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Christina G. Mello
Grand Valley State University

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Gender and Empowerment: Contemporary Lakota Women of Rosebud



Christina G. Mello
McNair Scholar

ABSTRACT

Western-European stereotypes still permeate Plains Indian culture suggesting that women were passive and subjugated while men were dominant warriors. This research challenges those stereotypes through exploration of origin and spirituality accounts, kinship organization, historical impact, contemporary and traditional issues, and through first hand ethnographic research of the Sicangu Nation of Lakota people in regards to gender roles. Using feminist critique and reflexive theoretical approaches, information was collected through participant observation and interviews with Sicangu people in 2004. By focusing on how Lakota women have empowered themselves, this research illustrates how women were and continue to be respected, influential members of what is now a matrifocal society.

Introduction

The focus of this research is on understanding women's roles in contemporary Lakota society on the Rosebud Reservation¹ of the Sicangu Nation (see figure 1). In the past and continuing into recent times, Lakota women have been stereotyped as subjugated and submissive (Young 2002:161). However, origin accounts and literature suggest that women's positions in Lakota society vary from women having equal roles to men, to being renowned, and even to leading the Lakota into a new era. Evidence is contrary to stereotypes as offered by the high position of women among the Sioux, the values placed upon virtue, upon childbearing, and upon industry and craftsmanship (Hassrick 1964:164; Medicine 2001:164).



Janet G. Brashler, Ph.D.
Faculty Mentor



Figure 1. Sicangu Nation in South Dakota
<http://www.rosebudcasino.com/pics/rosebudmap3.gif>

The feminist critique theoretical approach employed in this study focuses on gender roles and traditional explanations of biased images created for colonized peoples through a reflexive methodology. In addition, since gender roles of women are the focus of this research, kinship is examined. Kinship terms are complex and reflect gender, generation, and birth order (Young 2002:159). Relying on a feminist theoretical framework coupled with

¹ The word *reservation* is a western word. One informant told me the term *reservation* refers to a place for wild animals. I would like readers to be mindful as they read the word "reservation" that many people prefer to refer to their homeland as "Indian Country" rather than as a reservation.

a reflexive approach, the methods of participant observation and in-depth life history interviewing are employed. In particular, the research asks: in regards to gender roles, kinship, origin and spiritual beliefs, and contemporary and traditional issues, how much power is vested in contemporary Lakota women at the Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota? The concept of power exemplifies how empowered women are by examining the positive changes implemented in their lives, which places women in positions of being providers and respected members of society.

According to the theoretical models employed and research observations, kinship and ritual, origin myths, and spiritual beliefs should not be ignored. Contemporary issues stem from historical impact. The variables of historical impact, kinship, origin beliefs, and contemporary issues are examined individually and interconnected to illustrate how empowered women are unlike what traditional stereotypes suggest. To the Lakota people everything is interconnected and circular and so is this research, to an extent. For example, contemporary issues are a result of historical impact in which the colonizers tried to eradicate Lakota beliefs and way of life. Today, people are resolving these contemporary issues by returning to their traditional beliefs. Accounting for past gender roles in regards to the above variables will invalidate the stereotypes. The findings also address these variables as they relate to contemporary times. The focus was originally on women until it became clear that both Lakota men and women desire to pull together to restore their nation. The focus on Lakota women does not exclude considering Lakota men's roles and perspectives that reveal how men and women perceive one another.

Demonstration of changes in these variables, especially kinship patterns, over the years supports the idea of

female empowerment. Increasingly, many matrifocal families emphasize matrilineal kin where women have replaced men as providers. People on Rosebud do not fit into neat objective categories especially with the many outside influences. Very strong evidence for women being upheld and influential permeates contemporary society.

Background:

Issues of Gender and Power

Stereotypes of Native American women, in general, and Plains Indian women, in particular, suggest that women were passive and subjugated, and by inference, lacked power. However, a brief review of recent literature creates a different understanding about women from a number of Native American cultures and the Lakota in particular. Stereotypes of the past can be dissolved by reviewing research on the variables of kinship, origin/spiritual beliefs, and historical impact in regards to gender roles along with true depictions of traditional gender roles. Effects of colonization such as alcoholism, poverty, and violence can't be ignored. The reflexive approach emphasizes the importance of taking colonialism into account when considering contemporary situations at Rosebud so the effects of historical impact are included in the background review section. Gender roles, spiritual/origin beliefs, and historical impact are examined in separate categories.

Early Lakota society was misconstrued and misunderstood when interpreted as subjugating to women. Kehoe (qtd in Albers and Medicine 1983:56) explains that women's insights and attention to their roles along with ignoring the ethnocentric, Victorian influenced images of women's proper place in society sheds light on a more accurate depiction of early Lakota society. Lakota society in the past was not male dominated. Women and men had

different complementary roles and their roles in society were considered equally important (Young 2002:161).

A woman caring for children and doing all the work around the house thought herself no worse off than her husband who was compelled to risk his life continuously, hunting and remaining ever on guard against enemy attacks on his family. (Deloria 1944:39-40)

The attitude on division of labor was quite normal, despite how it looked to outsiders.

In Sioux society, men were the protectors, the providers; the women were the homemakers. Unfortunately, popular literature and films have greatly distorted the role of women by depicting them as slaves and household drudges, unequal or inferior to their men. This is far from the truth. The Lakota woman was a total individual, and her physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental makeup were not derived from the Lakota male. She had her own name suited to her personality and ability and did not take her father's or husband's name. (Black Hills Center for Indian Studies qtd in Reyer 1991:5)

Gender Roles

More recent researchers realize that European ideas of society affected researcher's interpretations and observations. Katherine M. Weist wrote that early observers focused on work and marriage of women and this is how they drew conclusions of low status (Weist qtd in Medicine and Albers 1983:31). She reported on observations of women doing all of the work around camp. Men were observed to be having

“fun” as hunters and warriors with many wives through the practice of sororal polygyny. Labor division and polygyny practices were quite functional within Lakota society. Furthermore, there was variability among gender roles so that men and women did not always perform according to the stereotypes. Early observers viewed polygyny as an indicator of lower status for the Sioux woman. In no way did this imply a low status or a threat to her rights but, in many instances, it was the woman who suggested her husband take a younger wife to relieve her of some of her household duties (Medicine 2001).

