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# Native Men's Gathering: Experiences That Shape Behaviors and Beliefs about Violence Against Women

Summary of Roundtable Discussions  
Held August 23-24, 2016  
Oneida Nation, Green Bay, Wisconsin

January 2017

## Purpose and Goals of the Gathering

On August 23, 2016, the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) invited American Indian and Alaska Native men involved in efforts to end domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking in their communities to the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin to share their perspectives and describe their work.

This was the first convening of its kind, and for most of the participants, it was the first time they had ever shared their experiences with like-minded men. The gathering became a collective opportunity to shed previous feelings of isolation and participate in the national dialogue about violence against women.

The gathering held particular significance to OVW, as men's voices are critical to ending violence against women, and they are often not a part of the discussion. Their perspectives must be understood in order to fully comprehend how their experiences have impacted violence towards women and girls.

Roundtable gatherings are one mechanism OVW uses to hear and understand the various perspectives and experiences that make up the field of those who are working to end violence against women, and thus roundtables are critical to informing OVW's decision making. OVW is committed to incorporating men's involvement and addressing boys and men's victimization, especially in Indian country where men and women have similar, extremely high victimization rates. Data from the National Institute of Justice's recent study, *Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Men and Women*, show that men and women in Indian Country have been victimized at similar rates: 84% for women and 81% for men.<sup>1</sup>

The objectives for the Native Men's roundtable were:

- Learn about the common experiences of Native men.
- Hear the messaging Native men received as boys, youth and young men, and how their experiences influenced their values, beliefs and behaviors towards women.
- Begin to understand how men might use their influence and privilege to impact the safety of women and children around them.

The men who attended the roundtable varied in age from their early 20's to mid-60's. They represented tribes from Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Washington, and organizations and community groups who share a commitment to creating safe and healthy communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosay, Andre B., *Research Report, "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Men and Women,"* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (2016). Available at [www.NCJRS.gov/pdffiles1/NIJ/249736.pdf](http://www.NCJRS.gov/pdffiles1/NIJ/249736.pdf)

## Themes and Outcomes

The participants' personal experiences were the foundation of the gathering, and the influences of their cultures were interwoven throughout the conversation. From these roots, and through a strong sense of openness, truthfulness, and trust, several themes emerged.

One of these themes was the experiences at different phases of life that shaped many of the men's relationship to women and violence. The men overwhelmingly recognized and expressed appreciation for their cultural socialization and the values women instill in Native boys and in their communities – the mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other females who first taught the participants the personal values they carry today. During the earliest stages of life, women were their primary caregivers and the strongest force in their lives. As one participant said: "We didn't have our fathers. When we did, they were usually bad examples. Our grandmothers were good teachers. Our mothers were teaching us about life."

In their youth/teenage phase, most of the participants said they experienced a shift toward violence. Much of the questioning and experimentation during this phase challenged the traditional tribal values they learned as children. As one participant explained: "We grew up with tribal ceremonies that celebrate the sacredness of life. But at the same time, we grew up seeing men mistreat women."

In adulthood, most participants began to feel their heaviest level of community responsibility, and in the elder phase of life, they spoke of having a holistic vision of themselves and their community, and of beginning to reconnect with the positive values of the ancestors.

Another theme was an acknowledgement of the personal nature of their work to end violence against women. Participants agreed that the conversation during the roundtable touched them personally in many ways and on many levels. It brought up deep-rooted, heart-felt emotions related to love, control, and power (or lack of love, control, and power). The conversation also raised their awareness that domestic violence and sexual assault are not just about the victim and the perpetrator. The violence is also about the children, the extended family, and the community.

Acknowledgement of the male-dominated systems that are typically used to address violence against women also emerged as a theme. Whether it was batterer intervention programs or mandatory arrest, the current systems are driven by male-dominated authority (rather than the authority of the tribe or authority of the community), are often difficult to access, are piecemeal rather than holistic, and usually do not reflect the native culture.

During the convening, three short digital stories had a significant impact on the men. The videos, created by Mending the Sacred Hoop, were first-person accounts from women survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The videos are part of the "Faces of Violence" series available at: [www.youtube.com/user/MendingSacredHoop/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/MendingSacredHoop/videos).

In sharing their reactions to and perspectives about the videos, participants said the videos were inspiring and enlightening. As one young man said after hearing an older man share his thoughts: “I feel enlightened again. I feel able to step back and reflect upon the generations and the wisdom of the ages.”

