

Indigenous Women and Colonization: Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Activism

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The relationship between the broader feminist movement and the urban Aboriginal women's movement was explored by the writer as part of the thesis project. According to the suggestions in women's studies classes, the finding of the research should be based on women's experiences and perspectives. Following this prescribed methodology, the writer sought various Aboriginal women's groups for their perspectives. However, it was soon realised that women of First Nations do not speak only on behalf of their own gender but for their families and societies as a whole. The departure from the prescribed feminist methodology which reflected mainly academic women's experiences and issues was problematic for the researcher. The result was that a distinct Aboriginal women's methodology (mode of inquiry) in the form of a grandmother's lodge emerged.

The writer conducted research amongst urban Aboriginal women's groups in accordance to the Indigenous grandmothers' lodge (council). A grandmother's lodge is a council open to all members of an Indigenous society where both genders and all sectors of society are equally represented. This methodology materialised as a result of the information gathered from the literature review and informants.

What was also most common throughout the literature review and interviews was a distinct Aboriginal women's conception of human nature, despite the diversity of First Nations. The conception of human nature is grounded in the Circle of Life philosophy which has been passed on by oral tradition and has been the foundation of Indigenous societies for centuries.

Spirituality plays a central role in the way one perceives their role in life. Aboriginal women's conceptualisation of their role as women is of a custodial nature and as keepers of the culture. Therefore, the connection to the earth and motherhood is also spiritual as in Indigenous societies women are often referred to as the earth and vice versa.

Women's reproductive role is considered sacred and important for the continuation of future generations. It is believed that woman was put on earth for a purpose by the Creator, as is everything else in the universe. It is this spirituality that was most evident in the interviews and in the

literature review.

However, there is some concern by many of the informants that the younger generation has departed from Indigenous beliefs and values and has lost this spirituality. This appears to be the greatest concern of urban Aboriginal women despite their own alienation from their home reserves. The restoration and maintenance of Aboriginal values and traditions is central to Aboriginal women's activism and the focus of their activism is to regenerate these values to the youth. The following is a brief summary of interviews and represents only a small portion of collected data. Most interviews were open; however, a few basic questions served as guidelines. (Two of these taped interviews were accidentally omitted.)

Taped Interviews: Appendix A

1. What is the role of Aboriginal women in your community?

Informant 1 is an elder and a member of both the AWCS and NWAC but is also involved in other organisations and workshops. She is Cree/Assiniboine. She claims that "traditionally, women always had a place in Aboriginal societies, before Europeans invaded our country. However, Native women have now been pushed into the background because of the laws imposed under the Indian Act which were made up by 'White Men' and the patriarchal system which the leadership has adopted."

Informant 2, the initial contact for the next interview, suggested a joint interview with her intern (Informant 3). Both are actively involved in various organizations. One is Métis and the other a former non-status Indian, now of treaty Indian status. Informant 2, a member of AWCS and NWAC, believes that the position of Aboriginal women has been undermined by society because the more dominant society tends to look down on Aboriginal people. Informant 3 said that in her northern community there were more women working outside the home now or attending educational institutions and that by mutual agreement more men were helping with babysitting.

Informant 4, who is of European/Aboriginal ancestry, gained Indian status under Bill C-31. She is presently a rather inactive member of AWCS and NWAC. According to her, there is a tendency for Aboriginal women to seek higher levels of education and to be in more dominant positions in their communities. She believes that Métis women are much more dominant in their communities than other Aboriginal women.

Informant 5, a member of AWCS, NWAC, The Older Women's Project and other Aboriginal groups, claims that many Aboriginal women, such as herself, are involved in many areas (for example, in healing circles) and that

many Aboriginal women serve as role models, educators and elders in their communities. She is Assiniboine.

Informants 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 belong to a group called *Wichitik* (Help One Another). Most of these women have also been involved with AWCS and NWAC but decided that their immediate concerns were not being met by them or the Older Women's Project. The women were mainly of Cree and Saulteaux backgrounds. These women felt the need for an action group to deal with everyday problems experienced by urban Aboriginal residents, especially those on welfare. The women interviewed took turns answering questions and seldom added to a person's response even when asked if anyone had anything to add. Therefore, it was assumed that there was consensus in the way a person responded to the question.