Negative interpretations of bride price and menstrual taboos were imposed and developed by early observers. Horses were offered in a respectful way to ask a woman's hand in marriage and weren't an economic purchase like early observers believed (Medicine 2001:194). Menstruation taboos in ceremonies had nothing to do with being polluting but had to do with a menstruating woman being observed as powerful. The Oglala Holy Man John (Fire) Lame Deer commented that the Oglalas do not view menstruation, which they call *isnati* (dwelling alone) as “something unclean or to be ashamed of.” Rather it was something sacred; a girl's first period was greeted by celebration. But, he continues,

We thought that menstruation had a strange power that could bring harm under some circumstances. This power could work in some cases against the girl, in other cases against somebody else.
(Allen 1992:253)

Women were able to “control the courting process” and owned the tipi along with everything but the man's hunting implements. Both women and men could dissolve a marriage at free will at any time. A man could announce

publicly *wihepa* or throw away the wife. At the appropriate time, he would approach the drum, hit it, and throw the drumstick over his shoulder, and the act was incontestable (Powers 1990:88). A woman would simply *wicasaihpeyapi*, throw away the man by packing up his stuff while he was gone and leave it outside the doorway, and he had no choice but to take his things and leave (Powers 1990:89).

Another variation in gender roles was the role of *berdaches*. *Berdaches* were men who from the time of youth dressed as women, performed women's work, never married, and were believed to be sacred (DeMallie 2000:726). DeMallie does not describe women's roles but does provide information on the roles of men. His failure to discuss women's roles has been cited as an example of perpetuating subjugated stereotypes about women (Young 2002:162). Various other accounts report flexibility in roles with stories of men engaging in crafts, women who were warriors, dreamers of *Anuk Ite* or Double Woman, and male *berdaches*. An *Anuk Ite* woman could choose between a life of reckless fun and various sexual partners or have all the desirable virtues of being a woman along with being a very skilled artisan (Medicine 2001:128-135). In an analysis of Ella Deloria's narratives, it is pointed out how the *Sinte Sapala Win* (Black Tail Deer Woman) is a reminder to young men to serve their people rather than indulge in erotic fantasy (Rice 1992:30). The story of a girl who elopes with a man who turns into a monster reminds her that a man who waits for a woman in courtship and offers horses to her family proves that he possesses the qualities of a hunter and a father.

Abuse of women is another area where power and gender are inextricably mixed, but there are many contradictory accounts. An account of a story about Crazy Horse says that Crazy Horse cared

too much about his people and was a shirt wearer so he didn't retaliate when No Water stole his wife who returned to him and shot Crazy Horse out of jealousy. The same source gives a quote in regards to the abuse of women. A man's abuse portrays weakness:

At your tipi a dog will make water, and if it happens, take your peace pipe and remember these words and your will power.
(Black Elk 1932: 390)

In other words, there are a lot of things that are insulting, but if I am a chief and someone elopes with my wife, I have to stand it. Take your pipe and control yourself (Rice 1992:31). The practice of cutting women's noses for female infidelity is described in a range from being a rare practice to a common practice. Debra Lynn White Plume writes that a wife batterer was called *ce ni ya* “he thinks with his penis.” A wife could make the man leave her lodge if they lived among her *tiyospaye* or extended family. He would, from then on, be known as *ki un ni* “they simply exist” and he could never marry again. Her brothers were obligated by social law to retaliate by speaking to him, beating him, or even killing him. If a wife lived with her husband's family, then her husband's parents were obligated to return her to her home. It was viewed as a broken home and the woman as honorable for leaving a destructive relationship behind. A man who beat a woman was considered irrational and could never lead a war party or own a pipe. He was thought of as contradictory to Lakota law and lost many privileges. A man who killed his wife was thought not to be Lakota any more (Reyer 1991:71).

Origin and Spiritual Beliefs

According to the Lakota origin account, there are very well documented female

figures who exemplify power. *Maka* is the earth spirit created by the spirit of *Inyan* who created the earth but shriveled up when he created *Maka* and gave her all his power (Young 2002:162). Different origin accounts report that an old woman is the one who determines the fate of the spirit world as souls pass on (Young 2002). White Buffalo Calf Woman who is of the *Ikce Oyate* (real people), who emerged to the earth out of the Black Hills, is the one who will lead the Lakota people to a new era and restore the buffalo (Green 1992:99). The White Buffalo Calf Woman is said to be the most influential and important deity of Lakota spirituality (Young 2002). White Buffalo Calf Woman's story is considered the most important to the Lakota people. She taught women quillwork, to avoid men during menstruation, and other roles (Young 2002:162). She taught the Lakota the seven sacred rites or ceremonies, (Powers:1990).

Acknowledgements of the importance of the roles of women are in Sioux mythology and are central to the preservation of the Sioux way of life. Ryer (1991) explains, "Indeed, the most important mythological figure was female, the White Buffalo Calf Woman" (3). Medicine (2001) agrees:

Essentially, this mythic occurrence [the origin story] is constantly invoked by most Lakota people, male and female, indicating the high esteem in which women are held in the culture. (140)

Furthermore, Lame Deer (qtd in Medicine 2001) explains her significant role:

The White Buffalo Woman then addressed the women, telling them that it was the work of their hands and the fruit of their wombs in which kept the tribe alive. 'You are from mother earth,' she told them.

'The task which has been given you is as great as the one given to the warrior and hunter.' And therefore, the sacred pipe is also something, which binds men and women in a circle of love. (141)

Gender roles are complementary at the mythological level as discussed by Powers (1990). White Buffalo Calf Woman or *Ptehincalasan Win* introduced the Lakota to all of their religious traditions but the male trickster, *Inktomi*, taught the buffalo people how to live on the earth's surface once they emerged there (Powers 1990:37). The duality in economic and social roles that ensures the group's survival is reenacted in such ceremonies as the Sun Dance (Medicine 2001:141).

Another example of women in the context of spiritual beliefs related to power is demonstrated by pregnancy and menstruation. *Eglushaka* or pregnancy translates to growing strong and the *wakan* of the female's menstrual cycle could weaken the *wakan* or holy components of male things such as medicine or war bundles (Medicine 2001:141). The times when women are most involved in ceremonies are before a woman loses her virginity and after a woman's menopause ceremonies. Virgins (*Witansna*) can handle sacred objects and carry the Sundance pole. Menopausal women are considered sacred and older women often are in charge of herbal medicines, as well as instructing the younger women about menstruation, sex, and child rearing (Powers 1990:43). One of the major ceremonies is *Is'na awicalowanpi*, 'they sing over first menses' or the White Buffalo Ceremony in English (Powers 1990:43). Women are honored for being able to bear children, which is why the first menses was an important ceremony.

