

Metis Responses to Violence

Understanding, Preventing and
Responding To Violence in the Metis
Community

with Dr. Cathy Richardson & Dr.
Allan Wade

Metis Responses to Violence and Oppression

- Metis context of community disintegration and community development
- Issues of violence
- Understanding interpersonal and state-inflicted violence
- Violence prevention and community building

Who Are The Metis?

- The Metis are one of Canada's three founding Aboriginal populations
- There are 292,310 Canadians who identified as Metis (2001 Census)
- The Metis constitute 31% of the total national Aboriginal population
- There are 44,265 Metis people in British Columbia

Metis Suffering

- Due to ongoing processes of colonization, including racism and unequal distribution of justice, goods, services & resources, the Metis continue to be overrepresented in statistics of suffering
- The Metis experience lower levels of education, income, health, inclusion, well-being (Richardson, 2004, Stats Canada)

European Colonization of North America

- “When the full extent of abuse is finally revealed, we’ll find the most extensive case of child sexual, physical, mental, and spiritual abuse ever recorded in human history”

Phil Lane, Director of the Four Worlds International Institute in Southern Alberta (Lethbridge Herald, Nov 1997)

A Legacy of Violence Against Aboriginal People

- Native American people have been subjected to one of the most systematic attempts at genocide in the world's history. At the beginning of the colonization process in North America there were over 10 million Native American people living on the continent. By the year 1900, there were only 250,000 people left. (Thorton, 1986 in Duran & Duran 1995)

Colonization of the Metis

- Through colonization and social engineering, the Metis were shaped by the colonizers to become a separate community unto itself. The Metis were separated from the values and expectations of both parent cultures in order to avoid enculturating the Metis into a cash economy, and to distance them from the “primitive communism” of First Nations life. The Hudson’s Bay Company established schools for this purpose, one hundred years before the Residential School System was developed in Canada, where they supplied with European teachers, were punished for speaking their language, and were separated from their parent cultures. Through these schools, the Metis were denied their earlier mobility (Bourgeault, 1984).
- The Metis people resisted these attempts at colonization, culminating in the resistance at Batoche in 1885

Current Metis Vulnerability to Violence

- What is the relationship between the Metis land theft and the single mother living in a western Canadian urban centres in conditions of poverty, social isolation, and vulnerability to violence and child welfare?

Metis Land Theft

- In 1860, the Metis in Manitoba constituted 90% of the overall population
- 1891, Metis land scrip was issued
- Each Metis was entitled to 160 acres or \$160.00 (1.00 per acre)
- Land speculators followed, paying 25 cents on the dollar, many worked for the Saskatchewan Land Company
 - formed two years before scrip was granted
 - consisting of half the federal cabinet, the brother of the federal land claims commissions
 - went to Europe following famines, encouraging people to come to Canada to benefit from redistributed Native land according to the Homesteader's Act, later buying adjacent properties for elevated cash values

Metis Land Theft cont.

- 1885 Canadian government sends an army to attack the Metis at Batoche, Saskatchewan
- 53 Metis are killed, the others are persecuted; many go underground and a westward diaspora results
- The Metis become known as ‘The Road Allowance people,’ living on the edges of prairie towns in extreme poverty, denied education and social services
- Families shift from being ‘extended’ to ‘nuclear’ to ‘single-parent;’ people stop identifying as Metis
- Many women end up living in urban apartments with their children, facing a series of social challenges & vulnerable to interpersonal violence & child welfare

Violence & Colonization

- The Metis are a people living in between worlds, descended from both the oppressor and the oppressed, acting as mediators between the two worlds

Statistics of Violence

- While Stats Canada reports that every second Canadian woman has experienced interpersonal violence, the violence against Aboriginal women is more complicated. V
- Violence against First Nations and Metis women includes the violence of the state, and interpersonal violence such as racism, prejudice, and unequal access to goods, services and Canadian justice.

Humans are Responsive

- Human beings are living, conscious beings who respond to each other and their environments.
- Interaction is both conventional and improvised.

Dignity

- Autonomy/freedom
- Social respect/esteem
- Physical and psychological integrity (safety, security)
- Self-worth
- Concern for others

Dignity: The Heart of Social Life

- Individuals orient to one another as autonomous agents and take care to preserve dignity.
- Politeness (e.g. requests not demands), bad jokes, accidental farts
- Social acknowledgement, inclusive hand gestures
- Recognizing what/that people already know
- Individuals respond to minor affronts.

Violence is Social

- Violent acts occur in specific interactions that include two people.
- Contrasting scenarios.

Violence is Unilateral

- Mutual

- boxing
- a tango
- a kiss
- embracing

Unilateral

- a physical attack
- a pirouette
- forced oral contact
- pushing

Mutualizing and Eroticizing

- If you hit someone with a frying pan . . .
- If you clobber someone with a piece of wood . . .
- If you assault someone with your genitals . .
- Assault is not a fight, rape is not sex.
- Summary of Linda Coates' research

Perpetrators Anticipate Resistance

- The mechanics of simple crimes.
- Wife-assault, sexualized assault and abuse.
- Imperialism, residential schools.

Victims Resist Violence

- Resistance is typically indirect and disguised.
- Resistance is a response and cannot be encoded in a language of effects.

