

Skywoman, Spider Woman, Corn Maiden, White Buffalo Calf Woman, Tonantzín

A description of Indigenous Feminism

*This statement is a community offering from the members of
Section VI.*

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Indigenous Feminism is inherent in the Native cultures of the Americas. Despite a variety of cultures from over 400 tribes and languages, the similarities in creation stories, women's roles, and ceremonies are intertwined like a woven rug or birch bark basket. Indigenous Ways of Knowing are inseparable from Indigenous Feminism and include: connection to nature and care for the Earth; permeable connections between people and the rest of Creation; the critical notion that all things in Creation are Sacred; the importance of balance and harmony within and between people and Creation, and a cyclical view of time, development, and existence. There is a dynamic, continual, and fluid balance back and forth between the Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine. Feminine and masculine aspects in each being are cooperative, essential, balanced, and cohesive. Harmony between the Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine (which are not defined in terms of Western gender roles) and between people and all living things is a fundamental concept in Indigenous cultures of the Americas. In many traditions, gender roles may be discrete, or they may be fluid or both.

When communities are healthy, Indigenous Ways of Knowing define women's roles and women's contributions in a way that respects the gifts of the Sacred Feminine. We honor women's ability to give life and respect our bodies as sacred and powerful. We have created space for ourselves through the power that we hold in our cultures and ceremonies. The power of women is essential for the life of Indigenous cultures. Women demonstrate and transmit strength and fortitude.

Indigenous women are often the keepers of stories and histories. Many kinship systems are matrilineal in nature, with children tracing their lineage from their mothers, their grandmothers, their great grandmothers, and sometimes many generations beyond.

Indigenous Feminism has always included the mentorship and nurturing of the next generation in order to maintain the kinds of communities that have encouraged our people to survive genocide and colonization. There is a level of respect and order that happens when women raise their children in a traditional community of acceptance, understanding each person's unique gifts and challenges. No one is singled out for not fitting in. Everyone is respected. Everyone gets to share. This structure sets up a supportive frame for the younger folks coming up. The task of rearing children and young people is embraced as a lifetime role regardless of gender. The continued consultation with one another provides a deeper way of relating to one another, as relatives.

The understanding of our roles is informed by Indigenous Ways of Knowing, which are science-based, using perception and measurement of phenomena over time. This has led to the integration of body, emotions, mind, Spirit and land in conceptualizations of health within Indigenous communities. Traditional harvesting of crops, such as sweetgrass and

wild rice, exemplifies another type of integration and sharing, gathering what can be used in ways that allow for continued healthy growth of plants and land. In many tribes, children are given their culturally congruent name after a time of observation to discern their unique characteristics. Naming children relies on essential perception and sensitivity.

The cultural foundations of the Indigenous world view is indistinguishable from Indigenous Feminism. It gives us the road map for resilience, strength, and endurance. Contemporary Indigenous feminism works to build bridges between ourselves and others while also working to undo the destructive impact of interlocking systems of oppression imposed by colonialism and the patriarchal social structures, laws and religions brought by Western European settlers.

Suggested readings on Indigenous Feminism

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Mann, B. A. (2008). *Make a Beautiful Way: The Wisdom of Native American Women*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

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