Kinship

Because kinship and family are intimately related to issues of power and social organization among many Native American groups, a brief review of the kinship system is relevant. Grobsmith (1981) provides useful background. Lakota kinship of the past included the *tiyospaye* or extended family system or what was the basic hunting band. Courting took place in the summer when different bands would join together. There was a bilateral emphasis with a patrifocal structure. After WWII, many Lakota lived along the same streams in close proximity. Living in close proximity was the only way left that resembled old kinship/social structure of kinship or *tiyospaye*. The government formed people into clusters that broke up traditional kinship structure even further. Contemporary issues resulted from people being surrounded by strangers. Today among the twenty communities on the reservation there are some who have more traditional values and more of a *tiyospaye* structure. Remnants of *tiyospaye* are evident amongst family who are living in households of close proximity. The Antelope community does not resemble the old *tiyospaye* according to Grobsmith's research (1981). The Antelope community is located one mile from Mission. In the Antelope community, there has been a high degree of intermarriage between Lakota people and non-Lakota people over the years, which has had a considerable effect both on the degree to which native language is spoken and on adherence to traditional kinship roles (Grobsmith 1981: 39). Contemporary issues are related to the breakup of the *tiyospaye* system with historical impacts that have changed communities. Historical impact has given rise to a matrifocal organization as the findings of this research validate. The effects of historical impact on kinship are discussed in the following section.

Historical Impact

Here, the effects of historical impact are examined regarding gender roles, kinship, contemporary issues, and changes that have occurred among the Lakota people due to colonization. Kinship is a good example of a variable affected by historical impact or colonization. Traditional social controls do not operate today. For example, Lakota brothers were expected to follow after sisters to serve as guardians. The behavior of following sisters does not occur due to the break up in *tiyospayes* and reflects acculturation followed by suppression of tradition (Medicine 2001).

Meeting the expectations of *tiyospaye* is difficult in contemporary times. To pull one's own weight, especially for men, strikes at the core of *bloka-ness* (maleness) and leads to drinking (Medicine 2001:212). The difficulty of pulling one's own weight has to do with the displacement of male's roles. Displacement of men's roles began with the government's systematic slaughtering of the buffalo and forced relocation of Lakota people to the reservations. Men's traditional role of provider and warrior was eradicated. More economic opportunities for women became available because women were able to implement their traditional roles as discussed in this section. *Tiyospaye* systems were the basis of traditional kinship. Mary Crow Dog (1990) describes fragments of the old *tiyospaye* left today. If there is no alcohol then a child is never left alone, is always surrounded and enveloped in love (Crow Dog 1990:29). Historical impact has resulted in homes becoming mostly headed by females (Reyer 1991:5) and many children ending up with their grandparents (Crow Dog 1990:16).

Patricia Albers' (1983) study of historical impact at the Devil Lake Sioux Reservation in North Dakota provides a basis for understanding

historical impact which occurred and is occurring at Rosebud. Albers examines colonial impact by contrasting female status in modern times (1972) to changes in their status since 1870. In this comparison, matrifocal organization and the break up of the *tiyospaye* system is explained. There has been no research like Albers done specifically for the Rosebud Reservation.

From 1870 to 1910 (Albers 1983) women were excluded from treaty negotiations and discriminated against by the United State government. Women were excluded from being agriculturalists so that Sioux customary division of labor was reversed and women would no longer be the "beasts of burden," an imposed stereotype. These changes put men into positions of power along with the federal government making changes to the *tiyospayes* or extended kin group. The United States Government tried to change extended families into nuclear groups so that the Lakota were more like white settlers. According to Albers, the federal government distributed resources (food and other commodities) to the head of the household, which was defined as a man. Agnatic (male) and uterine (female) ties used to shift depending on the season but due to colonial impact, agnatic and patrilineal bias dominated post reservation times.

Albers (1983) also writes about how women found their way to the off reservation market place by selling some of their garden produce and crafts. Women gained power by supervising the distribution of food and material goods in honoring ceremonies. Neither sex had any say in how land was used or what was done with any products that were produced from the land. In these early households, the ideal relationship was for men and women to be proficient in their own activities. Couples shared the products of their labor, physical abuse was not sanctioned, and they

maintained egalitarian values despite the missionaries. Common law marriages and high divorce rates were still common, but women's prestige was declining in Sun Dance ceremonies along with their supernatural powers in curing the ill. Also, women were not included in men's token political positions. Women policed community gatherings and supervised food distribution from collective hunts before reservations came into existence.

Albers (1983) goes on to discuss the colonial impact that occurred between 1910 and 1945. Support of agrarian development support was withdrawn and the government sold and leased Lakota land to neighboring white farmers. Women could receive direct cash benefits from selling the land if they were divorced, widowed, or single and living alone with dependant children; husbands would respect women's claim to this money. As many, if not more, women owned land during the 1940s as men. During the 1930s women lacked training for clerical jobs due to only domestic skills being taught in boarding schools, so most of the low paying government temporary jobs were given to the men. The *tiyospaye* had turned in to loose networks by the 1920s and the older generations couldn't support their adult children. As a result, people began to move into the mission and commercial communities for employment and subsistence. Reliance on grocery stores was building. Families were breaking up so that the wife and children could get ADC that was instituted during the 1930s, which lessened the institution of marriage and increased the likelihood that the wife would provide most of the support for her children. Albers concludes that during these times, the political positions still only belonged to the men.

Recently, a shift towards women being more empowered is revealed. Many women are sole caregivers for

their children as a result of marriages dissolving and the *tiyospayes* breaking a part. Albers discusses modern times that she labels 1968-1972 (Albers 1983:200). Modern times were characterized by Albers as a period when women were increasingly elected to tribal office positions since the 1950s. Also, households began to develop where the pooling of resources occurred. Relatives with no incomes were welcomed into these homes but expected to help with household chores. During this time, she reported that female contributions exceeded or equaled men's contributions in 40% of the households that she looked at. Men and women divided expenses in proportion to income and the largest portion most often came from the wife. By 1972, a shift occurred toward households that were independent of men and controlled by females who made decisions about how to run the household. The emphasis again became uterine with daughters staying at or near home after marriage due to the males not being able to support a family. In 1972, there were many unmarried and separated women with children living in the households of their parents. Kin relied on each other and held a definite sharing relationship. Men with no steady income had come to rely on people in the community, and females such as the wife, mother, sister, or daughter usually supported these men.

Under conditions such as these, it is not surprising that the balance of power should shift increasingly in favor of women. (Albers 1983:217)

Theory and Methodology

Most researchers cited in this analysis of Lakota women realize that European ideas of society have affected researcher's interpretations and observations.

