowledge and own that.
- Honor the whole woman as an individual and her various roles.
- Realize there is not a woman who likes or enjoys being raped or sexually assaulted and challenge that dominant culture belief.
- Promote that Native women are more than flesh and bone. It's her spirituality, her blood, who she is and where she is from. She is not just another person, but is both mother and warrior, a balance of fighter and nurturer.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #5: RECLAIM and Establish the Status of Sacredness Once Held By Native Women

> *"My son," counseled a Winnebago father, "never abuse your wife. The women are sacred. If you abuse your wife and make her life miserable, you will die early. Our Grandmother, the Earth is a woman, and in mistreating your wife you will be mistreating her. Most assuredly will you be abusing your Grandmother if you act thus. And as it is She that is taking care of us, you will really be killing yourself by such behavior."*
>
> *-Elder's Meditation of the Day, White Bison, Inc.*

The sacredness of Native women has its roots in indigenous social structures that existed prior to contact with Europeans. This belief, that women are sacred, created social systems that operated within the context of respect and honor for the female gender. This advocacy principle returns us to this belief and acknowledges female power as the guiding force in maintaining a natural balance in life.

The female principle dictated a healthy structured society and was so integral to most tribes that its consideration was believed to ensure the survival of the people. This belief system influenced tribal codes of conduct that prescribed social order and established the role of women in society as honorable, deserving of respect and blessed with the power of life and death. As a teaching, respect for women governed relationships between genders; it was an expectation, a tradition that passed unbroken from generation to generation. It shaped many other values and life ways that established the role of women in tribal societies and acknowledged their inherent power as women.

Without the ability to give life and sustain it, our world would return to darkness. A healthy respect for all life forms and the ability to breathe life into our world comes from our Mother Earth. In every tribe there is a genesis story of how the People arrived, many of these stories pay homage to our female beginnings or honor the interaction of female and male in the creation of the People. Far from being excluded or vilified, women are central figures. These life beginnings were key supports to respect for women and their role in traditional society.

Strong images of women were reinforced by the demonstration of a variety of customary practices, such as ceremonies for young women moving out of childhood into womanhood. In many Native traditions, young women would endure a series of physical, mental, spiritual and emotional tests in their transition to womanhood. These experiences gave them an understanding of their role and status within their tribe.[28] A strong understanding of their responsibilities was vital to young women, ensuring their active participation in the women's societies that were vital to governing and leadership within most tribes. These societies varied from tribe to tribe, from healing

[28] One such traditional ceremony for girls that is remerging is the Apache Sunrise Ceremony: www.grrlstories.org/rites/ROPApache.htm

societies to tribal councils, but were a very real demonstration of the power women held in traditional societies.

A healthy respect for women guaranteed conduct by other tribal members that protected women's sacredness and ensured the survival of the People. This reverence toward women established sexual assault as an extreme deviation. The fact that women were seen as sacred meant that to harm a woman sexually was a sacrilege. The desecration of anything sacred creates chaos and destroys the social fabric of a culture. The systematic sexual victimization, rape and forced prostitution of Native women during colonization [29] were acts of desecration. We are still experiencing the chaos and social destruction this caused to our societies, as is evidenced by the high rates of sexual assault of Native women both in their communities and at the hands of non-Native perpetrators. Over time, Native women's roles as the perpetuators of Nations, as leaders of our people, have been reduced to sexual exploitation and gratification. As women, we need only to look at our communities and society as a whole to see the ways in which Native women are dishonored. Gross disrespect is evident in language, attitudes, and even shows up in and is reinforced by video games like *Custer's Revenge*, in which a caricature of a Native woman is tied to a cactus and raped. For Native women, the consequences of colonization continue to distort and defile the image of Native women, both within dominant culture and most unfortunately, within our own tribal communities.

As Native women, our struggle lies in making our way through the parallel experiences of historical sexual violence and contemporary images of Native women that obscure who we really are. One of the many challenges in advocating for survivors of sexual assault begins with a single concept—confronting dominant culture's imagery of women. As American Indian and Alaskan Native sisters, we must lead the way in reclaiming the sacredness of women. If justice is to prevail, we must begin to prioritize the integrity of women through our laws and institutions. As advocates, it is critical to the lives of our sisters and the future of our children that we work to change attitudes and beliefs that permit sexual violence against American Indian and Alaskan Native women, remembering that:

Before we were American Indian and Alaskan Native women,
We were Yaqui, Dineh, Lakota, Ojibway, Hopi, and many others.
Before we came to live in a patriarchal society
We lived in matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilateral societies.
Before we were squaws, beasts of burden
We were "Women of Nations".

[29] Gould, Janice. *Native American Women: West Coast*. A Reader's Companion to U.S. History. Edited by Wilma Mankiller, et al. Houghton Mifflin. Boston: 1998.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY # 6: ASSIST Native Women Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted with Getting their Basic Needs Met

> *"After rape, you have a whole different window on the world. There may be anger or rage, but mostly it is the fear- the driving emotion. It takes away trust and replaces it with shame. On a continuum, fear is the negative of excitement. Somewhere in the middle is joy. It takes away the capacity to feel joy."*
>
> *–Sexual Assault Survivor (quoted in "Songidee Biimadaziwin")*

When a woman is sexually assaulted, she has had the most basic and fundamental of rights, the ownership and control of her body—of her self, taken from her. Sexual assault can be experienced as "a violation of [her] spirit – soul – psyche" [30] that impacts her on all levels of her being—her body, mind, heart and spirit. As sexual assault advocates, we must acknowledge that healing takes place physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and that the healing process is unique to each survivor. We should ask:

- ❖ What does she need to start her journey toward healing?
- ❖ What can we as advocates do to help her on her journey?
- ❖ How can we assist her in her transition from victim to survivor?

It is important to remember that a woman who has been sexually assaulted is grieving multiple losses,[31] and that "the grief experienced during this healing time sometimes collapses into other losses in her life – resolved and unresolved – revisited and unwelcome."[32] As one survivor says, "My spirit has been broken many times because of the incest and multiple rape wounds of my past. The damage caused by those traumas sought to destroy my very being."[33] The rape survivor is grieving the loss of her personal autonomy, her right over her body. She is moving through a place in which this basic right of physical freedom and control has been replaced by a sense of extreme vulnerability—the loss of the privacy and privilege of her own body, her Self. She may be grieving:

- ❖ *the loss of self-worth and control over her life;*
- ❖ *loss of trust in others;*
- ❖ *the loss of freedom to exist in society or in her family with feelings of innate respect, as well as*
- ❖ *the loss of freedom to walk the streets of her community without fear.*

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[30] Hudon, Eileen. Email conversation, MSH-TA: 8-25-03.
[31] *What is it Like to Become the Victim of Sexual Assault.* Program to Aid Victims of Sexual Assault, Inc. Duluth, MN.
[32] *Supra 27.*
[33] Chinook, Roxanne. *PTSD, Substance Abuse, and the Re-victimization of an American Indian Woman.* www.dove-wa.org

She may experience fear and uncontrollable anxiety, both physical and mental, and so a basic need at this time is to *be* safe and to *feel* safe.[34]

Grief has many faces; it can show itself as anger, sadness, self-blame, and guilt. A woman can experience grief as depression, as a loss of interest in everyday activities, the absence of joy.

A woman who is raped can experience a violation of all levels of her Being. These levels are not distinct from one another. For example, a woman who is sexually assaulted may experience a feeling of shame (emotional) where she feels unwell, and/or unclean (physical). All of these areas must be addressed.

She may feel exposed, as though everyone is looking at her, or everyone knows what has happened to her, or she may feel invisible, feeling that no one sees her, that no one hears her. It is our role as advocates to hear her and to see her, to make room for her tears, for her grief.

As advocates, we must learn to respect her anger. Dominant culture teaches us that a woman's anger is, at the very least, unseemly, and at the most, dangerous. As sexual assault advocates, we must let go of this belief and be there to validate the justifiable anger of a woman who has been raped. Honoring her right to be angry is necessary to her healing.

We must be vigilant not to minimize her fear and loss, particularly if the violence she experienced happened many years ago—fear and loss might still be very real parts of the life she has been living since the assault. As advocates our goal is to provide her with a safe place in which to work through her experience and move toward healing. We must stand with her in a society that both prepares Native women to be sexually assaulted, and then minimizes sexual assault when it occurs.