Four Operations of Language

- Conceals Violence
- Blames & Pathologizes Victims
- Conceals Resistance
- Mitigates Offenders' Responsibility

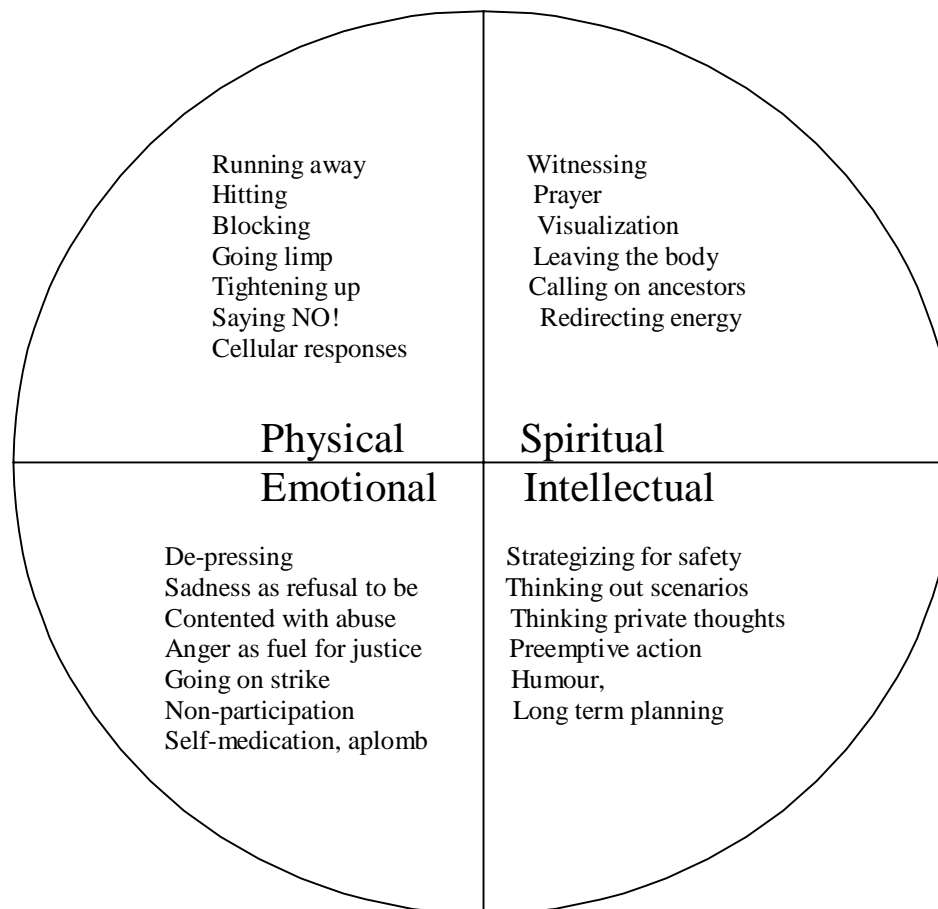
Violence Against Aboriginal Women

- My experience of violence transcends my gender and also includes my experience of the state. When the experience of Aboriginal women is fully understood on these terms, it seems to make little sense to report on the incomplete statistical evidence that documents that eight of ten Aboriginal women currently live in situations of overt physical violence - the violence of their male partners (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989:18). Focusing on a moment in the time or incidents of violence, abuse or racism, counting them - disguises the utter totality of the experience of violence in Aboriginal women's lives (Patricia Monture-Agnus, *Thunder In My Soul*, p. 171)

The Medicine Wheel of Responses

Based on the understanding that humans are living, conscious beings who respond to circumstances rather than merely being effected by them. Humans make choices, on a number of levels of being, that:

PESERVE DIGNITY, PROMOTE SAFETY, KEEP CHILDREN SAFE, & MAKE A POLITICAL STATEMENT



Resisting Violence

- The self is a stance-taking entity (Erving Goffman, 1963)
- Whenever individuals are treated badly, they resist (Coates, Todd & Wade, 1997)

Responses to Physical & Psychological Violations of Dignity

- Individuals often put dignity before safety
- Expressions of human dignity are misinterpreted as personal problems
- Forms of refusal represented as forms of inability
- Forms of autonomy represented as compliance
- Social commentary

•

Metis Responses to Violence

- Aplomb - the practice of keeping calm in tense situations (& false accusations)
- Thinking personal thoughts in the privacy of the mind
- Strategizing, planning, forethought,
- Meeting in a third space

Despair as an Emotional Response to Violence

- Despair and sadness are a statement that we refuse to be contended with violence and mistreatment (Coates & Wade, 1995, 1997)
- Despair is an evoked emotional response to a state of injustice
- Despair serves a number of functions and is linked to a process of decolonization identified as mourning (Laernui, 2000)

Resisting Victim-Blaming

- Metis women, along with other women, do not attract violent partners, consciously or unconsciously
- Demographically speaking, there are enough men willing to use violence as a tool, that it is statistically likely that a woman will end up with such a partner

Reassertions of Dignity

- Stories of brave women
- Fighting for children & against child welfare injustice
- Psychological freedom, naming the self

Response Based Networking

- Allan Wade email contact info
- Cathy Richardson
 - infinity@islandnet.com
 - Malaspina University College, Nanaimo BC
 - Metis Community Services, Victoria BC

The End

- Thank you for attending our presentation today....