When researchers perceive the asymmetrical relations between men and women in other cultures, they assume such asymmetries to be analogous to their own cultural experience of the unequal and hierarchical nature of gender relations in western society. (Moore 1988:2)

This is where the significance of the reflexive approach lies so the researcher is always examining the role as a researcher and not acting as a colonizer by creating a false reality. Thus, two theoretical approaches guide this research referred to as the reflexive approach and the feminist critique.

Feminist anthropology focuses on gender differences in cultures. Stemming from this general paradigm, the reflexive approach combined with the feminist critique challenges traditional explanations of social relations. Traditional explanations of social relations generated biased images of colonized people to maintain unequal relations between the colonized and their colonizers. The perspective of hierarchal social relations highlights the lack of attention to the roles of Lakota women in ethnographic and historic documents, which in turn perpetuates the subjugated, passive stereotype. The feminist critique is meant only to deal with past bias and misinterpretations of Lakota women caused by colonial impact. The following quote illustrates the uneasiness of Native activists towards the feminist critique.

One primary goal of Native activists involves restructuring and reinforcing Indian families. This includes their reevaluation of both women's and men's roles. If Native women are to fulfill traditions of female leadership, they argue, Native men must reclaim their responsibilities so

that the enterprise supporting Indigenous survival and prosperity can move forward. Native women repeatedly fault white feminists for the devaluations of men in their revisionary tactics. Part of a man's responsibility is to protect and provide for his family, as well as to expedite political and social duties. If a man fails in his responsibilities, it falls upon the society's women to instruct, reeducate and remind him of his obligations. Native activists fault Western hegemony and capitalism as systems responsible for alienating so many Native men from their traditional responsibilities. (Udel 2001:8)

Recently attention has been drawn to this issue by a number of scholars. Deloria (qtd in Mascia-Lees and Black 2000) notes:

In the United States, Native American groups, for example, protested images of themselves that had been created in anthropology and some called for closing the doors to anthropological research altogether. (93)

Reflexive anthropologists seek to correct this bias and focus on how unequal power relations are reproduced in fieldwork and ethnographic representations. The above ideology was taken under consideration for this current research project that seeks to examine issues of power and gender among the Rosebud Lakota. Also, according to Moore (1988), in regard to the feminist critique in anthropology:

[we] have to be careful that we're not adhering to western assumptions of personhood and relationship between individuals and society. (39)

Focusing on the individual's experience and perceptions of Lakota society in order to grasp the essence of how people define their own social reality is the goal of the combined methodologies in this research. An emic view was the desired ideal for this research project opposed to an etic view that could never fully understand the dynamics of being a Lakota individual. The qualitative approach of gathering interviews driven by the interviewee and participant observation were chosen so that as many as possible individual perceptions of Lakota women could be recorded.

[The] theoretical shift in anthropology that emphasizes an actor's model of how the world is and how they influence social action rather than models of the anthropologist or the analyst and feminist anthropologists have found this stimulating, because of the central role which feminist analysis of all kinds gives to women's actual experiences. (Moore 1988:38)

I was immersed in Lakota society and introduced to people by volunteering on the reservation at the Tree of Life Ministry in Mission, South Dakota. My taking a colonizer's position by working at the Tree of Life did not seem to be an issue. Tree of Life, run by the United Methodist Church, is a program that repairs homes on the reservation and offers a clothing room with emergency supplies for people in crisis. As people in the community got to know me and felt more comfortable around me, they asked about the Tree of Life to see if they could get assistance.

One of the key informants was the secretary of the Tree of Life, a Lakota woman who was from and grew up on the reservation. She introduced me to people in the community and she was very familiar and informed about the community that she lived in. She

was on the constitutional convention to amend the tribe's constitution and the meetings were held at the Tree of Life. The organization that I lived at did not seem to impact getting to know individuals or how people responded to me. A few people offered for me to live in their homes, gave gifts, and I was invited to many ceremonies and events. Friendships with people were forged, as the role of researcher was kept intact. People in the community are generous in general but how I was welcomed indicates that an oppressive, outsider's stance was not perceived. Both men and women were very open to my presence on the reservation. A few people who were more reserved came to seem comfortable after a month's time of me being there.

The primary research strategy was participant observation enhanced by interviews, primarily of Lakota women. In relationship to the objectives of looking for how much power exists in regard to kinship, social structure, gender roles, and family, relevant information was collected and documented through daily field notes and interview notes. The open-ended interview approach provided rich and specific details as opposed to a less personal survey approach. Quantitative data thus was not the anticipated end product. Rather, this was explicitly qualitative research to gain individual and personal perspectives on the issue of empowerment and gender roles. The results should not be generalized to the entire Rosebud Lakota population. Nonetheless, these approaches enhanced current knowledge regarding this group.

A key anthropological method in anthropology is participant observation. Participant observation targets activities, events and sequences, settings, participation structures, behaviors of people and groups, conversations and interaction. Each place where I volunteered and how each place affected

the research will be briefly described. Field notes, scratch notes, a journal along with methodological, descriptive, and analytical field notes were kept on a daily basis. Keeping a personal journal helped to employ the reflexive approach by accounting for my reactions to other people and to decipher between other people's reality and how I perceived observable phenomenon. This was helpful, for example, when I became frustrated with a family that seemed manipulative and used me to run errands. Utilization of my journal revealed to me how the family had their own style of returning favors in exchange for me driving people around to perform errands. The opportunity to examine the reasons for their behaviors and how the researcher was affecting their social reality by being involved in their lives arose using my personal journal.

Attention to this process of transforming the ethnographer's 'me' to accordance of other's cultural expectations can provide genuine knowledge of the nature of others' selves and societies. (Davies 1999:24)

An etic view would have ignored the role of men whose insights were regarded as equally valuable to both Lakota men and women. In the field notes, everything that was equally observed among men and women was written down. The reflexive approach is mindful of the loss of information that can occur when one codes field notes with a computer software program. All field notes were coded by hand. Coding notes by hand was done so that the language I used to describe a particular phenomenon would not be missed if the wrong word were chosen for coding the notes. Key words could only be coded by reading through all of the notes and had to account for the conversations

that were recorded. Other people didn't use the same descriptions as I to describe their social reality. For example, a researcher may describe and code for domestic abuse with words such as violence or alcoholism. An informant may describe a domestic abuse situation as, "we were all messed up and I would pick out dudes to fight with" (K's interview).