Sexual assault takes away a basic right and leaves in its wake basic needs. As advocates for women who have been sexually assaulted, we are here to assist women with getting their basic needs met. What these needs are will depend upon each woman and whether or not the assault is recent. If the assault is recent, a woman's most immediate need will be that of physical safety. The advocate must determine, "Is the assailant in your vicinity?" "Are you safe from further assault?" This is not to say that the advocate must put herself at risk (we have no control over the assailant, he may be in her own home), but we can ask the victim to answer "yes" or "no" to the question and then take the task of working to ensure her safety from there.

Once her physical safety has been ensured, her most immediate need is medical attention. Injuries from sexual assault don't always show up right away; a doctor can prescribe antibiotic treatment to prevent disease immediately, as well as providing contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Whether the assault is recent or not, a woman needs to know what has happened to her is not her fault; she is in no way accountable. She needs to know that sexual assault in any form is a crime

[34] *Supra 28.*

that "happens because someone wanted to take advantage of someone else. It has very little to do with sex … [it is] a crime of power and control where sex is a weapon used against you."[35]

Another basic assistance provided by sexual assault advocates is to provide the information a woman needs to make informed decisions, and then to ***support*** her in those decisions. A woman has the right to say what she needs, and whenever possible to have those needs met. If the assault is recent, we are there to give her information about the collection of physical evidence during the medical exam and the pros and cons of allowing this evidence to be collected. We must remember this is the survivor's choice. If she decides that she doesn't want to have physical evidence collected, it is our role as advocates to support her in this decision. She has already had control taken from her when she was assaulted. She should not experience health services' collection of physical evidence without her consent as a further victimization. If she wants an advocate with her at the hospital, be prepared to bring a change of clothes for her. If she decides to press charges, the clothing she was wearing during the assault may be kept as evidence.

She needs know that she has the right to report the crime if she wishes, and if she decides not to report, we must continue to maintain our support for her in whatever decision she makes. This support is crucial to her beginning to reclaim the control—over body, her decisions and her life—that was taken from her when she was assaulted. We also must face the fact that she knows more about her life and her safety than we do—it may be that reporting the crime puts her at further risk. Part of the information we as sexual assault advocates must give her is the knowledge that she has the right to be safe and we need to uphold this right by honoring her decision if she decides not to report.

We owe women our honesty when we provide information, and we need to let go of our own agendas and focus on supporting her. For instance, we might *believe* that it is only by women reporting and pursuing prosecution in cases of sexual assault that our communities will be safe, but we might *know* that of all the cases that have been reported in our community, only one has been prosecuted (and that without conviction). If we aren't honest with women about the difficulties of pursuing justice in sexual assault cases, we aren't giving them the information they need to make their own decisions and take back control over their lives. Honesty travels far and walks hand in hand with respect. We are obligated to see her as a human being, and to treat her as a relative, not as "the client, victim, reluctant witness or a helpless woman"[36], and we are further obligated to protect her confidentiality; she must know that her story is safe with us and will travel no further.

As sexual assault advocates, we must allow a woman's silence. We should not mistake our discomfort with her silence as her need to talk. She may need silence and a place to be quiet and think before she begins to speak, or she may be making sure we are trustworthy. When we allow her silence, we are establishing trust; only through trust can we create an image of hope. We are there to honor her journey as she moves towards healing—we are there to support her, not to "fix things"—it is *her* healing, *her* journey. We must be comfortable with her tears, her anger, her grieving, and her silence.

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[35] "Songidee Biimadaziwin". Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center Sexual Assault Program, Curriculum Development Project. June 2001.
[36] James, Genevieve and Eileen Hudon. *Principles of Advocacy,* MSH-TA: November 22, 1999.

We must respect her physical space by not crowding her, by acknowledging her ownership of her body and her personal space. At the same time, we should not neglect her physical needs: is she hungry, is she thirsty? Does she need housing, shelter? Does she have enough food; does she need clothing, child care, transportation, phone service? As sexual assault advocate and activist Eileen Hudon says, "These needs are too readily overlooked – especially for women in poverty. They may be more likely to be overlooked with rape survivors since so much emphasis has been placed on improving the criminal justice response. While it is necessary to be involved in legal reform, this may not necessarily what is helpful to the survivor sitting in front of you!"[37]

In addition, what does she need to comfort her? Sometimes, having a physical need for comfort filled can help with the emotional, mental and spiritual healing that is needed long after an assault has taken place. Babette Sandman, with Mending the Sacred Hoop, tells of advocating for an elder who had not spoken of the sexual violence she had experienced until decades after the assault. She told Babette that what she needed to talk about her experience and to begin to heal was a blanket wrapped around her, so that through that sense of physical safety, of comfort, her story could be told, and her spirit could begin its healing journey.[38]

[37] *Supra 27.*
[38] Conversation with Babette Sandman, MSH-TA: 5-03.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #7: ELIMINATE Compliancy (accepting things the way they are). Develop methods to eliminate internalized and historical oppression. Actively confront oppression/subjugation as it pertains to all sectors of society.

> *"Most tragically, domestic violence and sexual assault are the dirty little secrets within too many American Indian families; which are often so ashamed or intimidated that they cannot even talk about the issue and thus get stuck in cycles of violence and degradation that should pain the heart of any decent man."*
>
> *-"Respect and Care for Women is Primary." Editorial in Indian Country Today.*

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, Native American women are 3½ times more likely than anyone else in the United States to be raped. As Indian women, we know that those numbers are probably low. Because sexual assault is so common in our communities, we don't count it, we don't report it, we don't talk about it and we don't confront it. We just know that it happens—to most of us—and we accept that nothing will ever change. It has been a tool of colonization ever since the first Europeans arrived on our shores, and it never seems to stop. In fact, for many of us, the colonization process has been so successful that the colonizers don't even need to do it any more—we do it to each other. As Native women, we are raped most frequently by white men, but we are also raped by Black men, by Hispanic men, by Asian men, and by our own Native men—in addition to being raped by other women.

Rape is simply a fact of life for many of us—so much so that we don't even call it rape or assault most of the time. It was just:

- "a bad experience."
- "well, I guess I didn't really want to, but he did, so…"
- "my husband just wants to more than I do."

but mostly, we just don't talk about it.

When dealing with another woman's rape, we confront the fact that if it happened to her, it can happen to us. The fact that we are Native and we are women raises the likelihood of being sexually assaulted exponentially. To make ourselves feel safer, we often embrace myths that give us a false sense of control or security, telling ourselves:

- "I don't party like her."
- "I wouldn't hang out with that crowd."
- "I would never go to that part of the rez alone."
- "I would never dress/flirt/act the way she does—she's asking for it."
- "Well if she didn't act like such a victim…"

This must stop.

One of the most powerful things any community can do to prevent sexual violence is begin to name it, recognizing it for what it is: a force as devastating as any act of war or genocide—a force of destruction as great as any we have so far narrowly survived.

Too many of our elders look at what is happening to young women today, and see only a reflection of what happened (or may still be happening) to them. They may resist discussing sexual violence because they don't want people to "make a big deal out of it" for a number of reasons:

- It brings up distressing memories for them;
- The fact that they were assaulted means that they must have done something wrong (see above);
- It may make them feel ashamed that they didn't make a bigger deal out of it when it happened to them;
- It may make them feel guilty that they have not done something to create a safer society/environment for young women in their families/community;
- It threatens the coping mechanisms that they have chosen.

We must break through this silence and the acceptance of sexual violence that it creates. Part of the way to do this is to recognize that the acceptance of sexual violence in our communities is not mere laziness or a lack of caring. The Boarding School Era and the abuses of the foster care system have tremendously contributed to our internalized, spiritual oppression—an internalized oppression that keeps us silent and makes us compliant. When our grandparents (and/or parents) were sent to boarding schools that were run by violent and sexually abusive people, they learned to keep quiet or suffer further abuse. When we (and/or our parents) were sent to foster homes, we learned to accept the fact that all too often the people who were chosen to care for and "protect" us from our own families were just as likely to be *more* abusive than the families from which we had been removed. Complaining or finding a way to get out of those situations often sent us somewhere even worse. We must break this cycle that keeps us silent about the violence that many of us have experienced both as children and as adults.

As Indian women, we have been pushed to accept the status quo for generations (in many cases, our survival depended on it) and we continue to be pressured to remain compliant today. When prosecutors are unwilling to prosecute the rapes of Indian women, rather than hold those prosecutors accountable, we have learned to accept all of their excuses. We hear and accept that it's hard to get a conviction if the victim was drunk/at a party/family of the perpetrator/the only witness/unwilling to testify, and if a conviction is not guaranteed, it is a waste of time to even try to prosecute.

