

## How Can We Prevent Childhood Sexual Assault without Incorporating an Analysis of Systemic Violence as a Causal Factor?

I invite you to expand your definition of violence. I invite you to expand your definition to include its roots in environmental injustice, economic injustice and political injustice. We are all related but our histories are not the same. Some of our histories are not even told. When Christopher Columbus got lost in 1492 and landed in the Caribbean, he found a peaceful population with no weaponry capable of fending off a Western European occupation. The land was there for the taking. What was needed was a rationale, a moral imperative for taking it. He got one through the Doctrine of Discovery, issued by the King of Spain. The Doctrine of Discovery says that “European Christians are encouraged to capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ, to put them into perpetual slavery and take away all their possessions and their properties. This was immediately followed by the Inter Caetera Papal Bull of Pope 1493 which called for the subjugation of all barbarous nations to propagate the Christian Empire. This Papal Bull is still in place and the Spanish Empire authored Doctrine of Discovery in now entrenched in the United States Constitution as the result of a Supreme Court decision under Chief Justice John Marshall which ruled in 1823 in *Johnson v. Macintosh* that all lands taken from indigenous people based on the Doctrine was inherited from England after the successful fight for Independence. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues considers the Doctrine of Discovery as “the foundation of the violation of Indigenous human rights.”

We are all related. This is a deeply understood concept among indigenous peoples. It informs that we live in a complex web of relationships with all living beings, seen and unseen, that co-creates and interacts with the whole in sacred and mysterious ways. One change in the web affects the whole.

Recently, at a LEAP Cohort gathering in California sponsored by the WOCN, I experienced the mystery of our connection to one another in a profound and deep way. My life partner, Mary, wrote a song called “Unspeakable Pain,” about the residential boarding school experience of our indigenous elders and our ancestors. At the gathering Faalu, from American Samoa, had just finished her presentation to the group, which involved an indigenous cultural greeting. At the end of her presentation I approached her in an embrace and began to sing “Unspeakable Pain,” to her. Faalu began to sing it with me and before the women there could not tell which of us had begun the song. Faalu had no idea how she knew the words. It was a transcendent moment that spoke to the hearts and souls of all those present. Women of color wept from the depths of our beings, overcome with the longing for and loss of our historical

stories from our ancestral histories. We long for the stories of connection from our ancestors who would spare us the pain of knowing them.

We are all related. But our histories are not the same. The truth is in our collective history. The truth is the healing. Some of our histories of women and people of color would highlight a structural system of violence that those who benefit from it would not want told.

Consider that between 1492, when Christopher Columbus first set foot in the Caribbean, and the U.S. Census Bureau report in 1892 that documented a population of fewer than a quarter million indigenous people in the region that a population of 125 million people was reduced by over 90 percent. People perished through slavery, forced marches, deliberate infection with epidemic diseases and forced sterilization.

Compulsory sterilization was supported by the United States Supreme Court under Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in the 1920s. Over thirty states had sterilization programs to guarantee the purity of the White race under the Racial Integrity Act. Sixty thousand Americans of color from California to Maine were sterilized in states that “allowed sterilization of genetic material considered to be inferior.” The Supreme Court allowed the continuation of these practices in an 8-1 majority opinion. The Racial Integrity Act buttressed the belief that interracial marriages produced degenerate offspring (National Museum of American Indian, Fall 2009). There was considerable contact between the Nazi Regime and the eugenicists. The term eugenics is attributed to Francis Galton, the cousin of Charles Darwin, of survival of the fittest fame. Another man of the times, Harry Laughlin drafted a model sterilization law that was adopted by thirty states and was replicated by the Nazi regime in Germany in 1933. Women of color experienced disproportionately high rates of involuntary sterilization through the 1970s.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, in 1855, called Indian’s “a half filled outline of humanity whose extermination was a necessary solution of the problem in his relation to the white race.” Theodore Roosevelt, in 1900, said “Indians should be forbidden to leave offspring behind them.” He called the Sand Creek massacre where 600 people were murdered, only 60 of whom were men, “as righteous and beneficial a deed as ever took place on the Frontier.”