In addition to participation observation, narratives from three Lakota women and one Lakota man were collected once rapport and trust had been established after volunteering and participating in the community for a few weeks. The length of time required for interviews was flexible and depended upon the subject's available time. Everyone who participated in an interview knew exactly why the researcher was on the reservation. Before sitting down to an interview, informants would read over the informed consent form. I then asked if they had anything in particular they would like to talk about and if they would be comfortable responding to a series of questions or if they would like to just share their life without questions. For three of the interviews, specific questions were asked and the informants would digress. Their digressions incited more questions from the researcher and this led to more specific questions as they related to what the informant was speaking about. These interviews were 60 to 90 minutes long. The interviews followed the pattern of an informal conversation despite the researcher taking notes. The male interviewee wanted to know what the researcher would like to know but had many ideas that he wanted to share, and he talked for two hours without any interruption by me, except when I asked for clarification. With one of the informants, there were three additional interviews collecting a genealogy of her family. Questions about abuse and

others of similar discomfort were not asked of participants but some people on their own accord did share about abuse in their lives. Anonymity was assured and pseudonyms are used here.

In the Field

The Little Hoop Treatment Center had 8-week cycles of in-house living for people with substance abuse issues or co-dependency issues. I volunteered here twice a week and then once a week as time progressed. Personal relationships were built with a few of the staff. Many of the staff who happened to be very involved in the community became key informants. At events like a suicide workshop, methamphetamine workshops, an 18-mile sobriety walk followed by a ceremony, and at *Inipi* or sweat lodge ceremonies are where these staff members could be observed. The number of clients ranged from 5-7 men and women. The clients would share their life stories. I agreed to protect their anonymity as a requirement of being a Little Hoop volunteer. The treatment center's focus was the Red Road recovery approach that fits into Lakota spirituality. The Red Road runs east and west in the Lakota medicine wheel and exemplifies healthy living, unlike the black road which runs north and south.

I fulfilled two different volunteer obligations at the White Buffalo Calf Women Society (WBCW) by working separately with both men and women. One of WBCW's buildings was a residential shelter for women and their children who were experiencing domestic abuse. Here a couple of women told of how they were empowering themselves. Women were met who were caught in the cycle of alcoholism and dependency on aid from the reservation and the government. Another building housed meetings for men who were sentenced to attend by the court systems due to being charged with domestic abuse. Perspectives of

both men and women were learned and there was the opportunity to meet men who were empowering themselves. The director of the men's program held many *Inipi* ceremonies and spoke profusely about Lakota spirituality. He was an example of empowerment and how he used Lakota beliefs to turn his life around and to grow interpersonally as an individual while he helped other people in his community rediscover Lakota tradition.

At the Tree of Life, I volunteered in the clothing room every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. Mostly the same people would patronize the clothing room every week. The most common visitors were the street people, young college students who were often female, grandmothers looking for clothing for grandchildren that they were raising, and people who had just had a house fire. House fires were not uncommon. Some of the people shared about their lives on a frequent basis, and most people talked about their troubles in a casual manner. The Tree of Life provided a secretary who took me under her wing and told me many stories of her life and about what she called "my people." She shared information that ranged from politics to social norms, language, traditional beliefs, contemporary problems, her story of empowerment through spiritual beliefs, general gossip, the latest events and news on the reservation; she also introduced me to many people.

In fact, most people with whom I interacted on a consistent basis and who frequented the places where I volunteered were engaged in activities that promoted the growth of their community along with their own interpersonal growth such as participating in various workshops, traditional ceremonies, or recovery programs for alcoholism. As a result, this research reflects the perspective of Lakota women as seen from people

who live as traditionally as possible in a contemporary society which has been altered from colonial impact.

Findings

As discovered during participation observation interviews, contemporary Lakota perspectives tell of the Sicangu women being revered and upheld. The interviews exemplify people's perspectives of gender roles, kinship, contemporary issues, historical impact, and spirituality. Each of these variables will be examined separately in response to observation and interview questions. The four people interviewed along with the many documented conversations with people during participant observation, which are the most relevant discussions that concern this research, are included in these findings. The findings conclusively demonstrate that women are empowered, respected, influential members of this matrifocal society.

Census Data

The census statistics relate to some of the findings. Before there is further discussion about the findings, the census statistics as they relate to the findings will be addressed. The 2000 Census Bureau statistical and demographic information coincides with the reflexive approach of being leery of bureaucracies' possible tendency to skew stats to favor whatever the bureaucracy wants. The Census Bureau results may be skewed due to the fact that off-trust reservation land was included in their surveys. For example, the 2000 Census reports that 14 homes valued at over 1 million dollars exist on the Rosebud Reservation (U.S. Census Bureau: 2000). No such homes were observed on the reservation. Observations indicate that people were known to lie to officials out of fear. It is assumed that this fear is due to the history that has developed between the Lakota people and the U.S. government. According to informants,

people underreported how many people lived in their homes. One home that I spent time in had 5 people, which was the smallest number of people living together that I observed. This home tended to hold many acculturated values and to have a nuclear family base. The census statistics reported an average of 3.69 people in a home (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). With the high rates of alcoholism, there is much mobility between homes. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain how many people reside in each home. A census of Todd County indicates a population of 9,050 for the year 2000 opposed to the Census population of 10,243 for 2000 as reported for the inclusion of off-trust reservation land (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The entire reservation lies within Todd County with no inclusion of off-trust reservation land. These facts indicate that at least slightly more than 10% of the people surveyed were residing outside of the reservation. Off-reservation trust land must be where the fourteen homes valued for more than one million dollars exist. Off-reservation incomes could raise the per capita rate per household. The higher or off-reservation income segment of the population is likely to provide statistics that indicate smaller nuclear-like households, greater incomes, more education and employed men, and would skew the rest of the statistical data.

It is difficult to obtain needed information that is applicable to this research from the census statistics. For example, this research is interested in the question: how many grandmothers live with or are the providers for their grandchildren? Qualitative data indicates that many grandmothers care for their grandchildren in their own households. "Grandparents as caregivers" is a statistic that is provided in the census data; however, the percentage of caregivers being either

male or female is not. The percentage of householders over the age of 65 is broken down by male or female in a separate table, but the number of these householders who are grandparents is not indicated. The number of women who are grandmothers by their early to mid-forties cannot be determined by the census statistics because sex and age percentages only provide data by gender for the ages over 65 years old and for the ages between 18 and 21 years old. Similarly, education levels reported indicate fairly equal levels of academic achievement between the sexes. However, informants indicated that women are more likely to achieve at least a bachelor's degree. Regarding employment, one of the U.S. Census tables breaks down difference in male and female employment based on hours per week worked. Other research along with this research observes that many women sell crafts to subsist but the census does not count this as an occupation.

