

Native Women Talk about Sexual Abuse in a Northern Plains Tribe

Anonymous

My two close friends and I are sitting at classroom tables with an assortment of coffee drinks. We are discussing a coming-of-age experience that most young women experience: losing our virginity. It's just us three in the room. Our lighthearted giggles turn sour when I say, "Well, I choose to count the time I became a woman as the first time I chose to have sex." My two friends look at me and nod their heads. There is an unspoken agreement between us. All of us had our virginity, our innocence, stolen away by a male perpetrator.

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to each of us before we even understood what sex was. We thought it was just a game we played like hide-and-go-seek. It's a story I have heard from so many women, but we tell it in euphemisms:

We do not need to hear each story. We do not need to know the exact abuse that happened. We know without hearing the words. It happened

"He touched me down there."
"I know what happened to her when she was younger."

"I don't leave my kids alone with so-and-so."

"I don't trust people around here with my kids."

We are Native American women. Our coming-of-age story should not be about the abuse we experienced in our homes.

This abuse has become a silent killer in our community. Our shared experience bonds us closer together. We should not be silent any longer.

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Anonymous is an adult education student in the Northern Plains. She prefers not to identify herself or her tribe.

AFTER YOU READ: Using the context, define "euphemism." Read about Tillie Black Bear below and access more resources by visiting Mending the Sacred Hoop <mshoop.org> or <RAINN.org>.

Indigenous Women Organize against Violence and Abuse



Tillie Black Bear, 1947-2014

Tillie Black Bear (Sicangu Lakota) helped organize a national movement against violence against women. She worked to change laws and policies to protect women from domestic and sexual violence. She also used tribal traditions and stories to address violence in Native communities, and she founded the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center <www.niwrc.org>. She said: "Even in thought, women are to be respected. We teach this to our children. We teach it to our grandchildren. We teach it to our kids so that the generations to come will know what is expected of them. Those generations will also know how to treat each other as relatives."