The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ so called Indian Health Service sterilized 42 percent of Indian women of childbearing age without their consent. The General Accounting Office investigation reviewed only the years 1973-76 at only four HIS facilities. The investigation found that 3,406 involuntary sterilizations had been performed during that time. The HIS was transferred to the Department of Health Services in 1978.

This, to me, is systemic childhood sexual abuse and sexual violence against women that is governmentally orchestrated and promoted by one race over another. Clearly

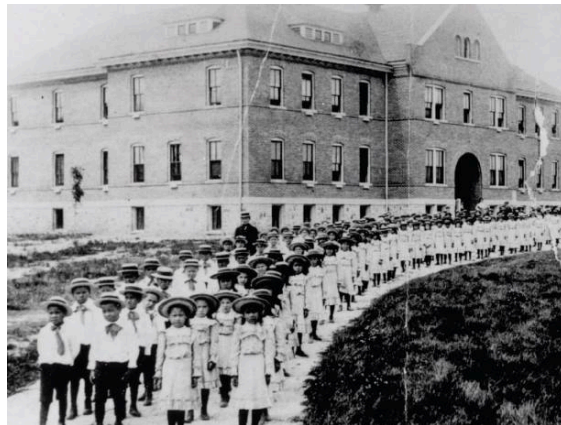
the structural racism perpetrated by a colonizing power over people of color needs to change. The newly formed colonizing government decreed in 1790 that only free white males could enter the United States. Its first laws regarding land ownership decreed that only white, male, Christians could own land. In so doing, all women and people of color were objectified and marginalized. Only white men could vote until 1920 when the Suffragists successfully obtained the vote for women. In that movement, women of color were marginalized and abandoned in the interest of getting the voting measure passed.

So how can women of color trust a structural system that has repeatedly betrayed their trust?

I was not until long after women won the right to vote that women were allowed or encouraged to be educated. Too much education would burden the fragile mind of a woman and render her hysterical.

Education itself was denied to women and people of color as a tool to retain control of power. Only those who could read could enter into agreements. Taking indigenous land through treaties not understood or authorized by indigenous peoples is the symptom of a morally corrupt racist government fueled by the Doctrine of Discovery and the Papal Bull ET Caetera declaring the supremacy of western European white Christians over all other peoples in the world.

When the extermination could not be realized, the government herded indigenous people unto reservations and the children were forcefully removed from their parents and communities into residential boarding schools. These schools were run by Christian Churches. Their government sanctioned role was to eradicate indigenous culture and language. By 1930, seventy-five percent of all indigenous children were placed into residential boarding schools where eighty-five percent of them, male and female, were sexually abused. This is government sponsored childhood sexual abuse. The children who came home from these schools did not feel accepted by the white culture nor did they fit in with their indigenous cultures. Institutionalization of the mind, body and spirit of these residential boarding schools is in itself a crime of abuse of horrific proportions. Young minds were robbed of their ability to critically think about their world and their relation to it.



A people whose belief that we are all related was made to feel that they knew was wrong and inferior in every way. These traumatic childhood experiences of our ancestors and our elders are now in the very DNA of indigenous people. Science has shown that sustained childhood trauma changes the structure of hormones and is passed on to future generations. The last of the residential boarding schools did not close until the 1980s. The residential model has not disappeared, however because as documented in the film "Schooling the World," we see the exporting of Western European English based educational concepts in other countries around the world proclaiming that Western European model features a superior approach to addressing the needs of a global economy. These schools are taught in English, have militarized drills built in, and promote conformity and institutionalization of the mind. Just as residential boarding schools did here, the children are cut off from their indigenous cultures and do not fit in anywhere, having lost their connection to the land.