One informant believes that traditional Aboriginal women's roles have been eliminated or diminished because of the residential school system and the church's influence. However, she does see Aboriginal women becoming more involved and getting more aggressive, not only in education but in almost every aspect.

Another informant said that on her reserve traditional roles for men and women were maintained. She says that everyone has their own responsibilities, based on gender, and that there is no need for anyone to be reminded of these roles. Another informant says that on her reserve a lot of women attend band meetings and that there is input by Aboriginal women.

Informant 11 is a Micmac from eastern Canada. She regained her Indian Status under Bill C -31 but has been actively involved with the Aboriginal women's movement for years and is now the current speaker for the NWAC. She says that on her reserve the band is under custom law. This means that there is no discrimination based on residency and that there is no distinction between on-reserve and off-reserve residents or Bill C-31 members. Therefore, she was surprised that this was a problem for some individuals in western Canada. She informed me that on her reserve, the acting Chief was a woman and she, herself, has been a band councillor for nine years. She says that there is an active women's group on the reserve and gave examples of the women's activism. There are three councillors and a Chief on her reserve. Only one is male; therefore, Aboriginal women do have active leadership roles in her community.

2. Are the Aboriginal organizations male-dominated? If so, why are Aboriginal women not more involved politically? If not, why not?

(1) This elder was quite concerned about the direction the Aboriginal leadership has taken and believes that the Aboriginal male leadership has

adopted the European patriarchal system. This, in turn, has given leaders power and control, not only over women but over their own people as well. She believes that the need for an Aboriginal women's organization would probably not exist if Aboriginal women's roles were still recognized and respected.

(2, 3) Both informants have lived in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and situations varied. However, both are of the opinion that changes are needed and that women need to be heard.

(4) It is her belief that the Chiefs and councils tend to dominate over both sexes. She believes that women have lots to offer and that they seem to be more socially involved whereas men tend to be more political.

(5) From her own experience and observations, and having lived on different reserves, she has noticed that there is a need for more democracy in Indian self-governments. She believes that a hierarchical structure gives power to only a few. She also claims that urban Indians are more politically oppressed by their own Indian governments.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) One informant believes that all the Aboriginal organizations, the AWCS, NWAC, FSIN and AFN are losing direction. She is of the opinion that these organisations, as well as the tribal councils, are following policies made up by the bureaucrats. She says that the leaders are always the same but just come under different names. She believes that these leaders are too high up and that they need to come down to the grassroots level and to speak to individuals and local organisations.

One said that there is only a minority of men that tend to be more dominant, mainly the leadership who have adopted "White" ways.

(11) This informant replied indirectly and said that she did not put the blame on Aboriginal men. She said that women have been traditionally the nucleus of a family and the community and she still believes that this is the case on her reserve. She says that women are a strong segment of the community and that this strength is at the grassroots level. According to her, they are the organisers and take a big role in the community. Therefore, they are too busy at that level and have no time, so have allowed men to take this role. However, she does see change happening as more support systems are in place. Once the children grow up and leave home, women have more time to get involved in other activities.

She also shared a little story that someone had told her. Historically, she said, before European contact, women were the leaders. However, the European men did not want to deal with the women and preferred to talk with the men. So the women, who were supportive of their men, allowed this to happen, but continued to counsel.

3. Should Aboriginal women be encouraged to become more involved in politics, economic development, in social planning – preservation of culture, religion, education, and so on?

(1) What is important to this informant is the future of the children. As a spiritual elder she believes it is her role to instil the values and beliefs that were taught to her as a child.

(2 and 3) One informant believes that Aboriginal women should put their differences aside and unite, despite the different labels given to Aboriginal people.

(4) This informant believes that Aboriginal women should definitely become involved in all areas, including economic development.

(5) This informant says that the focus of her journey is to pass on Aboriginal values, beliefs and traditions that have been lost to persons attending residential schools. She is involved in various aspects of Indian culture in terms of empowerment to women, and some of the areas she was concerned with were images, parenting and role models. Mainly she works with Aboriginal teenagers, single parents, elders and older women.