A sample of the census statistics for the Rosebud Reservation is provided in Table 1. Income, housing averages, and prices of homes are skewed by the inclusion of off-trust reservation land. The table only includes who did not work along with the most common type of employment that was reported. Census data supports the notion that the colonized continue to be subjugated by their colonizers who manipulate statistics, which conceals the fact that severe poverty exists within the United States.

Table 1. Todd County (Rosebud Reservation) statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau;

Rosebud Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, SD	#	%	Both Sexes	Female	Male
Population in Occupied Housing Units	10,243				
Total Population					
Female	5,319	51.3			
Male	5,050	48.7			
Per Capita Income (dollars)	7,279				
Household Type					
Total households	2,779				
Family households	2,170			1,238 (44.5%)	932 (33.5%)
Non-family households	609	21.9			
Average household size	3.69				
Grandparents as Caregivers					
Living in household with children 18 and under	702	100.0			
Responsible for grandchildren	517	73.6			
16 Years and Over Who Did Not Work in 1999				1,365	3,263
Most Common Type of Industry (for employed population over the age of 16)					
Educational, health and social services			42.0%	51.8%	30.9%

<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTable?>

Kinship

Kinship findings are related to Lakota society being matrifocal. Contemporary issues of alcoholism and poverty as well as the subsequent lack of patrilineal ties are increasing the matrifocal tendency of grandmothers who are householders. Also, women have placed themselves in positions of empowerment with their educations. Existing traditional kinship practices will conclude this section about kinship.

Grandmothers who were the sole providers for their grandchildren frequented the Tree of Life clothing room. The parents of these grandchildren had often disappeared due to alcoholism. A couple of grandmothers expressed their sadness over becoming attached to their grandchildren and then having the parents of the children sober up and want their children back. One woman cared for her grandchildren and took in foster children whose parents were no longer living due to dying from drug- or alcohol-related causes. Many people cared for children other than

their own. A few women complained of the foster care system that was eager to take their children and claim their home as unsuitable even when the children had a loving family. Reservation homes are often considered unsuitable for the foster care system, which calls into question the value of family love and support over the value of western “cleanliness.” Isn’t a home full of love and nourishment with many supporting family members and food suitable regardless of cockroaches running across the floor?

During this three-month project, I met a number of people who were not familiar with their father’s side of the family. One girl lived next door to her father whom she did not speak to at all. Her brother pointed out his father’s house as we drove by but didn’t see or talk to his father. The same siblings’ mother had 10 children by 5 different fathers. Women with up to 11 children who all have different fathers were observed and identified to me by various sources. Informants reported their fathers as disappearing for some

time to end up having a new girlfriend or wife and children fathered by him. The informants weren’t involved with these new families. Alcohol and men finding less work over each generation has affected the family structure. Families have become matrifocal due to the children ending up with the mother or the grandmother. Paternal grandmothers were observed as being caretakers for their grandchildren but on a less frequent basis. There is much mobility with the men who find residence in different places across the reservation or have to move to the cities to find work. One informant pointed out that housing is already scarce but men struggle even more with having their own homes because the tribe only grants housing to families.

Family is an important Lakota value and is at the core of *mitakuye oyasin*, an expression that means “all my relations” and relates all animate and inanimate objects. One informant pointed out societal differences in the definition of poverty as he spoke about his land, spirituality, and family as all

interconnected and relational in his mind. He didn't see himself as a man who should have the "American 9-5 job" but as a man who wanted to be close to his family and in touch with his land and spirituality that is derived from living amongst his people and homeland.

Kinship terms in the Lakota language to describe an uncle or sister, for example, are described in Powers (1990:62). These terms are still spoken today and were observed by this researcher as being spoken most often in the *Inipi* or sweat lodge ceremonies that I intended. The mother-in-law taboo was observed as still being in practice. The mother-in-law taboo is the practice of a child's spouse ignoring the parent-in-law of the opposite sex. It also prohibits the parents-in-law from making eye contact or addressing their children-in-law of the opposite sex. There are families that live together in a nuclear family arrangement (no extended family in the home), and they usually don't drink. Remnants of the old *tiyospaye* system of kinship seem to exist more for survival, and large families that live together pool their resources. I was told that many families gather in one home during the winter in order to share a home with heat and electricity.

Gender Roles

Observations and findings in my research about gender roles focus on work, sex ratios in politics, language, and how men and women are socialized differently. How men and women perceive each other is also discussed in this section. Briefly, the topic of medicine women will be broached. One woman who was a director at a program where I volunteered was very direct and forward with wanting to know what I was doing with my education. She was very enthused about this research being done and offered her office as a source for literary and video resources. She even pointed out to me,

without knowing the hypothesis of my research, how anthropologists have been male and haven't given credit to how much power women have and that the Lakota have a mostly egalitarian society. Women, she said, may have had more power in some areas in recent times.

However in one area, politics, there is mostly male involvement. On the constitutional convention committee, aimed at amending the constitution from the 1930s, two out of the six people were women. Women are in the tribal council, but many people complain that the council is corrupt and doesn't represent the Sicangu Nation like it should. A woman's husband fondly joked that their roles had reversed. For hobby and sale on the Internet, he made crafts traditionally created by women, such as par fleches, bone awls, and spoons. His wife was involved in politics.

Men and women shared their perceptions of their opposing gender. I was told by men, "you're a woman so you are strong and you can do anything." Does this reflect an attitude by men that women are more empowered just because of their gender? Descriptions of women ranged from women being honored and revered to being referred to as the backbone of the Red Nation. Men seemed to speak more favorably of women than vice versa. One man did complain about how poorly his sisters and mom spoke of men and how this affected his self-esteem. It is quite possible that men were uncomfortable sharing any negativity that they may harbor towards women with a woman researcher. A few women would tell me that they were taught never to marry men from the reservation because they are no good and lazy. Women complained of there being no good men to marry. Overall, there was a general respect towards women and men spoke very highly about their mothers. Respect may be due to some of the dependence

on women that men are socialized to project as a result of colonization.

On a couple of occasions and during an interview, the topic of how women and men are socialized differently was brought up. A couple of women complained that women are taught to work, raise children, sew, cook, and take care of their homes, but nothing is expected of the men. Women are expected to do these things and are seen as lazy if they don't. The following excerpt from an interview with P exemplifies how men and women are socialized differently.

