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## **Rape Prevention Education with Young Men**

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Recently during a retreat for Northland Family Help Center's Community Education Department, we were discussing the book *Transforming a Rape Culture* by Emile Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth. During our discussion Stephanie Ludwig asked me to write on the subject we discussed - how to implement rape prevention education with young males. This is arguably one of the hardest populations to reach but it is also one of the most important. When 98 percent of perpetrators are men it is evident that the only way to truly prevent rape from happening is to stop men from raping. Again, the challenge is, how do we reach men?

At Northland I work with a teen theater troupe called the PEACE project, and talk to young men in the juvenile detention center. I also provide education in Flagstaff to Native American high school freshmen boys and girls in a Native American dorm for students from outlying areas. Through working with these young men, I realized that I had to educate differently when working with teen-age boys.

When talking about rape I say that the root cause of rape is not sex but power and control. I then say it is always wrong to assert power and control over someone else. When I say this to a group of Native American boys or to boys that are locked up behind bars (the majority of whom are Latino or Native American and almost all of a low social economic status) I truly feel like a hypocrite.

These young men know intimately about power and control. Their history is one of forced Indian schools, and forced assimilation into white culture. In my own history I know my Great Grand mother at the turn-of-the-century was taken from her family, forced to speak English and physically abused if she did speak her own language. This is the woman that raised my mother, who passed on to her children much of the sense of powerlessness and self-hatred that was given to her. Although my mother sought healing, she had to deal with the need for power and control in her own life. The boys I see in lock-up are told when to wake up, when to sleep, when to go to the bathroom. Someone else, through power and force, controls their every body function.

This idea of power and control expanded for me when I went into a high school to do education. The style of dress and the music of today's teen mimic the whole jailhouse culture. Soon, by listening to the teens, boys and girls, I realized why they identify with the intercity, urban jail culture. Given a chance, these teens told of how they are controlled and under the control of the school administration. They also told of how they are harassed by the police and have no recourse to report any abuse of power.

I was hearing first hand, how we not only treat minorities, but all children. We raise our children with power and control-not reason. Good children do what they are told. Add to this how we socialize boys not to cry, but act out, and be aggressive. The picture of a rape culture comes into view.

Now, perhaps you are reading this and thinking that I am excusing rapists for their actions. This is why I am writing this essay. When doing rape education with young men, the biggest constraint for me is how to acknowledge the history and the reason they may be abusive without excusing their actions.

I know with drug education "just say no" simply did not work. A "just say don't rape" campaign will have the same failures. If we can connect with these men's abuse and with a strong voice say all abuse is wrong, then we make allies of these young men. Otherwise we face the familiar "I don't give a f\*\*\*" attitude of many of today's youth.

I end with the same question that I started with. How do I acknowledge the history of abuse and pain some young men carry while still holding them accountable for their behavior? How do I tell these young men that their real or potential behavior is absolutely wrong?