She believes that many Aboriginal youth and people are confused about their own sexuality. She believes it is important to get into the whole issue of sexuality, to bring the values back and to heal this confusion. She says that she has been involved with healing circles for women who follow a certain ritual. She believes it is important to try to bring back these rituals to the last two generations who have been most affected.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) One informant is definitely of the opinion that Aboriginal women should be involved in all aspects of community development. An example she provides is that of a talking circle because she feels that sharing is important. According to her, talking circles connect both men and women and demand respect. She believes this is important for the preservation of roles, culture and religion.

Another informant says that women should become more involved on the issue of sexual abuse.

Most of the women told stories of sexual abuse, which they believe has been responsible for many suicides. Many persons have kept it hidden because of shame. These women feel that women have the responsibility of bringing this issue out in the open because they feel that the leadership is hiding what is happening. They believe this issue needs to be addressed as there is a hurt out there. Apparently sexual abuse, from past experiences at residential schools, has affected both males and females who have now become abusers in their own communities.

(11) This informant believes that Aboriginal women should be involved in all areas, especially in economic development. She says that there are a lot of single parents and unwed mothers who need to ensure an economic base for future generations. She does not believe that Aboriginal communities have much to offer to support Aboriginal populations and believes that the focus should be on economic development.

She also believes that women are the ones that instil many of the traditional values and beliefs in the young at home and through their involvement at the community level. She feels it is important for children to respect others. Respect for others includes many things, one being respect for each other as male and female.

4. Do you believe that Aboriginal women should be involved in the feminist (women's) movement?

(1) She was of the opinion that that as women, feminists should be given support on some issues. However, she thinks that feminists tend to be "men bashers" and would not call the Aboriginal women's movement a feminist liberation or feminist movement. The reason given for this is that Aboriginal women tend to be active in many different issues and a more appropriate term for their involvement is activist and not feminist.

(2, 3) Informant 2 does not oppose involvement with the feminist movement because she believes that changes are needed and that women need to be heard and treated equally. The issues that she would like addressed are racism, sexism and classism and she believes that we need to give each other support.

Informant 3 agreed that involvement in the feminist movement is a start. These informants do not identify themselves as feminists.

(4) This informant's response was a definite "no." Some of the reasons given for not becoming involved were that the concerns of Aboriginal women are very different, that feminists cannot speak on behalf of Aboriginal women, that feminist cannot help with racism or address it, and that they do not understand Aboriginal women and what they go through.

She believes that Aboriginal women should have their own movement because they have their own belief system, values and morals. She does not agree with some of the things that some feminists would say or do (lesbianism, for example), and she would rather stay away from them. She does not mind being a woman and in fact, likes being a woman. She may sometimes argue with men, but this does not mean that she hates men.

(5) This informant does not believe that Aboriginal women should follow the feminist movement. The reasons given was that feminists do not

honour motherhood. She believes that nature and the family have a role and that it is the women that has to nurture because motherhood is an important concept in Indigenous societies. She believes that we are born into this role as women and that the whole issue of sexuality needs to be addressed in order to bring back Indigenous values and to heal the confusion about gender roles.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) Most of the informants responded to this question. One said that Aboriginal women should do their own thing and should not be involved. She said she did not want to be brain-washed. Another said that one should know oneself before becoming involved. Another added that feminists were way behind Aboriginal women. One went on to say that we have to follow the grandmothers, with prayers in the morning, and to honour motherhood.

(11) This informant does not feel that it is necessary, although, she firmly believes that women's perspectives on all issues need to be heard. She believes that Aboriginal women have to be in a political arena to ensure their views are voiced, but she does not feel that Aboriginal women are seeking the same type of equality as feminists.

5. Could you share your views about the relationship that exists between Aboriginal people and nature?

(1) According to this informant, teaching the youth traditional values and the belief that we need to live in harmony with the four sacred elements in accordance with the four directions is essential.

(2, 3) Informants 2 and 3 come from mixed backgrounds and did not go into any great detail, but Informant 2 did say that traditional values were still important to her.

(4) This informant replied that this depends on how you were raised. An example she gave is that as a youngster she was taught to respect Mother Earth. She was raised in the bush with her brothers and taught to take care of it and have respect for everything, including cleaning up any garbage. She says that at one time Aboriginal people practised this but now was shocked at the garbage thrown around by Aboriginal people on pow-wow grounds. She believes that older Aboriginal people have more of a harmonious relationship with nature than the younger people do nowadays. To her, a return to spirituality is needed.