We have learned that the jurisdictional chaos that Indian women face is simply an inevitable part of the system, and that trying to do anything to confront or change it is an exercise in futility – therefore, staying out of the system in the first place becomes the smart thing to do. It is here that systems advocacy becomes vitally important. We should never push an individual woman to work within a system that is set up to re-victimize her, rather, we should try to change the system so that it is not set up to re-victimize her. We should work with the justice system to untangle some of the jurisdictional problems that keep prosecutions from happening.

For instance, at the Nez Perce reservation in Idaho, the Assistant U.S. Attorney found she really did not have the time or resources to prosecute many of the crimes that happened on the reservation. Rather than accepting this as inevitable, she and the tribal prosecutor worked together to create a safety net: the tribal prosecutor was "cross-deputized" to try cases in the federal court. Thus, the tribal prosecutor continues to concentrate on crimes against Indian people, and he can prosecute non-Indians, as well as less dramatic crimes that the Assistant U.S. Attorney might ignore. This is the kind of creative solution that we can all learn from.

As advocates, we must speak up, and we must speak loud. Sexual violence is not a problem that is going to go away on its own; left alone, it is a problem that will continue to grow, devouring our communities and our families one by one. But when we bring the problem into the open, we can—with diligence and attention—remove the stigma of being raped, place that stigma on the rapist, and eventually banish sexual violence against women from our communities.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #8: ACKNOWLEDGE that the Struggle for Human Rights of Indigenous People Begins with Protecting Native Women.

> *"We must have respect and understanding for women and female life on this Earth which bears the sacred gift of life."*
>
> *-Traditional Circle of Elders, Onondaga*
>
> *"At a gathering of Native Elders, we were told that many men of today had lost their ability to look at the Woman in a sacred way. They said we were only looking at Her in a physical sense and lost the ability to look at Her Sacredness. They said the Woman has a powerful position in the Unseen World. She hast the special ability to bring forth life. They told us to start showing Her respect and to look upon her in a sacred manner. We must start this today, with a prayer: Grandmother, show me how to see in a sacred way."*
>
> *-Elders' Meditation of the Day*

In sexual assault advocacy, acknowledging that the struggle for human rights of indigenous people begins with protecting Native women is vital to our survival. Sexual violence in all of its forms is an assault on human rights. When a woman is sexually assaulted, her basic human rights are attacked, and her personal sovereignty denied.

> *My relatives, it is very clear—from the widespread sexual abuse, including the increasing sexual abuse of children, incest, pornography, rape, child and adult prostitution, HIV/AIDS, and gang rape found within our communities—that when this creative power and sacred expression of life is abused, in any manner, the very foundation of ourselves and our communities is damaged and destroyed, sometimes for generations.*[39]

Human rights belong to a people simply because they are human; they are inherent to each individual. All people have the right to live in dignity, they are entitled to freedom, security and decent standards of living concurrently. Human rights are indivisible.[40]

Attacking Native women through sexual violence has been a means of conquest and control since European first contact. Some of the most heinous war crimes have been committed against Native women in an attempt to destroy the Nations. In the same way that rape and other forms of sexual violence were used as "weapons of war and instruments of 'ethnic cleansing' " in Kosovo in 1999 as part of the Serbian attack on the province,[41] U.S. military actions of the 18th and 19th century targeted women and children. One of the worst examples occurred at Sand Creek in the Colorado Territory in 1864. Historically referred to as the Sand Creek Massacre, Native women and children were the predominant victims. They were "scalped, their brains knocked out; the

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[39] Lane, Jr., Phil. "Healing the Intergenerational Impact of Sexual Abuse." First National Indigenous Sexual Abuse Conference. Alberta, Canada: February 13, 2003.
[40] Information taken from *Human Rights, What and When*: http://www.abc.net.au/civics/rights/what.htm
[41] Eddy, Melissa. *Rape as War Weapon*. Associated Press, 2000. ABCNEWS.com

[military] used their knives, ripped open women, clubbed little children, knocked them in the head with their rifle butts, beat their brains out, mutilated their bodies in every sense of the word."[42] At Wounded Knee in 1890, women were purposely attacked and killed.

> *There was a woman with an infant in her arms who was killed as she almost touched the flag of truce . . . A mother was shot down with her infant; the child not knowing that its mother was dead was still nursing . . . The women as they were fleeing with their babies were killed together, shot right through.*[43]

Later, Colonel Chivington, the territory military commander that had been in charge of Sand Creek appeared on a Denver stage where he regaled delighted audiences with his war stories and displayed one hundred Indian scalps, including the pubic hairs of women. When asked why women and children had been killed, he reasoned simply, "Nits make lice".[44] Women were on display; their sexuality was a trophy for all to see, and Colonel Chivington profited from and glorified the atrocities.

Tribal systems upholding women's sacredness are a threat to a system built on power and oppression. As the creators of life, Native women are responsible for each tribe's survival, and should be honored for this role. The tribes who maintain this way have a natural advocacy through women taking care of their community, promoting and establishing equal rights and equal value for all, young and old, women and men alike—a natural balance. However, the dominant culture's impact on Native communities has replaced the acknowledgement of a woman's sacredness with male dominance and the systematic devaluing of women, destroying the balance inherent in traditional ways. Nations who internalize these values become assimilated, hurting their community and themselves by reinforcing dominant culture values through the use of sexual violence against Native women. When the values of the dominant culture are embraced, a Native woman's basic human rights are eroded, she becomes what the dominant culture largely views all women as, less than human. When a Native woman's humanity is lost, her sovereignty is destroyed, she becomes a thing, an object, her sexuality becomes a commodity that exists for others, rather than that which she owns, the expression of her sacred life force as the bearer of Life. When the dominant culture's values and attitudes toward women are embraced, and her sacredness is replaced with denigration, it becomes easy in the name of power, of dominance, to take what you want, to look the other way, to not challenge the barriers she faces. What do our communities gain from this identification with the dominant culture? What do we gain from our silence? Who looks out for the People? Who fulfills her role? What life balance exists?

What are we teaching our children? How is a system that refuses a woman her basic human

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[42] *Native American Atrocities:* http://www.lastoftheindepedents.com/sandcreek.htm. The testimony of an interpreter living in the village.

[43] Josephy, Alvin M., Jr. 500 Nations. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. p. 441.

[44] *Native American Atrocities:* http://www.lastoftheindepedents.com/sandcreek.htm. One of the soldiers quoting Colonel Chivington.

rights maintained? What is the hierarchy of the dominant culture? What is gained by this imbalance? For instance:

- What rights did you have as a child? What rights were you denied?
- How did your individual rights vary in comparison to the rights of your brothers? Your sisters? Your friends? Within your community?
- How did those rights differ between males and females? How were they similar?
- What did you learn through example? What were those examples?
- How did your rights change as you grew older? Did they change?
- What are a woman's rights?

There is a war being waged on Native women to prevent the prospering of Native people. In the words of Oglala holy man Black Elk, who was present at Wounded Knee:

> *I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream . . . The nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.* [45]

However, in Black Elk's vision the Sacred Hoop, which had been broken, would be mended in seven generations. The children born into this decade will be the seventh generation. Mending the Sacred Hoop begins through recognizing the attacks that have been waged against Native women as a way to destroy a people, and restoring her value as a human being. When we mend the Hoop, we begin by acknowledging women as the sacred gifts they are, and we begin to re-establish the natural balance of life.

[45] *Supra 39* p. 442.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY # 9: MOBILIZE our communities and change community perceptions about violence against Native women through awareness and education.

> *Silence is the breeding ground for sexual violence. Perpetrators keep silent about their actions and victims are silenced by the abuse, leaving the community to rely on myths as the context to frame the reality of sexual assault. To break through the silence, communities must be motivated to take action and change the way they think and act when it comes to addressing sexual violence.*

Public awareness and education are key factors in actively involving the community in changing perceptions about sexual violence. Community silence and resistance are the biggest obstacles we face in creating social change that addresses sexual assault, because they keep us from bringing the issue of sexual violence out in the open. Without these conversations, we are paralyzed—unable to confront our own values and beliefs, or make any headway within the community. Our first challenge in ending sexual violence, therefore, is breaking the silence. Our second challenge is working through the resistance that surrounds, supports and follows this silence. Understanding the obstacles we must overcome helps provide direction as we begin to address such a monumental problem.