## **Recommendations for Moving Forward**

The emotions and experiences shared at the gathering spurred a collective desire to participate in another convening soon. The men expressed their sense of isolation and lack of support they experience while working in this field, not only by families and tribal leadership, but also by systems – both tribal and non-tribal. Nearly every man who spoke said that to truly move forward with the knowledge gained at this first-ever, OVW-sponsored roundtable gathering of Native men, it is critical that similar convenings happen at least annually. They were very appreciative for OVW bringing them together for this discussion, but stressed the need to continue to collaborate in order to infuse a fullness and vitality into the movement for engaging other men.

The gathering’s final conversations centered around moving forward – not being complacent, but activating men to engage in vigorous roles that foster non-violence, and to hold other men accountable for change, responsibility, and forgiveness.

Towards this end, the men agreed that tradition and cultural practices are the direction for healing in tribal communities. They discussed promising practices such as traditional rites of passage, camps, and retreats for men that include traditional sweats, and other methods they would like to see practiced on a larger scale to stop the violence. It is these promising practices that they hope to share and build upon during the next men’s gathering.

## Testimony of Participants

“It’s okay for us to speak up. And it’s okay to love, and it’s okay to hold each other accountable.”

“But we, as men, also need to be supported. And we also have to be forgiven. Because we do – as warriors – we want to protect our women. We want to live up to those roles.”

“In tribal communities, probably the most effective facilitators of the programs are men who have been raised in that community; people who have been both victims and perpetrators of the kind of life-altering trauma that we’re dealing with in the first place.”

“Batterer’s intervention programs should not be looked at as punishment. It’s an opportunity to restore honor, to return to honor. That, for many of us, that we have done things to dishonor our name. We have done things to dishonor our families, our partners, our children. We have done things to dishonor our community. But we have the opportunity to restore honor, to return to honor.”

“It’s hard for me to have these types of conversations. For some reason, it wasn’t hard today.”

“The opportunity to feel safe in this environment, feel safe in this conversation, it’s an honor. It’s a blessing.”

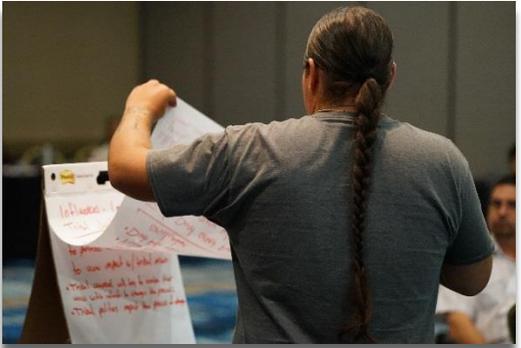
“We can take this conversation to another level where we actually create, you know, worksheets and workbooks and actually develop our own curriculum.”

“I think we’re ready for movement. There’s a lot of small programs and groups that are doing little work like this, but maybe it’s time to move to a grander scale as native men.”

“No matter what it is that’s really troublesome in our communities, substance abuse and everything else, it’s about a lost identity, which is the spiritual connection. We lost that spiritual connection as native people...”

“We seem like we’re standing alone doing this work. But the beauty is that it’s begun.”

“One thing I didn’t hear when we were talking about those last scenarios was the little boy. I heard about the women, and I heard about the men, but I want to give that child a voice in this room. He was beaten. He was hurt. He witnessed violence within, and he witnessed his mother’s inability to help him.”



*Images from the Native Men's Gathering: Experiences that Shape Behaviors and Beliefs about Violence Against Women*

## A Warrior's Journey

With deep thanks and appreciation to OVW for sponsoring the roundtable and to the Oneida community for hosting it and providing participants with kindness and care, David Cournoyer, Oglala Lakota, read a poem he created after co-facilitating the roundtable's two days.

**A Warrior's Journey:** Reflections from Native American Men Gathered at Oneida Nation of Wisconsin to Discuss Violence Against Women, by David Cournoyer

It's a boy!  
A baby boy!  
How big? How much hair?  
What's his name?

Not his slave name!  
The one that comes from the grandmas,  
From inside the ground.  
A name dug up  
From that treasure-culture buried in my own  
backyard.

What's his Indian name?  
His destiny, his ancestry, his legacy,  
For his great-grandchildren still to come.  
When they reach back to their origin story:  
Women giving life, Women sharing power, Families  
surviving seal to seal.

What's his name?  
Will he be a warrior who wars?  
A warrior who loves?  
Will he find fault, or find love?  
When does he take his first moose?  
What about that first kiss?  
Then will he dance and sing in thankful bliss?