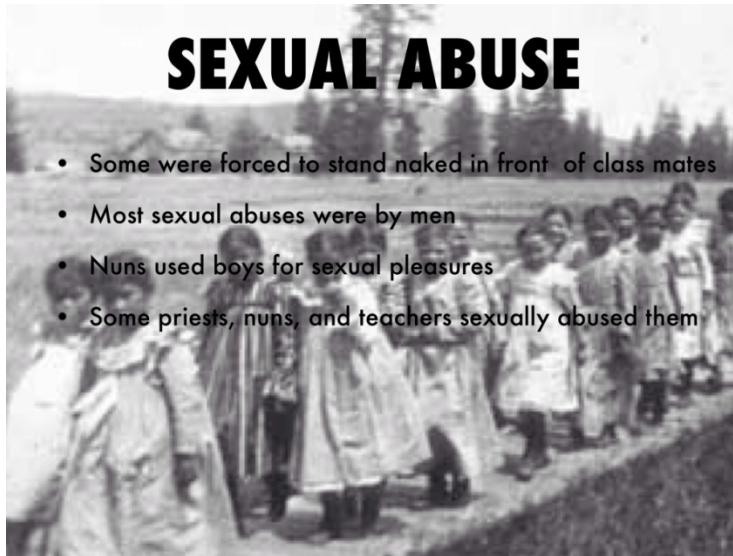
Historical trauma is entirely different than consciously holding onto the past when it resides in your ancestral memory and DNA. It results in numerous defense mechanisms, developmental malfunctions, and behavioral issues. This is scientific and is supported in studies.

~Tony Ten Fingers/Wanbli Nata'u, Oglala Lakota



## SEXUAL ABUSE

- Some were forced to stand naked in front of class mates
- Most sexual abuses were by men
- Nuns used boys for sexual pleasures
- Some priests, nuns, and teachers sexually abused them





I am challenging us to re-look at our prevention education efforts to end relationship violence. I am challenging the field to embrace a people of color understanding of the world. In indigenous culture, women and the land are one and the same. Our creations stories eloquently speak of how the land came to be. It would take days to tell our stories but the stories speak of women creating the land and all that is upon it. The first violence towards women is to deny her connection to the land. I heard Beverly Cook, of the Onondaga Nation; tell of Sky Woman falling from a hole in the sky, carrying seeds in her hand representing all the plants and fauna in her hands. Below her were water and the animals that lived with the water. The animals could see the falling woman's dilemma and sought to create a landing space for her. Turtle offered its back as a landing space. Various animals volunteered to get soft mud from the water's bottom to provide soft material for landing upon turtle's back. Birds held Sky Woman aloft until all could be prepared. Finally, a muskrat brought up enough mud. The woman was gently lowered unto the turtle's back and she began to plant the seeds she had carried from Sky World. Beverly then showed the science of the egg traveling down the fallopian tube, needing a soft resting place where it could be fertilized. Indigenous people knew the life process.

Indigenous people also knew that children need a comforting, stress-free environment where they can prosper and reach their full potential. Men stayed home from the hunt to ensure a conflict free environment for the child's arrival. A cradle board was readied for the child's arrival. Songs were sung to the fetus at 25 weeks, knowing that the child could hear them. Once born, the child in the cradle board could have eye contact and connect with community members. This child was welcomed into the Circle as an important person. The structure of community life was based on the Circle where all were equally important in a matriarchal, non-hierarchical social structure. This child was taught that everything, the plants, the animals, the trees, the rocks, are all infused with

the spirit that lives in all things. All beings are equal and inter-related. One needs to seek agreements with the plants to provide food for the community.

This is not a world where anything is objectified. All beings are deserving of respect. Violence is not thinkable when all life is seen as sacred. We need a cultural change, a structural change that would be so profound that violence of any kind would be seen as an exception to be entered into only upon dire circumstances.