(5) According to this informant, the concept of motherhood is important to Aboriginal people. This is our role as women, and we are born into this role. She believes that healing circles give Aboriginal people an opportunity to regain what values, beliefs and traditions have been lost through the

residential schools and that there will be a return to Native spirituality. She says that the residential school system broke down the socialisation process of Indigenous societies.

(6, 7, 8, 9, 10) One informant spoke for the group and said that they were all traditional women and believed in Native spirituality and harmony with nature. She says that motherhood should be honoured. She tells of a beautiful song she knows with the words "aske, neekowee" which means, "the Earth, our mother" in Cree. She believes that Aboriginal women should be involved in other protests and in environmental issues for the protection of Mother Earth. She has been involved in such protests and would like to see more Aboriginal women participating.

(11) This informant says that at every meeting she has attended she always hears people talking about Mother Earth, the four directions and the elements. As well, there are also sunrise ceremonies held at these meetings. Ceremonies give participants the opportunity to get out on the land, to the woods, and along the river, or have a feast, or simply just to get out and pick berries. They feel closer to nature and a return to the old traditional ways. She also says that the concept of motherhood is very important and provides an example of the importance and stature of a pregnant woman.

6. Are amendments to the Indian Act, for example Bill C-31, harmful or beneficial to Indian people?

(1) This informant has been very active and supportive in bringing about change to the discriminatory sections of the Indian Act. However, she does believe that the amendments to the *Indian Act* have brought out more discrimination towards reinstated Aboriginal women within Aboriginal communities. According to her, not all Aboriginal males are necessarily at fault.

(2, 3) Informant 2 dislikes the different labels given to Aboriginal people.

Informant 4 believes that Bill C-31 is bad legislation and has hurt Aboriginal people more than helped them. She says that there is more discrimination towards Bill C-31 members by band members.

Informant 5 did not respond directly to the question but did say that she feels that urban Indians are politically oppressed.

(Informants 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) – One person responded and said that the Indian Act was oppressive. She does not think that Bill C-31 is any different and that people are still being cut off from status. She believes that the Indian Act is useful as proof of what Native people have gone through, the colonial process. Otherwise, she does not see the Indian Act as ever being

beneficial but believes that a way can be found to use it as a weapon. She also sees Bill C-31 as a way of nation building and could make First Nations more powerful by taking on more members. The other participants did not respond to this question but seemed in agreement.

(11) She said that the Indian Act was all we had at the present and that unless something better comes along or replaces it, then we more or less have to live with it. She says that some amendments are useful such as Bill C-31 but that they are not without problems. She says that this has ended discrimination to some degree but did not go far enough.

7. What is the relationship between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men? Does one tend to dominate the other or are they more or less on an equal footing?

(1) Her own personal relationship has not been abusive or male-dominated and she believes that this is partly due to her strong personality. She has seen different forms of abuse in other relationships, regardless of sex or colour.

(2, 3) Both were of the opinion that men appeared to be more dominant in relationships and with more authority over family matters.

(4) She believes that this depends on which groups of Aboriginal people you are talking about. For example, she sees Métis women as being very dominant but does imply that this depends on individuals. She also says that many men are threatened by educated women in Aboriginal communities, whereas women feel less threatened by educated men. She also says that organised religion has had an impact on marital relations and that many are influenced by the teachings of the church.

(5) This informant believes that it depends on one's upbringing. However, she believes that roles have changed, especially men's, who play into the European patriarchal and class system and that indeed Aboriginal societies have changed.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) One person said that in her family women played the dominant role. Another said that it was the same for hers. Yet another said that it was still very traditional in hers as well. One person said that there is only a minority of men that tend to be more dominant, mainly the leadership, who have adopted "white" ways.

(11) This informant said she looked at it this way. She says that when she looks at the leaders, she knows that there must be a woman's influence in their lives. She says that to believe that they are making decisions or policies without any regard to the female population is just not a concept she can believe or accept. Neither can she see a female-dominated group making

decisions for just women because they too have males in their lives.

8. Are Aboriginal women oppressed? If so, what oppresses them the most? If not, why not?

(1) This informant believes that the Indian Act bears much of the responsibility for the way Aboriginal women have been treated. She says that the Aboriginal male leadership has adopted European values and the patriarchal system which has indeed undermined Aboriginal women's former positions. She has been actively involved in the restoration of Aboriginal women's roles and in changes to the *Indian Act*.