In many of our communities, sex itself remains a taboo topic. When it is brought up, it is often discussed in unhealthy ways, and we shut down our children's questions with laughter or silence. People are uncomfortable talking about or responding to questions about sex. Our young children learn by asking questions about the things they don't understand. When they ask about sex, however, they are quickly conditioned by the adult reaction to feel that they shouldn't be asking such questions, that there is something wrong in approaching the topic. They learn this silence because either the adults they ask can't explain the answer, or the adults feel the child will not understand. Most people react from the perspective that their sex life is personal and meant to be kept private. When we do talk about sex, we usually focus on discussing the feelings associated with intimacy and don't really describe the physical act itself. If we have such barriers about discussing sexual intimacy, is it any wonder that we are unable to bring sexual violence out into the open where we can confront and deal with it?

The fact that sex is not discussed in healthy ways in our communities contributes to one of the most blatant obstacles we face in ending sexual violence—denial. People like to think that sexual assault doesn't exist in their community. Why? Many times we fear that looking honestly at the incidence of sexual violence would bring more shame on us as Native people/communities, while some individuals may have buried their own experiences and issues so deeply that they are unable to face talking about the issue. Another fear is that these conversations would expose the incest and molestation that many families have hidden. For most people, however, denial springs from simple ignorance of what exactly defines sexual assault.

While some react with denial when faced with the reality of sexual assault in the community, many others of us state that sexual assault is a problem, but don't really do anything for a number of reasons. Apathy can be one reason that we don't address the issue—we believe that no matter what we do, nothing will change. Some of us may think that sexual violence is not a priority issue for the community because it doesn't occur very often. In reality, sexual assault only seems infrequent because not many are reported. Another barrier to addressing sexual violence can be the many questions we might face when we attempt to confront the issue; questions like, "How do you get people to discuss sexual assault?" "Isn't it the cops' job to deal with this?" "What will people think of me?" or "How can I talk to other people when I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this issue?" This middle ground is where most people tend to stay; without direction people can spend their energy floundering—wishing to confront the issue, but unable to move because of the obstacles they perceive to making change happen.

When we do begin to talk about confronting sexual assault in our communities, all too often we skirt the issue by turning to a discussion of child sexual abuse and molestation. The rationalization behind this shift is that "we are going upstream to discover the source of the problem", with many believing this is the way to head off a multi-generational cycle of violence. It is easier for the community at large to use this issue as a rallying point—most people will agree on protecting children, but this inevitably fails as a means of confronting the issue of sexual violence against adult women.

Sexual violence dehumanizes those who've been assaulted, but supported by dominant culture's view that sexual violence is something that stems from sexual desire rather than from a wish to hurt someone, perpetrators almost never admit they did something wrong. Perhaps we should look to the positive changes that have been made in addressing domestic violence in our communities in our attempt to confront sexual assault. Domestic violence advocates continue to emphasize addressing domestic violence as a social problem rather than an inter-personal or relationship problem. This has led to extraordinary changes in the way domestic violence is addressed, and has increased the level of prosecution and conviction of batterers. There are fundamental differences between domestic violence and sexual assault, however, and the question that needs to be answered is, "Can the same method of seeking convictions of and sanctions against batterers work with sexual assault perpetrators?" How can we use some of the same methods that have worked to address domestic violence in our fight against the sexual violence that occurs in our communities?

Perhaps one answer lies in using the survivor-centered approach of the majority of domestic violence programs. Individual sexual assault advocates, health care providers, and women who have survived sexual violence have said that many times meeting the needs of survivors runs contrary to the needs of the criminal justice system. Women request help for healing while the justice system looks for evidence. Professionals in the field know that there are women who want to see a conviction, yet many survivors never report the assault, or wish to endure the adjudication process. There are many reasons why women choose one path or the other. Although training can help service providers understand the dynamics involved in a woman's decision to report or not report, the entire community response must have a survivor-centered approach that meets the needs of each woman no matter what direction she chooses.

We know rape and sexual assault are epidemic in our communities—the statistical evidence is staggering. The sheer magnitude of the impact sexual violence has had on individuals, families, and our communities as a whole can become overwhelming barriers to addressing the problem. The effects are so devastating and so entwined that many communities have reported that when they
break down the barriers of silence and denial and begin to address sexual violence, they don't know where to begin. They become overwhelmed by the scope of the problem—as adult disclosure of child sexual abuse spawns the disclosure of several rapes of adult women—they find it difficult to prioritize one over the other. The challenge lies in our ability to communicate all the issues surrounding sexual assault, as we mobilize the community to actively address this issue.

There are many methods of educating and motivating our communities: video presentations followed by discussions, educational campaigns around Sexual Assault Awareness Month, holding talking circles or focus groups, or doing community presentations. In doing this, we must expect that any community mobilization effort will encounter some resistance—this is key to accepting the task at hand. The work of organizing also requires a long-term commitment to continue to introduce new campaigns and maintain existing groups, such as talking circles. Community awareness and education is always at the forefront of social change work. If communities are to effectively address sexual assault, a commitment must be made to provide educational opportunities that mobilize the community. Sexual violence against Native women will only end when our communities break the silence and denial that surround this problem and become educated and aware of the issue.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #10: PROMOTE a Social Justice and Social Change Response to Ending Violence against Indian Women

> *Animals have the power to react against injustice. The bee has its sting, the bear its courage. Every one of them has the power to defend itself so that they won't get wiped out. A legend tells us that no matter what or how the animals tried to fight back, they couldn't do anything individually; so a few of them decided to come together. They had to. The survival of all was at stake. If they didn't unite, they were all going to go down. The eagle, who had the vision, got all the animals together in a circle and each put its power in the center. Together they appealed to the Creator and their words were heard.*
>
> *-A sharing by a Salish elder*

Social justice is about ensuring adherence to or creating laws that uphold human rights. Social change is about identifying the underlying causes of a social injustice and working to change the conditions that create and perpetuate it. As advocates working to end violence against Indian women, first we must identify injustice and then create social change by our response to that injustice. By promoting a response that incorporates both we begin to dismantle oppressive systems that uphold violence against women by addressing the attitudes, thoughts and beliefs that undermine our basic human rights.

What are human rights? What do we have a right to? Each of us, as human beings has a right to our life. We have a right to our bodies, and we have a right to make individual choices, to shape our lives in the way we see fit. Social change for Native people is about restoring basic human rights to uphold our inherent sovereignty. Social justice is about tribes reclaiming and restoring honor and respect for women—dismantling dominant culture beliefs that perpetuate the internalized oppression that manifests as violence against the women who create our Nations. The fact that sexual violence against Indian women is epidemic means on a very basic level it is tolerated. How can a society that calls itself civilized accept this crisis as a norm? Does society at large even acknowledge this crisis? Working to create social justice means we organize for change at both a local and national level to expose the severity of rampant sexual violence occurring against Native women. Being effective with social change means we work to change our communities and we work to change ourselves.

Most services or institutions are set up to respond to the symptoms of social problems—they are not set up to create social change. Their responses can be generally categorized as assisting with victims' needs or doling out punishment for perpetrators. At the end of the day any given systematic response would be able to detail the number of people who received counseling, were arrested, convicted, offered housing, or referred somewhere else. While these responses may change or affect those individuals going through the process, they will never reach far enough in responding to the reasons people are going through these systems. While the types of services or institutional responses are necessary, their role should be accepted as limited and attention should

be given to other methods of intervention—methods that don't simply respond to the problem, but work to eradicate it.

Social change movements are community-based initiatives that address the attitudes, behaviors, and acceptable social norms that create injustice that affects the quality of life for either groups or individuals. These movements also work to change laws, policies, and practices in order to create institutional and systemic accountability and responsiveness to individuals and the community as a whole. Social change efforts begin at the grass roots level. They are led by those most affected by injustice—from the civil rights movement to the battered women's movement, to ending apartheid in South Africa—such individuals have historically been instrumental in creating solutions to social wrongs. The common factor in all successful social change movements is that people with energy who were outraged at the social oppression they were experiencing, organized and collectively worked for and demanded change. These efforts involved careful organizing, public education, and a commitment to continue to challenge socially accepted norms, and resulted in social justice reform.

As women working to end violence against our relatives—our mothers, daughters, sisters—and against ourselves, many of us do this work in institutions or community based organizations. We have experienced injustice first hand, and we must take our experiences and awareness into promoting social change in the course of our work. Essentially, we are working to put ourselves out of work by ending the violence we see perpetrated against women. We must always ask ourselves "what are our obligations to women?" When creating social change and social justice for women who have been sexually assaulted, our political agenda should always keep our obligations to women as the guiding force behind our vision. We must be careful not to get off track with approaches that label the women we work with, being aware that society places great pressure on all of us to blame women for the violence they experience. When we identify women as having "relationship problems", of having a "victim mentality" or use the post traumatic stress many survivors of sexual assault experience as a label, we are putting the responsibility for the violence on the woman, and are perpetuating injustice. Social change puts the responsibility on the assailant and the community. We must promote a social justice and social change response to violence against Indian women and work to end the injustice. We must continually evaluate our obligations to women at a personal level, in terms of providing services, assessing our legal and judicial obligations, and what we owe women as a community and a People. We must commit to strengthening future generations. In the end, it is this vision that guides us in moving beyond survival, beyond our systematic involvement to create social justice.