In 2006, the Visioning B.E.A.R. Circle was born from a Massachusetts Department of Public Health primary prevention initiative of the New England Learning Center for Women and Children addressing the needs of Native Americans in the Franklin County and North Quabbin regions of Western Massachusetts. After conversations assessing our strengths and challenges in preventing sexual violence, the indigenous community determined a need for an intergenerational council of our own to address these issues. In the ensuing years, members of the Council received forty hours of sexual assault and domestic violence training. We then met twice a month for the whole day. During that time we mapped out our goals, assessed our successes, re-defined our goals and brought our teachings to community gatherings. At first all our training came from mainstream primary prevention concepts and approaches. The VBC Council received active bystander training from a local mediation agency that had developed a well-respected active bystander training. Teaching the curriculum did not come naturally to us. It was a didactic approach that did not honor the Talking Stick Circles we were accustomed to using. The VBC Council also received training on the sexual treatment of perpetrators and sex offender management through another local agency. We became frustrated to learn that a major gathering place for indigenous community members was a haven for sexual predators. We tried to introduce safety protocols into this local gathering spot only to find there was no will to address the sexual violence. Key leaders were themselves perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence. I was, in fact, on the Elder's Council. At first we seemed to be making great progress until a member of the Elder's Council's son sexually assaulted the daughter of another elder. The father could not apply the training he had received to his own family situation. The elder Council disbanded in the ensuing conflict. Also another teenager was raped on the pow wow grounds during a gathering and not one person responded to her screams. The article in the local newspaper, by identifying the location of the rape, effectively disclosed the identity of the teen who was victimized. The Visioning B.E.A.R. Circle decided to develop alternative cultural gatherings where safety protocols would be in place to ensure the safety of all. We hosted a pow wow where we were able to obtain stay away orders preventing two unaccountable people who had victimized their former partners from the weekend gathering. Through our advocacy and court interventions, we are now seen as the credible go-to place in the indigenous in our area. This supports a platform for our primary prevention efforts. Members of the

Visioning B.E.A.R. Circle have presented our work at the National Sexual Assault Conference from 2008 to the present on six different occasions. We have also presented at the Multi-Cultural Efforts to End Sexual Assault for several years, most recently earlier this year. We were selected as one of 13 innovative prevention programs nationally through a study done by the NSVRC with CDC funding. Our community led, indigenous Council has been instrumental in addressing violence prevention.

Finally, after several experiences with different prevention approaches, we wondered “What is wrong here? Nothing felt right. We decided to learn about our ancestral teachings before the Western Europeans came. We researched all the tribal groups and learned about the values all the tribes held in common. Twenty-six different values emerged. We then whittled that down to twelve. These are:

1. Peace and Justice: true democracy, environmental justice, economic justice and gender equity
2. Compassion
3. Generosity
4. Wisdom
5. Courage
6. Respect
7. Sacredness/prayer/vision quest/reverence/faith
8. Humility
9. Empathy
10. Balance
11. Connection to the land
12. Gratitude

An exhaustive literature followed to flesh out the content of these values. The twelve values are not framed in mainstream language. True democracy is based on Circle Process where all are equal and responsible for all decisions and outcomes of behavior. Environmental justice demands a relationship with the plants and animals as equal to humans with their own agenda. Gender equity means that women are the creators of the land and are to be treated with the respect that this entails. Economic Justice is based on a bartering system where all have what they need regardless of how the community values their gifts. Those whose gifts are compensated more are expected to give away the excess.

True democracy involves a consensual decision making process. Conflict resolution is where those who harm and those who experience harm are asked to participate in healing circles that would restore the community to wholeness. The person victimized is the final authority on conflict resolution in relationship violence situations. Searching for common ground is critical. The search for justice is a never ending process and



injustice itself is viewed as the root of all violence and the source of all conflict. True democracy fosters equity in sharing resources.