(2, 3) Both informants pointed out that Aboriginal women were more oppressed in northern communities than in urban centres because of isolation, lack of resources and poor transportation. However, when they do move to urban centres, they encounter other problems such as racism, classism and unfamiliarity with urban life. They also find that there is a lack of family support systems when they move away from their communities.

(4) She replied that Aboriginal women are more oppressed in the city than in their home communities. She says that this is because there is a conflict of cultures. She says most Aboriginal women are humble and shy in dealing with the various agencies. It seems to her that people are less caring in the city and Aboriginal people get the run-around. As a result, many Aboriginal people become very vocal and aggressive in their dealings with the various agencies. Racism, classism and poverty also leads to aggressiveness and quite often alcohol offers the only escape from these problems. This informant says that some non-Aboriginal women in higher positions also tend to oppress other women and tells of her own experience.

(5) She believes that Aboriginals are more oppressed in the urban centres, both by non-Aboriginals and by their own Aboriginal governments who are mainly male leaders with European values. Off-reserve Indians do not have the same privileges as on-reserve residents; therefore, they appear to be the more oppressed group. However, she does add that women can also oppress other women and gave her own experiences as an example.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) The women from Wichitik formed their group because they knew that urban Natives needed a support system and help in their everyday lives. Some of the problems that Native people face in the city include racial discrimination, daily transportation difficulties, getting children back from social services, and in general, lack of support systems. Many Aboriginal people in the urban centres get the run-around from various agencies and do not have anyone acting on their behalf. Some have problems with the local transit system and many do not read or do not have cab fare

when they get downtown. Meeting appointments and getting to the food bank pose problems for many, and volunteers helped those in need of transportation or assistance in interpreting. These women believe that urban Natives are a very oppressed group, and, as a result, the women have formed a network of people helping out, one which included men, women and elders. They would also like the same on-reserve privileges extended to off-reserve residents and firmly believe that where one chooses to live should not affect these privileges.

(11) She believes that urban Indians are probably more oppressed and have more difficulties. She says that one does not turn "white" the minute they leave the reserve. She thinks that urban Natives are oppressed by a combination of things and that if she were asked to identify one thing that she could not do so. For example, she says that as a youngster, she hated going to school as she was the only Aboriginal student in a very small community. She recalls the negative stereotypes of Natives as being savages that were taught in school when she was young, which made her ashamed of being Aboriginal.

However, she says that if women are oppressed, it is our own fault, it is our own thinking that makes us oppressed. She cannot say that we are oppressed because we have a voice, a channel and ways of being heard. But if funding for Aboriginal women's groups were cut off, then she would say that Aboriginal women were oppressed. She does not think the term "oppressed" is appropriate when speaking in terms of our own Aboriginal communities and groups.

She said that when she looked at the whole picture in respect to non-Aboriginal governments and the more dominant society, the term still would not describe how she felt she was being treated. She says she feels more like she is being cheated and that the attitude of the governments seems to be to give Aboriginal people something so that they will go away. She believes that it is more of an attitude problem and that Aboriginal people are victimised because of the superior attitudes of non-Aboriginals and their governments.

9. Which sex appears more oppressed, in the urban centres/or on the reserves? Why do you think this is so?

(1) She says that Aboriginal people have to try twice as hard in urban centres to get what they want, for example, jobs or housing. Sometimes, it is harder for women than it is for men, but not always. The same problem does not really apply on the reserve, but it does seem that "who you are" determines your destiny and whether or not you are outspoken. She also says

that many band governments are made up of relatives; therefore, "who you are" does have an impact.

(2, 3) Both informants come from mixed northern communities and say that when Aboriginal people leave their home communities they encounter many other problems. Both say that in some ways, the quality of life improves, perhaps financially for some, but emotionally they suffer more because of loneliness and racial discrimination in many forms. For example, quite often many Aboriginal people can be found living in dilapidated or even condemned houses simply because landlords tend to rent these types of accommodations to Native people. In other words, some material gains may be made, but emotionally and socially, they may suffer more because of their Aboriginality.

