

# Mending the Sacred Hoop

## Newsletter

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### Defining Sexual Violence

Sexual violence encompasses all acts that have the intent to harm, injure, insult, and improperly use a person sexually. Such acts negatively impact the sexuality of the person targeted, harming their sexual health and well being, and robbing them of a positive image of who they are and how they define themselves. Sexual violence includes a wide range of sexual activities that are forced upon someone, eliminating their right to consent, erasing their choice and denying them their sexual freedom and ownership of their sexuality.

*Many Native women were sexually abused as children and all too often this sexual abuse was by a relative or friend of the family. "When I was a child, I was raped in my own home. In our house we always had lots of relatives and people over, and my parents drank a lot. One night, when my parents left to go to get more beer, a relative who I trusted raped me."*

*Native Women Focus Group – October 2002*

#### SEXUAL ABUSE MAY CONSIST OF:

**Fondling:** Unwanted touching, caressing, playing, feeling of body parts. This is not limited to intimate body parts such as breasts, vaginal or buttock area.

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### Awareness and Attitudinal Survey

*In recognition of April as sexual assault awareness month MSH-TA is devoting this issue of the newsletter to help raise awareness of this topic. This awareness and attitude survey can be used a part of a public awareness event or self-reflection tool in hopes that it will create discussion around sexual assault and sexual violence. It is intended to challenge individual thoughts and beliefs and get people to look at their own value system as well as critically think about how these community attitudes create barriers to address the overall problem of sexual assault.*

#### Instructions: please give a detailed response to the following statements:

1. I'd be more sympathetic with an elderly rape victim than a younger victim who had been out alone at a bar.
2. A young woman who was raped discovers she is pregnant and comes to you for assistance. What would you suggest?
3. Incest is least likely to occur in a family with regular church attendance and strong religious connections.
4. Sometimes a man rapes his date because he is sexually frustrated and doesn't know how to openly communicate his feelings and needs.
5. A man calls on the crisis line and states he was just raped by another man. How would you handle this?
6. A woman becomes a lesbian because of an unfulfilled sexual relationship with a man.

*"Attitude" continued on page 5*

**Pornography:** Forcing a woman to watch videos of sexual acts, forcing her to perform sex acts and/or recording or taking pictures of such sexual acts without her knowledge or permission. Forced exposure to pornographic material: magazines like *Playboy* or *Hustler*, sexually explicit, exploitive pictures, and X-rated videos.

**Sexual remarks or language:** Referring to women as bitches, whores, or sluts, and making any other remarks that strip away a woman’s value as a human being, including belittling a woman’s appearance.

**Exhibitionism:** Acts that consist of indecent exposure by the abuser: undoing one’s clothing and sexually rubbing/playing with oneself or masturbating in front of her. Such acts may also include forcing her to watch the abuser perform a sexual act with another, or forcing her to perform a sexual act in front of the abuser and/or someone else.

**Rape:** Forced sexual intercourse, and/or using force to commit oral, anal or vaginal sex.

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*“I went home after a party. I drank too much and I went home to pass out. I came to and a man from the party was on top of me, he jumped off and left. I pulled my pants and underwear back on and fell back to sleep, when I awoke I remembered what happened and felt sick about it, but I never told anyone. I know I didn’t invite him along with me home. He must have followed me and came into my house and assaulted me after I passed out. I never told anyone because I felt ashamed and knew that if I hadn’t drank so much and passed out this would not have happened.”*

*Native Women Focus Group – October 2002*

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**Unwanted sexual advances and/or touches and degradation:** Unwanted caressing of your various body parts. Sexually explicit gestures such as flicking their tongue at you, rubbing or pressing themselves against you, invasively asking for touches and not taking “no” for an answer. Actions that degrade you: pinching your buttocks as you walk past, talking about what they can do to you sexually if you go on a date, offering gifts or money for a sexual favors.