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #11: HONOR our tribal legacies and incorporate traditional ways of helping and healing from sexual violence.

> ***"…the sacred ceremonies given to us by the Creator are the Heart of our existence. These ceremonies are our first duty."***
>
> ***-Traditional Circle of Elders (Northern Cheyenne)***
>
> ***"Hidden in the ceremonies are many truths, many principles, many principles, many guidelines for living—our access to the Unseen World, healing and visions. Because the Indian People didn't have schools or books, the Great Spirit gave us Ceremonies. The ceremonies are handed down from generation to generation to learn their meaning. Today, many Indian People live in cities or urban areas where it's hard to learn the ceremonies. We need to go to the Elders and learn the ceremonies so we can pass them on to our children."***
>
> ***-Elder's Meditation of the Day, White Bison, Inc.***

There are many tribes, each with their own traditions and beliefs; many of these beliefs share commonalities. In order to honor tribal legacy and incorporate traditional ways of helping and healing we must honor each tribe's differences. Many traditional ways are ceremonies and these ceremonies are oral, there are no written formulas. How do we honor the ways so that victims of sexual violence are helped through their traditional tribal healing journeys? We can begin by sharing and supporting, being respectful, guiding, and resourceful. These are characteristics that Native people teach and live by; these are also the characteristics of advocates who work in the sexual assault field.

The work of honoring our tribal legacies begins with integrating traditional teachings, values, and beliefs. Advocates can incorporate traditional ways of helping and healing into their work by using their personal knowledge and/or practice of traditional ways, or by finding tribal members and elders who are willing to be of assistance.

While individual tribes vary in their specific ways, most tribes hold the following teachings in common: Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, and Truth. It is also taught that men and women share six aspects of being: character, personality, soul, spirit, heart or feeling, and a life principal, discovered through the ability to dream and to receive a vision. A woman, however, does not have to search for a vision; her life principal is already fulfilled by her ability to give life. This life principal extends to women who do not give physical birth as well. These women are still honored for having sacred life, they hold a place within the family and the community, acting as an auntie, grandmother, or sister helping to raise, nurture, and protect the children.

It is the duty of tribal members to live by these ways, to keep these teachings, and to pass them on. When we remain silent and keep these teachings to ourselves, we lose the opportunity to share and teach our ways, preserving them for future generations. We don't want to pass on the legacy of violence; we know all too well the violence that has invaded our homes, streets, and

communities. The legacy that we must carry on is the one that our ancestors fought hard to keep for us and for future generations. Our ancestors knew the importance of our culture, our traditions and how these ways would help guide us in our life on Mother Earth.

The following verse represents The Great Mystery of Life, the way of life Native people know well through their legacies.

CREATION[46]

Young and old asked:

Who gave to me
The breath of Life
My frame of flesh?
Who gave to me
The beat of heart
My vision to behold
Who?

When to Rose the gift
Of shade, of beauty
And grace of form?
Of mystery of growth
The power to heal
When?

How to Bear the gift
Of sense of time
A place of wintering?
How to Eagle came the gift
Of glance of love
The flash of rage?
How?

Who gave to Sun
His light to burn
His path to tread?
Who gave to Earth
Her greening bounty
Cycles of her being?
Who?

Who gave to us
The gifts we do not own
But borrow and pass on?
Who made us one?
Who set the Path of Souls?
Who carved the Land of Peace?
Who?

As the young asked, the old women and men thought about these matters. They gave their answers and explanations in the form of stories, songs, prayers, rituals and ceremonies.

As advocates, we know the traditional status women held in our communities. We also know the history of how Native women were treated during and after colonization. We have walked that path as children, as adults, and we have heard the stories of our ancestors. Along with our own stories, we pass these on to new advocates who are quickly learning about the current violence against Native women.

Our tribal legacies live on; they are passed on through reclaiming and restoring teachings. We must reclaim what being a woman represents in our traditions. We must honor her balance—her sacredness, for she is the backbone of the family. Her sovereignty and her rights, her dignity, her voice and her equality must be acknowledged and respected.

There are steps to reclaiming and restoring our status as Native women. The first step is to know and seek the wisdom of traditional ways; once we've done that, we can begin using them in our

[46] Johnston, Basil. Ojibway Heritage. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Reprint: 1990.

daily life and passing that practice on to others, starting with our own children. Eventually, we can pass these ways on to those seeking answers to unanswered questions; many Native people are unconnected and are looking for self-fulfillment, spirituality and a place within their community.

Many Native women who have been sexually assaulted either remain silent, or begin seeking out traditional ways such as healing ceremonies. Other Native women seek help from local programs that do not provide culturally sensitive alternatives, but do provide women with mainstream services. Women seek help from such programs for a variety of reasons, some do so because these may be the only services available in their area, others because they may be seeking anonymity. Some women who seek traditional healing find it to be an experience of regaining their spirituality, confidence and self worth. Other women may be distrustful of traditional healing if their perpetrator is a spiritual leader.

Too often, silence and secrecy has surrounded sexual assault in Indian country. Our communities must address the fact that a Native woman or girl is at a high risk of becoming a victim of sexual assault: a study by the American Indian Women's Chemical Health Project found that 75% of the Native women surveyed reported having been sexually assaulted.[47] Tribes must recognize that sexual assault is a crime, and realize that it is an experience that lasts a lifetime. The ethics that govern tribal traditions are lost when, whether by action or inaction, a tribe condones any type of violence against women.

As advocates we can pose questions about violence towards Native women to any audience to start a dialogue to create change. We can ask:

- What does "women are sacred" mean to you?
- Would you allow someone to abuse your grandmother?
- What would you do if your daughter were raped?
- How do you believe children are affected by violence?
- Stories or jokes that are offensive are prevalent, how can you help to stop this?

We can help women heal by sharing and supporting, by taking away the silence that surrounds sexual assault and replacing it with open dialogue to create change. We can honor our tribal legacies and incorporate traditional ways of healing to help women heal from sexual assault. We can change our communities to reflect the ways our ancestors fought so hard to pass down to us, that women are sacred and sovereign; they create our Nations and form the backbone of our families and communities.

[47] Sexual Assault in Indian Country. NSVRC. http//:www.nsvrc.org/Indian.html

PRINCIPLE OF ADVOCACY #12: PROTECT women's right to confidentiality and privacy when seeking safety

> ***"HONEST*** *(Gwekwaadiziwin) means to be* ***honest*** *to ourselves. To live in the spirit of how we were created. Never to lie or gossip about one another.* ***Respect*** *and* ***in confidence*** *is the key teaching here."*
>
> *-One of the Seven Teachings of the Ojibwe*

Confidentiality policies are implemented to ensure a woman's privacy and safety when seeking services and accessing programs for assistance. A victim of sexual assault may seek services that include counseling, systems advocacy, legal advocacy, and medical attention or need an advocate to simply listen to her. Whatever services are provided, discussions between a sexual assault advocate and a victim should be considered "privileged communications."[48] In many parts of the country, the "privileged communication" relationship is protected by state statutes. In order for Native women to be afforded this same protection a written bill or resolution regarding the "privileged communication" relationship between a sexual assault victim and advocate should be amended into tribal codes and laws. Confidentiality develops trust and creates reliable services for survivors of sexual assault—a strong confidentiality policy is necessary for programs to help survivors heal. Tribal sexual assault codes stating that communications between a sexual assault advocate and survivor are privileged protect this confidentiality and make it more likely that the survivor will have justice.

Advocating for Native women who have been sexually assaulted is a skill that requires much time and energy. An advocate needs skills that allow her to help women navigate through many systematic protocols, policies and procedures as well as the complex net of jurisdictional issues that also arise, all while keeping a woman's information confidential.