Do men have empowerment in their lives or how do they make positive changes to their lives?

Not yet. Women have to be women before men can be men.

Can you explain?

I don't know if you can write this down. Do you know what a castrating bitch is? Assimilation and acculturation have taught men to hate women and so women hate men but women only hate themselves if they hate men. They don't leave men alone so they can grow up and not be made weak by being taken care of.

Why are women taking care of men?

Men are more important, it's what I described to you about the boarding schools. (She was referring to an earlier conversation in which she described how boarding schools taught that men were more important, fed before the women, and why she thinks there are only medicine men now.) Maybe it's because we didn't live right and the men were killed off at young ages. People get victimized

but when treated like a victim they act like a victim.

How do women take care of men?

They let them get away with things they shouldn't. They enable. Mothers enable sons and take care of sons financially or physically. Don't teach them how to move out of homes and be responsible. Somehow girls learn how to do these things. They are shown how to cook, clean, sew, and work.

Women's experiences in the job field differ from men's experiences. During their thirties many women do return to college. This statistic correlates with those provided by the Census (U.S. Census Bureau: 2000). College is a source of empowerment for women. Many more women are reported as attending the local Sinte Gleske University, SGU, which is located in Antelope Community next to Mission on the reservation. The classes are oriented towards social services and secretarial and administrative work that people view as women's work. The most common jobs on the reservation are those with the tribe, school systems, or social services. Many more women than men were observed as employed at these places and in director positions. Government and social services positions favor women and are viewed by men and women as women's work. One woman attributes more women working to relocation during the 1950s. Not until the 1950s did women start working because of relocation. They could find jobs in the cities. When asked if women's roles have changed, an informant replied that more women work now. I asked if this was because of single mothers. She said that everyone stayed with their babies until they were grown and went to school and then they went to work. Back then women lived

on welfare because there wasn't any childcare but now there is.

Informants reported that their fathers and grandfathers were still finding work up until the 1970s and their moms or grandmothers were housewives. Sometimes, the families had to move to find work. Families could work in sugar beat fields in South Dakota or as ranch hands. Even the men who were interviewed and have college educations aren't maintaining work due to alcoholism. What led to the decline of men working and the increase of women working over the last 30 years? One informant said that men do work but in ways that can't be counted by an official census. She said that the men work hard and don't get credit for it. They do a lot of hard labor like fixing cars for money. One man sold his paintings and danced once a month with an out-of-state group that traveled. To find work he had to leave the reservation. He lived with his mother and siblings that he was very close to. This is the conflict that many people face because families are so valued in Lakota society. They can live in poverty with their families or go to the cities to be the working poor and be isolated from their families.

A couple of informants pointed out how the language has masculine and feminine differences.

Wo is for men and *wa* is for women in language. The letter *O* is for men and *A* is for women. This is an example of how women had their role and place. (N's interview)

Women once had their own names. One woman accredited the language as empowering her because the traditional language had compassion unlike today's language that has changed and is used to gossip about people.

There use to not be competition over roles. Everyone had a role for the tribe to survive and that was the natural order of things. (P's interview)

P bases this on the old language that was all about self-responsibility. The language changed her life as she reported during an interview. The language didn't put her down instead it empowered her. *Waunisal* means compassion and a long time ago she said, it was meant to have it for yourself.

It was said that grandmothers carry on the oral tradition (Penman 2000). It would be interesting to know at what rate elderly women contribute to Lakota society and what exactly differentiates their roles. Grandmothers often take care of the children, so it would make sense that they pass on oral tradition. Grandmothers are referred to as the carriers of oral tradition (Penman 87). Grandmothers are who to consult with about politics; they are disciplinarians and holders of herbal knowledge (Reyer 1991:11). Finally, sources suggest that men did and do have a higher mortality rate so it would make sense for grandmothers to be the carriers of oral tradition by story telling. However, confirmation of this observation would require more research.

In Theisz (1988:11) and Crow Dog (1990:201) there are brief mentions of medicine women. More research about the existence of medicine women could be done because I was told of there being medicine women in the past on only two occasions during the participant observation phase of this research. The extent to which colonization impacted the existence or frequency of medicine women is a very important question.

Spirituality

Lakota spirituality could be the subject of another paper, so this portion of

the paper will be brief. Spirituality is juxtaposed with the variables of kinship and gender roles. Kinship is spirituality in Lakota terms and one of the most important values is to care for family. Holism and circular thinking among the Lakota emphasize how equally important men and women are because everything is viewed as of equal value. The saying *mitakuye oyasin* "all my relations" exemplifies this statement. *Mitakuye oyasin* also describes kinship beyond biology and fictional kinship ties were commonly built in both and outside of the *Inipi* ceremony. In the sweat lodges, people adopted uncles, sisters, brothers, aunts and grandparents. Historical impacts on spirituality and an interviewee's description of key women in Lakota spirituality will, also, be included in this section.

Examples of spiritual beliefs as they relate to women and empowerment were provided by observations, conversations, and interviews. For example, on the local radio station, there was a public service announcement for the White Buffalo Calf Women Society walk for violence against women. The story of White Buffalo Calf Woman was told. She had shown herself to two men and one was destroyed by the thunder beings when he had disrespectful thoughts about her. The PSA pointed out that this story traditionally taught men to respect women.

During N's interview, he told me,

The spiritual expression is feminine. The pipe was brought from WBCW and she changed into the most beautiful woman man ever had seen with a voice to match. She taught songs and some of the lyrics in her songs so that the people can live. This is holistic. Spiritual expression is feminine because everything is provided by Tunkushila and planet mother. She gives everything that we need here. In the Milky Way, the

spirit comes to the fork where an old woman is. She will review your life and if you think that you were selfish and lived on the black road, she will push you off the spirit trail and back. You retain these past life memories in consciousness and this determines your value system. We have karmic debts to come back and undo from a selfish life and we keep coming back to undo these debts until we can go to her to return to the center [of the universe].

Historical impacts have affected spiritual beliefs. The following excerpts from a couple of interviews give insight into impacts on beliefs. When I asked about women having different roles than men (I had not meant in ceremonial terms), one informant, P, responded,

We're still stuck under the Catholic Church or the medicine men, thinking that men give life and women suppose to listen to them and not go against them. It's where spiritual abuse comes from. It's when you don't question authority, when you think God is out to get you because God is a man. It's all that voodoo stuff about how you drop the pipe or have moon time and touch the pipe. Everything that is natural that happens to a woman is used against her. I don't know if this is traditional or came from the missionaries.