**Disrespecting the privacy/physical boundaries of an individual:** Invading privacy by walking in on someone while they are dressing or in the bathroom. Invading their privacy, watching someone undress or use the bathroom without their knowledge (voyeurism, or being a “peeping tom”), refusing to leave the room when asked, not letting the doors be closed, etc.

**Forced prostitution:** Forcing a woman to perform sexual acts in return for favors, friendships, trade or money.

**Expected sexual favors:** Insisting upon sexual favors for repayment of a loan or for the expense of a date. Making her “put out,” not going home until sexual acts are completed, making her feel as though she constantly owes the abuser for any gifts, or for anything that has been done for her and her children.

**Spiritual Abuse:** Using spiritual practices such as doctoring and sweat lodges to take advantage of the closed surroundings in order to commit sexual acts. Self proclaimed spiritual advisors, traditional healers, etc. who use their status to spiritually coerce another to engage in sex, stating “the spirits said that I need to have sex with you for you to heal” or “you need to be doctored, or touched, in that place” for healing. Instilling fear by telling women they will use “bad” medicine against them.

**Marital Rape:** Marital rape is the crime of forcing another person to submit to sexual intercourse within the context of a marriage, and constitutes abusive treatment. Battered women, and even women who may not be battered, often face sexual violence in their relationship, and find it difficult to get help. A woman may assess her situation and deem it hopeless, thinking that no one can protect her from her partner’s unwanted sexual advances.

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*“He asked what was wrong and I said I wasn’t in the mood. He replied, ‘Why? Did you have some already today?’ His comment made me angry. As a woman was I expected to be in the mood at any given time? How many women put up with an attitude like this and let him have his way, even if they don’t feel like it? How many women are forced to engage in sex, when they weren’t in the mood or feeling sick? And who would protect them from this type of behavior? What would a police officer say if I called and said my partner wants sex and I don’t want too? I’m afraid of him.”*

*Sexual Violence Survivor*

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**IN CONCLUSION:** Native American communities remain at a distinct disadvantage when addressing sexual violence. All too often, the problems they face can seem insurmountable: denial, lack of services, no money for programs, jurisdictional issues, and the rural nature and isolation of many Native communities, are compounded by the lack of formal training for law enforcement, and the fact that small communities often mean no confidentiality for the victim- the list can go on

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **Sovereign Women Strengthen Nations: Ending Rape and Domestic Violence Conference**

*A CALL FOR MEN AND WOMEN WARRIORS TO DEFEND THE FUTURE OF OUR NATIONS*

**May 5-7, 2003**

**Ramkota Best Western**

**Rapid City, South Dakota**

This conference will gather Northern Plains and Great Lakes Native Nations and those serving Native People's for workshops addressing sexual assault and domestic violence in Indian Country. There will be workshops for Advocates, Medical Personnel, SANEs, Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) members and Law Enforcement featured in breakout sessions.

**Registration Opens February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, Registration fee: \$ 250.** For more information contact: **Sacred Circle - National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women, 722 St. Joseph Street, Rapid City, SD, 57701 Toll Free: 877-RED-ROAD (877.733.7623), or by e-mail, [scircle@sacred-circle.com](mailto:scircle@sacred-circle.com)**

### **The Native American Indian Arts & Music Festival**

*LIVE MUSIC, CRAFT BOOTHS, RAFFLE, CELEBRITIES, TRIBAL DANCE GROUPS, & GUEST SPEAKERS.*

**May 30, 31 & June 1, 2003**

**Covelo, California**

Featured artist include **Linda Coolidge**, famous for her country styled gospel music, **Lois Lockhart**, a Pomo vocalist, singing songs in her native language which include gospel. Also, the native women's drum group, **Mankillers**, will perform and nationally known star from the motion picture "Indian in the Cupboard", **Litefoot**, will appear in concert.