Many times Native women who have been sexually assaulted face barriers that do not allow them privacy, confidentiality or safety. When an assault takes place within the boundaries of a reservation, very often tribal law enforcement cannot give full protection because of jurisdictional issues. When a crime has been committed on a reservation, the story travels fast—it sometimes only takes a matter of minutes or hours for news of a woman's assault to travel through the community. So how can Native women receive full protection under the law and have their

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[48] That is, the communications between a victim and a sexual assault advocate should be considered "so private that even where the information disclosed is relevant to a court decision, the court may not require that it be made available." The "privilege" in privileged communications between the advocate and the victim belongs to the victim. This means that the victim has the right to tell people, but that those who are providing her with services do not. *See* Patterson, Lupita. Model Protocol on Confidentiality When Working with Battered Women. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. May 2003. *See also* The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. Confidentiality Issues and Victim Advocacy in Indian Country. CCAN. March 2000.

confidentiality protected? Again, this will take the time and energy of advocates working on behalf of Native women. If tribal codes do not ensure and enforce the private relationship between sexual victims and advocates, then it will take advocates stepping forward and presenting the issue to tribal officials in order to amend codes and create change. Oftentimes, action taken by advocates has been the only way to get tribal codes amended. It is only after strong women working for tribal justice and social change have presented the issues that tribal and justice officials will address the problems.

How does one stop gossip and educate the community on the importance of confidentiality? Part of sexual assault education must include stressing the issue and discussing the ways in which information is leaked to the community, how this perpetuates gossip and the effect such gossip has upon the individual, families, and community. Gossip is damaging, it will stop the victim from pursuing justice, and it may put her at risk from the perpetrator, and/or the perpetrator's family and friends. Too often, the community attitude is not supportive or compassionate toward the survivor of sexual assault and victim blaming such as, "Why was she there? If she stayed home and was a good girl, this wouldn't have happened" are common responses. Educating the community will help dispel some of these attitudes, and making sure that a woman's confidentiality is protected by tribal codes will help shield her from gossip and the retaliation against the victim that often accompanies it.

In addition to changing codes, communities need to understand sexual violence; education is a continuing cycle in the work of ending sexual violence in our communities. Persistence, perseverance, dedication and the ability to clearly define the issues must be used by the advocate to educate the community about a woman's right to confidentiality and the privileged communication relationship that exists between her and the advocate.

TIPS FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT ADVOCATES on CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES[49]

- Work with SART/CCR team to get legislation or statutes in place to create a privilege for sexual assault advocate & victim communications.
- Work with SART/CCR team to amend tribal codes to include a nondisclosure provision and expand and develop internal policies and procedures that complete the code provision.
- Explain the program's policy in full detail to the survivor so she understands the reasons for confidentiality.
- Don't document her statements, information about her history or family – an advocate only needs to keep statistical information.
- Be prepared to respond to subpoenas and search warrants.
- Explain the reality that information may still leak and discuss options for the survivor to take if this happens.
- Use the program's attorney as a contact in case you need to obtain legal advice or in case of incarceration for refusing to submit to a subpoena.

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[49] Adapted from ***Right to Confidentiality: A Key to Safety for Native Battered Women, Tips for Advocates.*** For Shelter and Beyond: Ending Violence Against Women and their Children. Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women.

- Explain the advocate's role as a mandated reporter on child abuse to the survivor and that state and tribal laws are enforced.
- Become acquainted with state and federal laws that have confidentiality provisions and/or create privileges for certain types of relationships: rape victim & counselor, husband & wife, parent & child.
- Establish a written internal code of conduct to protect confidential information, stating **who** can release information, **what** information can be released and **when** information may be released.
- Conduct internal reviews and audits to determine the effectiveness of the confidentiality policy.

Stories told by survivors who were not afforded protection of their confidence illustrate how they had to face fallout that they experienced as another form of victimization or oppression in an already traumatic life. Sometimes these experiences were life threatening. Confidentiality and a privileged communication relationship between the advocate and survivor can provide a survivor with safety and extra support in her process, allowing her a safe place to consider her options and begin a positive healing journey.

The following are two stories illustrating the need for confidentiality:

A well-known psychologist was invited to speak on a state-wide lecture circuit. At a conference about battered women sponsored by a local institution (not a battered women's program), this individual used the example of a woman's story to make a point. As it turned out the woman was in the audience. As a Native woman who was getting her life together, when she heard her story being told to the audience, she broke down sobbing and had to be assisted out of the conference. The speaker had shared so many details of the woman's story that any Indian person in the room would have known her identity. The only thing the speaker didn't share was her name.

Everything in this example illustrates loss, but more importantly, it highlights the devastating impact a failure of confidentiality can have on survivors.

Suicides have reached epidemic proportions in some Native communities. The numbers on sexual assaults would be equally as high, however the majority go unreported and very often when they are reported, no charges are brought or the case is never prosecuted. Services and a confidentiality policy may have saved the young girl in the following story from the experience that led to her death. This story may be quite common in Native communities that are small and isolated where everyone knows everyone and their business and where sexual assaults are not seriously addressed.

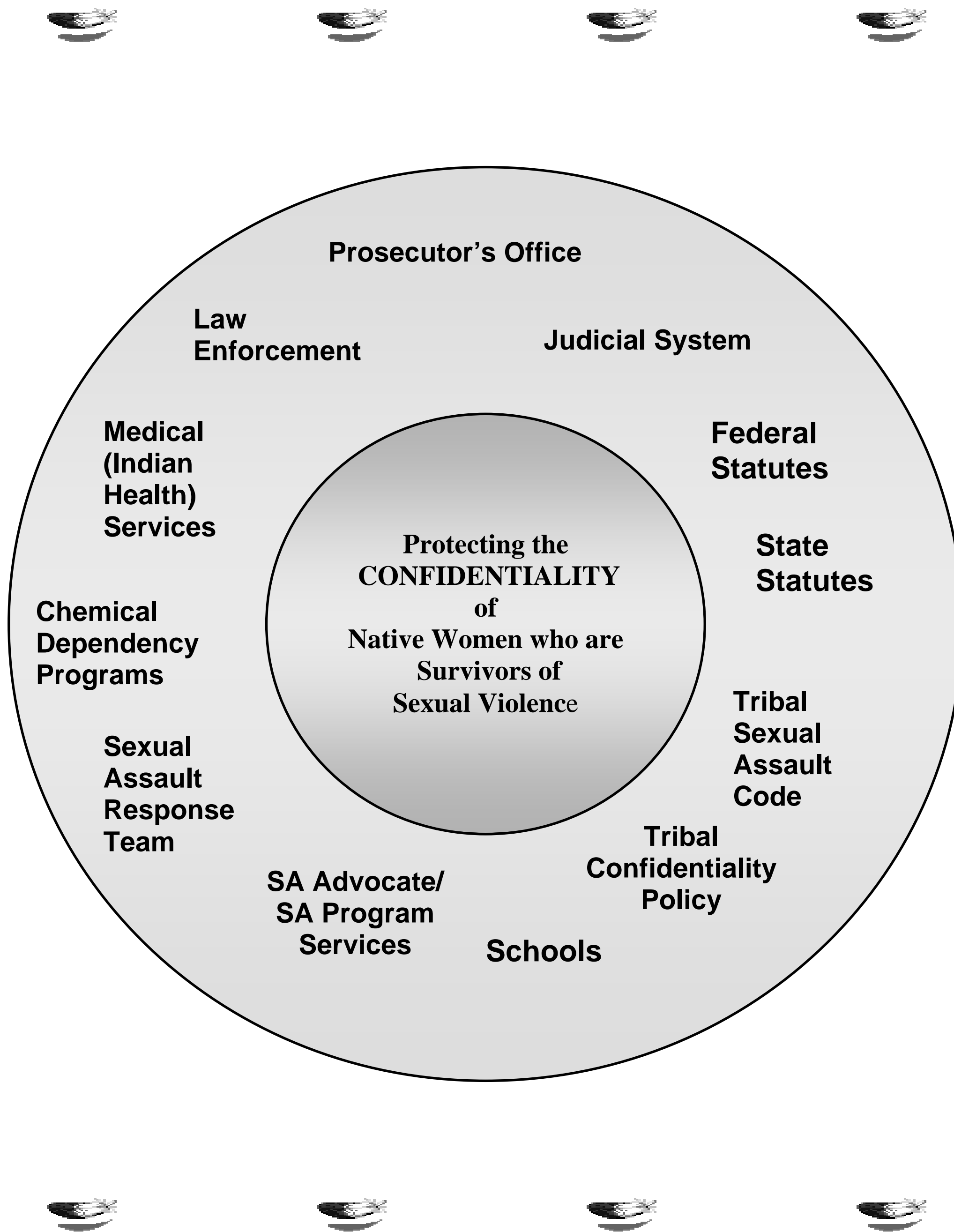
A 12 year old Native girl was raped by a community member; she committed suicide shortly after the assault. The shame, guilt and gossip may have been too much for her to handle. The man who raped her was never charged or arrested and continued to live in the community as if nothing happened.