(4) This informant believes that both sexes are just as oppressed, perhaps in different ways, in urban centres. She cites many problems that urban Natives experience, namely racism, classism and poverty which lead to other societal problems such as alcoholism and prostitution. She is especially concerned about the inner City Aboriginal youth.

(5) This informant says that clashes in cultures, Aboriginal and European, have set these groups apart, and that some Aboriginal men have adopted European values. She believes that Aboriginal women are the ones fighting oppression by bringing in healing circles and reinforcing Aboriginal values. She says that Aboriginal women achieve this by their own spirituality and naturalness as women.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) The answers varied. One believes that everyone is oppressed but that Aboriginal women appear stronger. She says her dad, brothers and others are oppressed by different things. For example, she says that alcoholism oppresses families and individuals. She does not believe that being poor necessarily means you are oppressed in all ways. She does not believe the welfare system is necessarily good because nowadays people get bored easily because they have nothing to do. In the past, she says that people always found something to do, for example, beadwork and other crafts.

One said that there does appear to be more oppression and sadness in the urban centres because of the loss of culture. However, she says that is happening both on the reserve and in urban centres.

Another says that some individuals are just wasting away in urban centres and just sit at home smoking.

Still another says that life is much better on the reserve than in the urban centres because there's a lot of fresh air and more things to do out there.

Another said that the way 'oppressed' is defined makes a difference

from her point of view. She does not believe that this term is appropriate for defining Aboriginal women's roles.

(11) She says that when she looks at the whole situation of Aboriginal people in Canada, in terms of race, then she would say that yes, "oppressed" is the word she would use to describe Aboriginal peoples' situation. She does not see any input from Aboriginal people with regard to decision-making as it is only the federal government that decides what is best for Aboriginal people. She says that this is an attitude problem.

10. What do you envision or hope to see happening in the future for Aboriginal people?

(1) She would like to see the return of Aboriginal women's positions in Aboriginal societies. Although self-government is important, she feels that Aboriginal communities need to be healed before it becomes a reality. However, she wonders when the leadership will realise this.

(2, 3) They would like Aboriginal women to set their differences aside and work together to address racism, sexism and classism, which are more prevalent for Natives in urban centres. These two work with Aboriginal families as a whole, therefore, it is difficult for them to pinpoint one particular area of concern.

(4) To this informant, Aboriginal youth in the city are more of a concern to her because they are growing up in a society where they can get into anything and without spirituality. She believes that more involvement is needed for the education and guidance of the young because there is a lot of violence and temptation out there. What she would like is for FSIN to establish band offices in the city to deal with the urban members. Urban tribal councils tend to deal mainly with education and do not adequately serve urban Indians. She says that Aboriginal youth coming into the city do not have a place to go and FSIN should look more into setting up recreational facilities and other counselling centres for Aboriginal people as a whole. Although self-government is desirable, she does not feel that Aboriginal people are ready for self-government as more training is needed so that they become good administrators.

(5) This informant is mainly concerned with the revival of Aboriginal values, beliefs and traditions. She is especially involved in trying to bring back rituals and says it is important to get into the whole issue of one's sexuality and spirituality to heal the confusion caused by the residential school teachings. She says that there needs to be more democracy for urban Indians with their own band governments as well.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) These informants would like to see more equal

treatment for urban Indians by their own band governments and also by the federal and provincial governments. They believe that all privileges should apply regardless of residency. Self-government is a goal but at present there are other everyday matters that need to be addressed.

One informant says that there is a need for the younger generation to learn basic survival skills and responsibilities.

(11) She would like the attitudes of Canadians changed and feels that this can be accomplished through education and changes in curriculum. She would like Native Studies to become mandatory in schools because it is the young that will make the change. She does not feel that older Canadians will change their attitudes much with regard to Aboriginal people. She says that several issues need to be addressed both in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. She has mixed feelings about Aboriginal self-government, and although she does not oppose the principle she would like to know what self-government means before endorsing it.

She is also concerned that we are not all getting knowledge and teachings from the elders and that these might be lost if no effort is made to share and teach what has been heard. She says that elders share many things, the way things were, everything right down to medicine, and has heard many giving advice as to how to use leaves and other plants. She hopes that someone is documenting some of these teachings. She believes that many elders would be open to documentation if approached in the right manner and preferably by their own people.