**All proceeds of this fundraiser is to benefit the American Indian Women's Domestic Violence Assistance Program Family Shelter Fund.** For more information contact **Margaret Hoaglen, Babara Smith, Yvonne Gallardo, or Florine Fulwider at 707-983-9333, or 707-983-6093.**

## **Understanding the Continuum of Sexual Violence**

Sexual assault is not an exclusive act of aggression but should be considered as a continuum of attitudes, beliefs, and actions that support sexual violence. It should also be understood that sexual violence is part of the larger issue of sexism. In order to have an impact on the numerous acts of sexual violence the community must make steps to address issues related to the larger issue. This brochure focuses on a single area in effort to bring about an understanding of sexual violence that will ultimately lead to addressing sexism.

Contributing factors to sexual violence lay in the attitude or viewpoint that women are sex objects. This objectifying of women stems from suggestive looks or actions, sexist comments, and sexual exploitation. Men whistling at and calling out to women on the street is tolerated, jokes are rude comments are made daily, and freedom of speech and expression is the guise sexually pornographic material. Many of these actions are not considered "criminal" but are part of a largely acceptable societal attitude.

The level to which our society accepts sexual objectification creates a foundation where this becomes the absolute value of women. This manifests into a belief that there is little significant purpose for women beyond procreation and gratification. From this belief it makes it easier for men to move onto more invasive types of actions.

Personal and legal boundaries are pushed when actions are clearly directed toward a particular individual. Verbal harassment, often using slang references to female body parts coupled with derogatory commentary, is used on the street, in relationships, and in the workplace. This includes obscene phone calls, unwanted sexual advances, retaliatory insults for rejected advances, slanting comments with sexual overtones, and relentless flirting. Groping and inappropriate touching are also actions that occur. These include grabbing and pinching women's bodies, making unwanted sexual

*"SA continuum" continued on page 4*

contact in public or in front of friends, and touches that make women feel uncomfortable. These events occur often enough that most adults could easily account for either experiencing or witnessing these types of incidents.

At this point of the continuum perpetrators of these actions usually suffer little consequence. They may be ignored, avoided, or chastised in response by the woman or the people around him or they may be kicked out of a public place, such as a restaurant or bar. The level of intervention at this point will vary significantly from individuals involved of from friends and family based on the level of acceptance in the community.

A distinct line is drawn in society when it comes to more explicit acts of sexual obscenity. Peeping in windows, exposure, and soliciting sex are some of the “minor criminal” violations that communities have implemented a standard not to tolerate. These actions points back to the belief that women are objects existing for sexual gratification therefore granting permission to invade their privacy by watching through windows, “flashing” them for pleasure, and manipulating them for sex through prostitution. The actions of the perpetrators are taken more seriously as these are viewed as threatening to the community and police and court interventions start to get utilized. Although the general tolerance level is lower the struggles exist in reporting, arresting, and convicting perpetrators of these crimes.

The continuum then enters into more physical types of violations such as molestation, coerced sex, and statutory rape. Common acts include non-consensual contact including the removal or attempted removal of clothing covering intimate body parts, date rape or forced sex, and taking advantage of younger/teenaged women. These often occur in the context of an on-going relationship as acquaintances, dating relationships, and in marriages. Our societal beliefs support the underlying notion that women become the property of the man in relationships and glorify staking a claim to young virgins that gives approval for these acts thus making it difficult for perpetrators to fully understand the harm that has occurred.

Common understanding of sexual assault typically focuses on the overt of acts of sexual violence. Severe aggression, kidnapping, and brutal assault coupled with sexual penetration are what most people envision as the dynamics of sexual violence. Some might believe that the continuum of sexual violence starts with rape then moves up from there to include hitting, restraining, and use of weapons. As this continuum demonstrates this is actually toward the most extreme end of assaults.

The most extreme end of sexual violence involves both sexual and physical violence. This includes women who are beaten and raped over an extended period or throughout a relationship, women forced into prostitution, and raped and murdered. These actions are what grab our attention when hearing of such heinous crimes and this is what we try to protect our communities from when actually this is more of the end result of our social attitude of women.