This is another example of the devastating impact no services or confidentiality can have. Sexual assault programs with strong confidentiality policies can help save Native women and girls from experiencing the same trauma.

Native women's stories show that confidentiality is a vital issue in their safety and healing from sexual assault. As Native people, we have suffered from the enculturation forced upon us by colonization. Once, we spoke to one another about what was going on in our communities as a way of protecting one another—it was a means of support, an exchange of news and information. With the extreme changes to our way of life brought about by colonization, this communication too often becomes gossip and re-victimization and endangers the Native women who have survived sexual assault. Native women have the right to confidentiality and we must uphold this right through policies and tribal codes. Moreover, confidentiality policies must be consistent, which often does not happen within each agency on tribal land. All tribal agencies that serve tribal members who are sexual assault survivors/victims need to have consistent confidentiality policies in place. In addition, tribes must have the backing of state and federal law enforcement to stop crimes and enforce laws against non-Native or non-tribal members who violate tribal members. With the many jurisdictional issues faced by tribes in the enforcement of sexual assault laws, protection of the survivor's confidence and information could be leaked out when tribal jurisdiction is shared by state and federal entities. If this happens, the survivor will need extra support, and programs should enforce "Breach of Confidentiality" policies and administer consequences.

Systems that can protect the confidentiality of sexual assault survivors are shown on the following page. Getting the many different systems to work together can be challenging, but once united they are strong and work in the best interest of the survivor.

Systems that protect the CONFIDENTIALITY of sexual assault survivors:



PRINCIPLE #13: DEVELOP Policies, Protocols and Practices that Safeguard Sexual Assault Advocates and Women who have been Sexually Assaulted

> ***Police are afforded certain protections when dealing with potentially dangerous situations; if they are attacked as a result of their work there are stiff penalties. These same protections are afforded to police dogs, yet increasingly, advocates are expected to be at the scene without institutionalized protections if they are attacked or experience retaliation for their work in the community.***

Sexual assault violates a person physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The deepest wounds lie at the core of a person's existence; sexual violence greatly damages emotions like trust and interpersonal connectedness. Advocates are often a part of a survivor's healing journey. They become the keepers of women's stories, entrusted with the task of holding these stories in confidence and not using this confidence to do harm. In order to honor both the advocate's responsibility and the survivor's need to reconnect and trust again, policies and practices need to be established to respect this unique trust relationship between women and advocates.

When we consider the limited resources that exist to adequately fund sexual assault programs in many Native communities, it is obvious that many domestic violence advocates will also be at the forefront of addressing sexual violence. Domestic violence and sexual assault are often overlapping issues for battered women, but are not often viewed as conjoint problems in the public response. This creates the necessity for women to prioritize one over the other in an effort to receive services or protection. If a woman is in a violent relationship, and sexual abuse is a part of the violence she experiences, which does she address first? Does she address being punched and kicked, or does she address being raped by her partner? Does separating sexual assault advocacy from domestic violence advocacy ask women to compartmentalize the violence they experience? In most Native communities, domestic violence services are the most readily available to women, and advocates who work with survivors of both domestic and sexual violence need policies that safeguard them so they can remain focused on working for the benefit of the women in the community.

Advocates who work with survivors of both domestic abuse and sexual assault must deal with the fact that there are different standards applied to each even though anecdotal and national data show that many women experience both types of violence in a battering relationship.[50] In one southwestern community, the domestic violence program has been seeing an increase in the number of incidents where battered women tell advocates that their husbands make sure they drink enough to pass out and then rape them while they are unconscious. In response to this growing problem, this program is currently cross-training their domestic violence advocates as sexual assault advocates. In addition, this community is in a rural area were services are limited, so (often by default) the domestic violence program gets referrals for women who have been sexually assaulted.

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[50] Bureau of Justice Statistics. Special Report, Violence against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey. U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1995.

In remote areas like Alaska, many villages are so small that most everyone will know about an assault, leaving the woman and the advocate to deal with the scrutiny of the entire community. Many times this scrutiny is far from friendly. One domestic violence advocate tells of the time she assisted a woman who had been raped, only to find that the entire community was upset with her for doing so. Even though her community's response was not overtly threatening to the advocate (and some responses are), her feelings of being safe and at home in her community were greatly diminished. When dealing with such a dynamic, advocates need the support of practical safety policies and protocols so their focus can be on supporting the woman who has been assaulted, rather than on thinking about whether or not they themselves are safe in their community or at their job.

In most places sexual assault advocates have inherent rights that protect them when working with women who have been raped or sexually assaulted in regards to confidentiality and "privileged communication". This enables them to have discussions with survivors without worrying about whether those confidences will be revealed to the assailant or used against them. They're shielded by the privileged communications provision of the criminal justice system. Domestic violence advocates, on the other hand, don't have the same protections, and are far more visible in the community—many have been assaulted by the batterers of the women they are assisting. In order for this "privileged communication" provision to apply to the DV advocate who is also a SA advocate, the program must designate itself as one that works with not only survivors of domestic violence, but also sexual assault. As sexual assault and domestic violence are overlapping issues for many women, applying existing standards of protection for sexual assault advocates to all can provide more safeguards for those who do both types of advocacy. These safeguards must include consequences for those who violate those protections.

Native communities seeking to fully address violence against women should place serious value on the role of advocates and use every means available to protect those who stand with and work on behalf of women, viewing their role as esteemed and as deserving of protections as other professions. Many state and federal law enforcement agencies and their employees are granted immunity from liability for good faith conduct in the context of carrying out their duties. Many tribal institutions also have immunity clauses that mirror those of non-tribal entities. In particular, model codes regarding the enforcement of foreign protection orders under the full faith and credit provision of VAWA will contain language that states:

> *An officer or any other law enforcement official of the ___ Tribe who acts in good faith in enforcing a foreign protection order and its terms shall be immune from suit for wrongful arrest or any other civil or criminal action. This immunity shall extend to a tribal officer who effects the arrest of a non-Indian for violation of a protection order.* [51]

Communities should consider that when advocates are working on behalf of women, they are acting in good faith within their role as a biased supporter of women, standing in support for the

[51] *Model Tribal Domestic Violence Full Faith and Credit Ordinance.* Full Faith & Credit Project: June 2000.

safety of all women. This is no less than law enforcement acting as biased supporters of the safety and protection of the tribe and community, and advocates should be as valued in terms of protection policy. Yet advocates are threatened, ostracized, and intimidated by individuals who feel they are breaking up the family, by the courts when they don't provide information about women they work with, and by the larger community for doing either too much or too little in handling the problems.

Across the country, as a standard practice, advocates are currently responding to violent assaults at about the same time as police. In some rural areas they may be the first responders, and in remote areas they may be the only response a woman gets. Police are afforded certain protections when dealing with potentially dangerous situations; if they are attacked as a result of their work there are stiff penalties. These same protections are afforded to police dogs, yet increasingly, advocates are expected to be at the scene without institutionalized protections if they are attacked or experience retaliation for their work in the community.

Advocates protect and support the women who maintain the lifeblood of our nations. Policies and protocols certainly need to be established to protect the women in our communities and the same must be done to protect those who not only are the voice and support for those women, but also are the guardians of their trust. Providing safety for women is at the forefront of advocates' work. Safety provisions must be set in place for advocates as well, in order to provide safety for **all** women.

Sexual Sovereignty

Sexual sovereignty for American Indian and Alaskan Native women lies in our being able to say *for ourselves* who we are—re-creating ourselves in our own image as Native women by using our own language and cultural concepts to define who we are within our respective tribes as well as dominant culture. It is about Native women exercising choice—having the ability to choose our sexuality, personal space and boundaries—our lives. It is freedom without conditions—having control of one's own body and its natural expression without someone else's influence and without another's permission. Sexual sovereignty is defining ourselves as we wish, without that definition having to be absolute. It is being able to take pleasure in who we are and having the liberty to do so in practice. It is enjoying being a creation of beauty in our own eyes beyond the judgment and definition of others.

RIGHTS VERSUS PRIVILEGES

As women we are conditioned by dominant culture to minimize sexual violence when it happens in our lives and our relationships. We are expected to tolerate it because we are women. Our sexuality is defined by how others think about us, not about how we think about ourselves, and we often feel guilt, shame and responsibility for the things others do to us. Our sexuality is defined by how men are socialized to think about women. We are expected to apologize for who we are, for our sexuality, because we are raised to believe it is not ours. This becomes the practice and the framework of our lives—our human rights become privileges because we are women. While rights are inherent, privileges can be bestowed or denied. Sexual consent becomes not a birthright but a concession, and is often not relevant. If others believe they have access to our bodies with or without our consent, then we become less than human by their actions. We are taught to forgo our right for theirs because we are considered less. We are robbed of the knowledge of ourselves and our bodies as truly our own. We do not enjoy knowing what it means to be fully intact. We are not allowed to set our own boundaries, to live safely in our bodies.