Gender equity, according to indigenous understanding, means that women have control over reproduction and environmental issues. Reproductive Justice and environmental justice meet at the intersection of women's blood and empowerment. This literally means that women's DNA goes back to the very first ancestor. Every woman in this room carries this ancestral DNA. When women speak of trauma, we are speaking for the land who cannot speak for herself. Our stories are sacred tears, like rain falling. We need to tell these stories to free ourselves from trauma re-enactment. Our survivor stories are spiritual experiences between the land and the people. Re-establishing equitable balance means we have to teach our female children who they are and empower them to take their rightful places in the community. Because the earth is female it is the women who must lead the work of restoring the environment to where it was before human interference. In indigenous culture God is not a noun. God is a woman; she is thought; she is an active co-creative force. Feminine principles outline a world of interacting communities on equal footing with plant communities, animal communities, human communities and spiritual communities. Healthy relationships are reciprocal. The grandmothers among us have taken the fire inside and radiate that fire outward to the communities in which we are a part. Women can empower children by taking them to the land to plant and gather food. Women are the first environment. Each woman passes on contaminants in her breast milk. Her milk is a barometer assessing the health of the environment. And now her DNA holds the trauma of times past.

Economic justice speaks to the role of money and profit in fostering violence against women and children and Mother Earth. While excessive possessions are valued in the dominant culture, sharing one's excess in give-away ceremonies are valued in indigenous culture. One percent of the United States population controls ninety-nine percent of the wealth. In indigenous thinking, greed is an illness that bogs a person down with having to care of all these material possessions. Bartering and equitable distribution of resources builds community. Greed can lead to spiritual emptiness because one's life purpose is based on amassing material possessions. Even women get seen as trophy wives for the rich and powerful in that mindset.

When White male, Christians took the land and claimed ownership of it, they needed a means to keep it. Money was invented and access to money itself was kept in the hands of the occupiers and slave holders as a means of controlling access to resources. Consider the violence inherent in this greed. Consider the violence against women. Consider the child labor laws that were necessary to outlaw the using children

to work the mines. Consider, too, that human beings lost their freedom in the frenzy to own everything. All human beings are now fenced in, even the wealthiest living in gated communities. Access to the shores is limited. Animals are fenced in for human consumption in warehouses of pain and despair. We eat the pain of the plants and animals that are no longer treated like our relatives. They are treated like objects over which human have dominion.

The Visioning B.E.A.R. Circle has now become the Visioning B.E.A.R Circle Intertribal Coalition as its own 501 c 3 non-profit. Our eight-member board has authored our own primary prevention curriculum based on indigenous values and traditions before colonization. We are also designing our own evaluation tools with the consultation of two professional researchers funded by the NSVRC. We teach in sacred Circle. The goal of the curriculum is to decolonize our minds and return to a way of living based on the way our ancestors taught us. We teach gender neutrality and sacredness of all life. We teach that we are equal to and need the plants and animals for survival. We are renewing our agreements with the plants and animals that feed and clothe us. We seek to restore the plants and animals to their original condition before human interference. Our modules are taught in Circle with four teachers in the four directions. Our pre-test question is asked in the first round of the Circle. This is followed by several teaching rounds. Then the original question is asked again, providing our post-test response. The final round asks how and if people have been transformed by participating in the Talking Stick Circle. This round is audio taped to provide qualitative data. The feedback we have received speaks to the seamlessness of the evaluation process. People forget the evaluation in their story-telling and sharing.

Our overarching goal is for our community to embrace our ancestral cultural into our everyday life. We see a cultural center with land we can love and live upon. We can use our ancestral teachings to resolve conflict, to heal and restore ourselves, to share and teach our children through stories about how to be compassionate and live with reverence for the land and all the life upon it. Because we are all related, we invite those of all cultures to dance with us in the Circle of Life.

Women of color know in our hearts what needs to be done. We can look to our own cultures for the tools to change the culture of violence to one of peace. The change we need cannot be done by emulating the structural violence forced upon us. It can be done from transforming what is inside us that has been injured by the impact of colonization to a place of healing and by finding within ourselves that place of ancestral knowing that has been waiting for our discovery.

What can we do to develop transformative structures to prevent childhood sexual abuse?

Engage an interactive discussion to discuss possibilities.

Discuss working and engaging with anti-oppression groups in the community as crucial to forging safe spaces for children to grow.

Discuss working with youth in community groups.

Discuss Circle Process and Community Consensus Decision Making