There are many issues to be aware of when dealing with sexual violence. Society’s myth is that women must fear the stranger in the alley when it comes to rape and sexual assault when in fact women know the perpetrator in 82% of the time (BJS Special Report, number NCJ-154348). Many battered women report being sexually assaulted in their relationship with the batterer. Also women have experienced sexual abuse by spiritual leaders and traditional healers when seeking ways deal with the trauma. No matter where in the continuum a woman experiences sexual violence the experience is traumatic and harmful.

Many communities have people and programs available to deal with these issues and there is a growing effort to cover the full extent of the problem. To create lasting change we must address our social attitudes and beliefs in order to effectively address violence against women.

Written by Jeremy NeVilles-Sorell for Mending the Sacred Hoop, based on a presentation by Bonnie Clairmont at the “sexual assault training” sponsored by MSH-TA, March 4-6, 2001, Minneapolis, MN.

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and on. Further complicating the issue is the fact that records of reported sexual violence against Native American Indian women are hard to find, because most cases are never prosecuted. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 70% of sexual assaults go unreported, the most often stated reason being that the victim fears the assailant (76%). In Indian country particularly, it is very difficult to document the extent of sexual assault, and therefore, difficult to gather specific statistics, largely because of jurisdictional authority issues.

Native women organizing around the issue of sexual violence have formed tribal state coalitions, women advisory groups, and volunteer lead groups for sexual assault victims: SART/SANE Teams. Without such organizing efforts the level of help available for sexual assault victims would remain at little or no services or support. A glimmer of hope shines at the end of the tunnel for sexual assault victims, services, support, prosecution, and SART/SANE Response Teams: tribal codes and community organizing.

While communities are addressing the issue of sexual assault, too often it’s been at a snail’s pace. Too many times communities address the issue only after a major event takes place: a woman is raped and murdered, or sexual assault victims come out and tell their stories, prompting people to come together and say, “let’s do something about this”. Communities are rightly motivated by these events to take action. When a community goes beyond responding to a specific event, and begins organizing coordinated community efforts to ensure the safety of women, a change begins to take place within the community. Members of the community who feel strongly about an issue feel empowered to take the lead and commit to a project or event to create change. They begin to make things happen. Sometime these projects or events are so important that they become an annual event for the community, or they may diminish, be missed and then someone will come along and start them up again. When communities make a committed effort to ensure women’s safety, change comes, it happens, and it changes again and again. With the momentum created by many smaller changes communities as a whole begin to change, and although it may take time for some to grasp it, they will, knowing that it is a good change, a change definitely needed. ✂

Written by Beryl Rock for Mending the Sacred Hoop



7. Rapist and sexual predators are always the creepy guys in cars.
8. A rape victim doesn’t want to participate in prosecution of the perpetrator.
9. Women cannot rape other women.
10. Rape is caused by the sexual abuse of children.
11. In an AA group you hear a person state they drink because they were sexually abused – are they making excuses?
12. The only way to tell if sexual assault is a problem is by the number of police reports that are filed.
13. Women will say, “I was raped by so-and-so” just because they are jealous and vindictive.
14. Only children that were molested grow-up to be gay and lesbian and molest other children.
15. Families don’t talk about sexual assault because they are afraid of what other people might think.
16. Sexual harassment does occur between heterosexual men.
17. Thinking of women only as sex objects is what leads to rape.
18. Prostitution is not a form of rape because the women get paid to do it.
19. If there is not penetration then sexual abuse did not occur.
20. People that are raped or sexually assaulted don’t say anything because they are unsure of what will happen if they do.
21. It is just as wrong not to report sexual abuse, as it is to commit the crime.

\* Initial survey created by Eileen Hudon (source for the first 6 questions listed), the remaining questions were created by Mending the Sacred Hoop.

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