11. What does the term "feminism" mean to you?

(1) This informant views feminists as "men bashers," but says that feminists should be given support on some issues. She does not like the term "feminist" but rather prefers to be called an activist. According to her, the Native Women's movement is not a sexist or separatist movement but rather a movement for the reaffirmation of Aboriginal women's roles in Aboriginal societies.

Informant 2 does not consider herself a feminist and says she likes being a woman. However, she did say that she wanted to be treated with dignity and respect in a relationship and would not stay in or tolerate an abusive relationship. Informant 3 did not respond.

(4) The informant said that while she attended university she followed the trend of feminists. However, she did not approve everything feminists did or said because she had been raised differently.

To her, it seems that feminism has a thing against men, where she has been taught differently. She says that what she was taught was that we were

put on earth for a reason. She has very positive feelings about the men in her life and says that they helped her out a lot.

(5) She says that the three main things that shape a person's attitude towards sexuality and how one reacts are puberty rites, linguistic grouping and one's own religious environment. This is why she believes her "White" sisters have different attitudes towards sexuality.

She says that there are definitely cultural differences with regard to motherhood and sexuality and the way Aboriginal families function. For example, non-Aboriginal nuclear families function differently from that of an extended Aboriginal family system. She does not think that Aboriginal women are oppressed spiritually, unlike feminists. Aboriginal women have their own spiritual beliefs and practises and do not focus on male domination as being the source of their sole oppression.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) One informant said that she had been raised to do things other than housework and that she had been socialised by her father. She had not been raised to pick on men and sees Aboriginal men as being just as oppressed as Aboriginal women. She says she is not a feminist. As far as she is concerned, feminists want status and power, to be like men. As well, she does not see unity in the women's movement and gives REAL Women as an example of women fighting against themselves.

One person says she receives guidance from elders and says that Aboriginal women face many other problems than just sexual or physical abuse.

(11) "I don't know, I always like to think that all of us have a feminist side". Her understanding of the term is that it means not wanting anything to do with men, which is not her idea of what feminism should mean. As far as she knows it refers to a radical group of women who use words like male dominance.

Her own conceptualisation of the term is that "it is a woman's perspective such a wife's, mother's, sister's or grandmother's, because that's what makes one feminine, we are females, we are mothers, child-bearers, nurturers and caregivers, so that's what feminism should mean." I asked her if she was familiar with the various feminist theories, she said she was not and did not care to become involved with feminists and believes that time has gone by.

12. In your experiences do Aboriginal women suffer from sexual or physical abuse?

(1) This informant says that she has seen many forms of abuse but not in her own relationship.

(2, 3) This question was not addressed in this interview.

(4) This informant works with inner City youth and therefore has seen many acts of violence and prostitution. She says that pimps are really a problem.

(5) She says that many things are revealed at healing circles but says that they are told in confidence.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) Some of these respondents gave instances of personal and non-personal cases of sexual abuse but were mainly concerned with those who had suffered at the hands of administrators in residential schools.

(11) She says that abuse comes in many forms and that she has heard many stories about abuse but has not experienced it personally. She says that Aboriginal people are aware of these abuses and are trying to deal with them in their own way, in their own communities.

13. Are women's and men's roles divided on the basis of sex in Indigenous societies? If so, can you explain why?

(1) This informant says that traditionally Aboriginal women had their own roles in their own societies.

(2, 3) This question was not addressed directly but the implication from other answers was that Aboriginal women do have their own identity and specific roles.

(4) This informant believes in traditional Native values and beliefs and was raised accordingly, therefore, accepts her role as a woman.

(5) This informant also accepts her role as a woman and says that at birth your destiny is determined and that you are raised accordingly.

(6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) One said that in her family, her father defined the roles of family members which were not necessarily based on sex. She said that the eldest had the role of raising the younger ones which included tasks such as cooking, sewing, ironing, beadwork and so on. Family members took turns whenever it was time for them to assume this responsibility. She says that this took place even when her parents were still alive.

She says that different skills determined a person's task. For example, if you were good at making bannock, then you would be the one to do it; tasks were not simply based on a sexual division of labour. The most noticeable division of labour based on sex seemed to be in ceremonies where men were the servers.

(11) This informant believes that she has already answered this question previously. She believes that women have their own roles and tasks based on sex.