In a society where women's human rights are often seen as privileges, we are blamed for the sexual violence we endure. Women are held responsible for being raped. We should have or should not have done a hundred things. Women are expected to be flattered by the unwanted attention, the leers, jokes, comments, objectification of our bodies, sexual advances and other marks on our spirit. Not only do we get blamed as women by dominant culture but we internalize those beliefs and blame other women who are raped, molested and abused. What effect does this have on our sexual expression of self? On our sovereignty as Native women? How do such messages influence us when we advocate not only for ourselves, but for those of us who have experienced sexual assault?

SOCIALIZATION

Throughout childhood, as girls growing up, we quickly learn that we are valued by how attractive we are. Depending on where we grew up, there are several expressions that reinforce this for

girls—maybe we were our uncle/brother/father's "favorite girl", maybe our mother dressed us up and placed great emphasis on how "pretty" we were. We learned that women were "foxes" or a "nice piece". Who we were was defined by others, and that definition was sexual. We began to lose it very early—the ownership of the core of ourselves—our sexual being. In dominant culture, women's sexuality has been interpreted by men, for men's sake, before we had a chance to explore it, express it—own it. Dominant culture defines our sexuality as something for a man to own or take. We are told that men cannot control themselves and not to tempt them. At the same time, we are told to be attractive, that our highest goal is to be desired. How do we navigate such contradictions?

If others define and lay claim to women's sexuality, it becomes difficult for us to own it—it can become a source of shame or guilt. We get the message that it is something dangerous, wrong, immoral, a source of vulnerability, and we are pushed to conform to society's stereotypes of love and sex. These stereotypes objectify us, removing our choice and our sexual sovereignty, and are used as excuses to violate women. Natural femininity is perverted instead of honored as a gift from the Creator. This creates a world where sexuality and sexual objectification are blurred together—men can "playfully" grab at us, complain that they "don't get enough", make sexual comments, humiliate us, and we get the message we should be honored by the attention—after all, we were asking for it.

MASS MEDIA & DOMINANT CULTURE STEREOTYPES

Women bear the responsibility for sexual interaction, without the right to fully choose that interaction. Majority society's message proclaims that women's sexuality is not their own; it is a tool of definition used by others, especially for Native women. We are familiar with the common portrayals of Native women in the mass media and literature—as "primitive", "savage"—scantily clad in buckskin, sexually available. Mass media uses these images—dominant culture definitions of our sexuality—to sell products, videos and magazines. The 2004 Grammy Award performance of "Hey Ya" by OutKast typifies this dominant culture stereotype: meagerly clad Native women in "war paint" dancing around tepees.

Our body image is distorted by dominant culture into a perceived commodity, a bargaining chip. We can either be used by force or barter our bodies to survive. This turns the wheel of the sexual violence that frames our lives and creates a false choice for women; we can begin to believe we have control over our own body by convincing ourselves that we benefit from its sexual use/abuse. The pornography industry is built upon this false choice. Women are told they are lucky to be pictured, to be taped—paid to be the sexual object of desire. Money makes it an "acceptable" choice for women to act as objects, less than human and reduced to being good for only one thing.

> *I tried to describe the feeling of seeing pornography to a man once, so that he could empathize with the wommins [sic] abhorrence of it. I said that it was like your stomach folding in on itself over and over, like your body closing down and trying to find escape through your mouth, or being pulled out through your*

> *spine, so there is nothing of you left for men to take. Nothing left to hurt. I think he sympathized, but he also wanted sex. Not empathy, then.*[52]

Whether women identify as traditional or not, live on a reservation or in the city, are full or mixed blood, are sober for twenty years or have a current drug/alcohol problem, whether we are mothers, aunties, grandmothers, sisters or orphans—we are all affected by these messages. We can be overwhelmed by dominant culture's idea of a woman's body minus the reality of what it means to be a woman—a human being. Dominant culture's depictions of women can make us forget what human looks like until we look in the mirror. We should be able to look at ourselves and say, "My body is mine and its marks, its scars, its imperfections tell a story—*my* story of *my* life."[53] Instead, we are seen—and see ourselves—in advertising, movies, in museums, on the streets and often in our own home as an object—a receptacle for another's desire.

RECLAIMING OUR SEXUAL SOVERIEGNTY

We began losing so much so young, it can be difficult to know and embrace our sexual selves and uphold our sexual sovereignty. Sexual sovereignty can mean a woman: [54]

- Is free and feels free.
- Looks at her body and does not feel guilty or dirty.
- Exists without fear or shame.
- Defines and celebrates her own sexual being.
- Is honored for having the gift of life.

How can we reclaim our sexuality as a beautiful thing that is about us as sexual beings rather than objects? When we honor our bodies, when we have respect for ourselves—the knowledge that we carry something so precious, so sacred—this can start internally cleansing us of the dominant culture messages that define/evaluate us on foreign terms. Honoring women is foreign to majority culture. We are evaluated and found lacking. The truth is, in traditional culture, we as women are not vulnerable and weak but powerful. How we celebrate our difference is what makes us sovereign.

Becoming a woman is viewed in such a different way by dominant culture and this dominant culture view has spread into the way we are seen by Native men as well as the way we see ourselves. We are told we are "on the rag", have "the curse" and so on. This dominant culture idea of what it means to become a woman starkly contrasts traditional beliefs that respect the time of a woman when she is on her moon. We must look for and reclaim own traditions about what it means when a girl becomes a woman. Though the traditions and celebrations vary, there is commonality among them. Becoming a woman is honored as an exciting time, a time of change and of moving into new responsibilities. In Ojibwe tradition it is a time of fasting with no distractions. As a girl who is becoming a woman fasts, women come in and talk to her about

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[52] Rice, Jennifer. *Wimmin's Bodily Sovereignty.* home.vicnet.net.au~yrwimmin/yrw/yrwwbs.htm
[53] Sandman, Babette. MSH-TA: May 2004.
[54] The conclusion of this document was formed from conversations with Babette Sandman, MSH-TA: May 2004.

what it means to be a woman—they talk about her life-giving gift and her strength. These women of the community are chosen by her mother as women who can strengthen her and her belief about herself and her gift, a gift she carries throughout her life. She begins this journey into womanhood as a young girl who goes through a year-long ceremony and is then recognized and embraced by the community as a woman. Her womanhood is seen not as "the curse", a weakness, but is honored as a strength and a gift. She carries that and is respected for that. Boys are also part of the ceremony—by watching they can know how important this journey into womanhood is for her. Taking part in this ceremony teaches them about women. Men take part as well, demonstrating their supportive role, and to encourage the young boys in this way. They get to participate in her transformation; they experience upholding her sexual sovereignty. They see that if she has this Creator given strength, she gets to choose. It is her body. They see and she gets to experience claiming her body at a young age—what she does with it is her business. No one but she gets to say whether to have sex or not to have sex, whether to be touched or not. These traditions say, "This is your body and you have the gift of Life. It is for others to honor, protect and respect." They state that it is her right to say, "I did not have this gift as a little girl, but now I do and others must honor, protect and respect it."

For many of us, colonization has taken away our traditions through force and coercion and we believe that we don't have access to traditional healing or ways of thinking. When we understand this feeling of disconnection, the effects of colonization and the historical past of our ancestors, we can know where this disconnection comes from and ultimately, restore our connection with ourselves and the cultural ways with in us. It is a common misperception that unless we have the "right" sorts of visions, dreams, or customs, then these experiences don't mean anything—we'll never be Indian enough. We have internalized the dominant culture ideals and stereotypes of what it means to be Indian, and unless we fit into these definitions we believe we are not really Indian, or spiritual, we don't really know who we are as Native women. The reality, however, is that we do. Whether we recognize it or not, that spirituality and ability to see and feel is within each of us. We are not teaching one another anything; we are reminding each other of what is already inside us. It exists—passed down from generation to generation. It's all within us. We carry it within us, though we might not always know how to see it, or are afraid to acknowledge it if we do.

Like tribal sovereignty, sexual sovereignty is inherent—we do not have to ask for it and it is not limited. In the end, we must reclaim what we lost—what was taken from us and each define and restore sexual sovereignty for ourselves, for what it means to us. Recognizing and honoring our own sexual sovereignty allows us to recognize and honor it in the women for whom we advocate.