Who will teach him?  
Who will hug him?  
How will he learn living an honorable life?  
To be a good relative?  
To help and please, to provide and protect?  
Not perpetrate, prostitute, or possess.  
Where did THAT come from anyway?

From the Cavalry?  
From Carlisle?  
A cask of whiskey?  
Colonization?  
Or a drunk uncle in the night?

The pain, the hurt.  
The lies, the walls.  
I'm done. I'm effin' done.  
I'm tired.

Accountability starts with me, but I can't stand it.  
I can't stand up to him anymore.  
I can't stand up for them anymore.  
I'm done with this reality show.

I need you to show up and speak up.  
Show your heart.  
Do the self-work. Do it.  
Apply pressure; that's what I needed.  
Full-court pressure: Apply it, gently but firmly.  
Press.  
Push.

Now, shush....I hear a cry.  
A baby? A little bundle?  
He's crying. Pick him up!  
No, wait, that wail is older.  
It's louder...wiser.  
A cry from someone who's seen the wilderness, cold  
and alone.

That cry came from a vision, an awakening  
It's the cry – the cries and the tears - of a man, a  
father, a lover, a warrior.

# Appendix 1: Participants

## Facilitators

David Cournoyer, St. Paul, MN  
Sarah Curtiss, Duluth, MN

## Native Participants

Johon Atkinson, Metlakatla, AK  
Don Chapin, Newport, OR  
Greg Grey Cloud, Mission, SD  
Paul Crane, Emmonak, AK  
Robert Flores, Tucson, AZ  
Daniel Goombi, Mayetta, KS  
HawKan HaaKanson, Harlem, MT  
Joshua Hughes, Pendleton, OR  
Joel Hunt, Emmonak, AK  
Gregory Jacobs, Green Bay, WI  
Rod Kaskalla, Santa Fe, NM  
Peter Lengkeek, Fort Thompson, SD  
Eric Lewis, church Rock, NM  
Marlin Mousseau, Seymour, WI

Raymond Beans, De Pere, WI  
Jeremy Nevilles-Sorell, Duluth, MN  
Craig Ninham, Green Bay, WI  
Sven Paukan, St. Marys, AK  
Kenny Perkins, Akwesasne, NY  
Raymond Povijua, Santa Fe, MN  
Monte Randall, Okmulgee, OK  
Gene Red Hail, Oneida, WI  
Hehaka Wambli Red Hail, DePere, WI  
Roy Red Hail, Oneida, WI  
Aldo Seoane, Rapid City, SD  
Leonard Stevens, Oneida, WI  
Fidel Talache, Santa Fe, NM  
Ralph Tucker, Oneida WI

## Federal Participants

Bea Hanson, Principal Deputy Director, OVW  
Lorraine Edmo, Deputy Director for Tribal Affairs, OVW  
Darla Sims, Tribal Division Team Lead, OVW  
Karimah Dosunmu, Program Assistant, OVW  
Rebekah Jones, Grant Program Specialist, OVW  
Steven Hafner, Research Assistant, National Institute of Justice

## Other Participants

Amy Pincolini-Ford, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
Brienne Smith, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
Yolanda Webb, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

## Appendix 2: Agenda

### ***Native Men's Gathering: Experiences That Shape Behaviors and Beliefs about Violence Against Women***

#### *Day One*

8:30 am      *Traditional Opening/Welcome*  
9:45 am      *Framing Our Discussion*  
10:45 am     *BREAK*  
11:00 am     *Beliefs vs. Behaviors*  
12:30 pm     *LUNCH BREAK (on your own)*  
2:00 pm      *Four Directions: Small Group Discussion*  
3:30 pm      *BREAK*  
3:45 pm      *Wrap up Discussion*  
5:00 pm      *Adjourn*

#### *Day Two*

8:30 am      *Welcome Back*  
9:00 am      *Reflections on Day 1*  
10:00 am     *Video:*  
10:30 am     *BREAK*  
10:45 am     *Discussing Influences and Impacts*  
12:30 pm     *LUNCH BREAK (on your own)*  
2:00 pm      *Acknowledgement, Forgiveness—the Man in the Mirror*  
3:15 pm      *BREAK*  
3:30 pm      *Activate a Paradigm Shift*  
4:15 pm      *OVW final thoughts/ Wrap-up activity*  
4:45 pm      *Wrap up and adjourn (Traveling Song)*