Another male informant and interviewee spoke a lot about Indian people being holistic thinkers. He pointed out how holistic thinking clashed with white man's middle class, left-brained thinking. For him, lack of holistic thinking was part of the reason that stereotypes were developed, devaluing Lakota women when Lakota society was superimposed with euro-centric values. How can women be inferior to

men when one acknowledges Lakota spirituality, which treats men and women as equals? Based on anecdotal evidence, Lakota spirituality still strongly exists in people's everyday lives. Missionaries, education, and outside influences have affected this holism with what N would call left-brained, materialistic thinking. Holistic thinking can be observed in spiritual beliefs and in the way many people interpret events in spiritual terms. For example, I was driving with a young woman who observed an owl fly across the road and seemed frightened as she told me the owl was a warning bird. My ears were always filled with stories about spirits when I would join a family of various ages by a campfire in the canyons. I was told often about the representations of different parts of nature and had few conversations about what was material.

Contemporary Problems and Alcoholism
Another group of questions related to gender and empowerment are tied to alcoholism.

Alcoholism is a significant problem on the reservation. Alcohol accounts for many deaths along with violence, domestic abuse, matrifocal homes, and people's inability to maintain scarce jobs and homes. The effects of historical impact on traditional practices can be accounted for, to some degree, when alcoholism is removed from the contemporary picture. Alcoholism stems from the atrocities and abuses inflicted upon the Lakota by the United States Government. The slaughter of the buffalo to displace men's roles as hunters and force starving people onto the reservations led to men's frustration and dependence on alcohol which was introduced and steadily supplied to reservations. Wounded Knee, the death of leaders such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, withholding of commodities, forced relocation to shoddy land, the taking of the Sacred

Paha Sapa (Black Hills), stealing off water rites, abuses of boarding schools, racism from surrounding towns, forced sterilization, and many more injustices have led to the devastation of a nation of people who have sought comfort in the ongoing cycle of alcoholism. Alcoholism persists in an isolated place where there is not much opportunity and little hope. To the contrary, there is much hope when we look to the effects of people returning to traditional ways and Lakota spirituality. The effects of alcohol repute the variable of historical impact because contemporary problems stem from alcoholism that was caused by historical impact. When we remove the variable of alcohol and hence historical impact, we gain insight into how traditional ways treat women. The historical impacts are never fully resolved, but traditional ways can be viewed more clearly.

Why should there be a focus on traditional ways? Tradition and participation in ceremonies dictate and require sobriety. Sobriety, Lakota spirituality, and traditional ways have been the most influential strategies in people empowering themselves and turning their lives around from complete poverty, institutionalization, abuse, death, insanity, and everything associated with alcoholism. Every sober person or recovering alcoholic that I spent time with had returned to their traditional ways, except one woman who was slowly returning to traditional ways. This particular woman was resolving her conflict of the abuse that she endured during boarding school times. The boarding schools taught her that Catholicism was everything and that she shouldn't believe her traditional Lakota ways.

A more accurate picture of the Lakota's perception of women can be developed when the variable of alcohol is removed. Domestic abuse is cited as a reason why women are not respected in contemporary times. Reality is that

domestic abuse is not related to gender or being a woman. Domestic abuse positively correlates with drugs and alcohol. Observations and informants reported just as many women abusers as male abusers. Often, for men, there is shame in discussing abuse that affects their *bloka* or maleness. Some of the men sent to the White Buffalo Calf Women Society for domestic abuse described their girlfriends and wives as abusive when the women were drinking. On several occasions, I was told about a woman's husband whom had abusive girlfriends and one man shared about having an abusive ex-wife. The common factor was drugs and alcohol. One woman shared about her old hatred for men and how she would pick fights and beat up men while she drank. Another man used to be abusive to women in his past until he found sobriety and returned to Lakota spirituality and traditional ways.

Conclusion

Research focused on contemporary times is required so that the 21st century positions of women are not erased (for an example see Farmer: 2004). The background describes how researchers have demystified stereotypes but also shows very contrary ethnographic accounts and beliefs about particular practices such as the practice of nose cutting for female infidelity. The general consensus is that Lakota men and women lived in an egalitarian society despite some of the contradictions. Contemporary Lakota people report that past society was egalitarian and so is today's contemporary society. With the call of feminism to find out what women's roles had been in societies where male anthropologists focused on men's roles through a western European lens, women anthropologists in the 1970s began to do research to discover what women's roles were. Anthropologists hadn't understood what

they were seeing. Their observations were biased and superimposed from their own culture.

These people [whites] endured great hardships, and all the while they were thinking that our women were slaves we felt that theirs were. It may not flatter the white man, but the Lakota did not think him considerate toward his women. (Standing Bear qtd in Powers 1990:210)

Native activists are concerned with returning to their traditional roles which were egalitarian, and this requires the collective effort of both men and women. Native activists such as Mary Brave Bird, as she wrote in *Lakota Woman*, are concerned with replacing the effects of genocide and forced sterilizations that women claimed the Indian Health Service was still performing in the 1980s. Replacing the effects of genocide means that women want to have many children and not follow the nuclear type families that they feel are a by-product of being a feminist. Lisa Udel in her work calls the having of many children and the pooling of resources between women as "mother-work."

Women haven't suffered loss of roles as much because they can still raise children and engage in mother-work. On Pine Ridge, more women hold down jobs because nursing, teaching, clerical and domestic work are jobs for women that are more readily available. (Udel 2001:8)

Mother work is evident in this research and supports the fact that a matrifocal society is becoming predominant.

Lakota women didn't live lives of subjugation as background research for this project revealed. Colonial

impact has affected men's positions and has ultimately contributed to women being in more empowered positions in contemporary times. Gender roles, spirituality/origin beliefs, along with kinship are measured variables that have always proven women to be respected and influential members of Lakota society. The findings demonstrate this fact. Kinship and spirituality are at the core of Lakota society and examination of these variables alone demonstrates how respected women are. Everything being of equal importance, including all inanimate and animate objects, is best summarized in the saying *mitakuye oyasin*, which means "all my relations." This saying exemplifies the emphasis of egalitarianism that Lakota people place on their own society.

The following statement from an informant best concludes this analysis,

My definition of being a Lakota woman. You live your life so things are better for the next generation. That is the circle. If you lead a bad life you leave nothing behind but a lot of resentments, she laughed. When I first got sober, I looked myself in the mirror and said I am Lakota and I am a Lakota woman. I realized that what they did a long time ago weren't great things but you can live and do the next right things, like you learn. (P's Interview)

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