

# Discussion of Terms

- An Open-ended Discussion of Some Terms Used

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# An Open-ended Discussion of Some Terms Used

– by Brenda Hill

Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women

The section of the manual is the record of a number of advocates' discussions of terms commonly used in the work to end domestic and sexual violence. The terms and the meanings given here are not meant to be definitive; rather, they are meant as a tool to help us talk about the work that we do as we continue to focus, refine and energize our efforts. Again, we hope that this section elicits rich discussions and contributes to your work, and hopefully you will be inspired to share with us what you learn.

- **Abuse** – Dictionary definition: “to use wrongly or improperly; misuse...; to treat in harmful, injurious, or offensive way.” Abuse occurs when one person’s behavior or words are intentionally aimed at hurting another.
- **Accountability** – begins with examination of our belief system, behaviors and relationships. We are responsible and accountable to women who are battered/raped for ending the violence. Though the vast majority of those who are battered/raped are women, we are also responsible to those men who are battered/raped and those who are gay, bisexual, transgendered or transsexual. Holding batterers and/or rapists accountable for their violence and providing safety to victims and survivors is part of our role as relatives and community members.

**Batterers' (and rapists') accountability** – means they takes responsibility for violence in all its forms. This requires honest self-examination, and directly, openly owning violent behaviors. It includes acknowledging the impact their violence has on partners or other victims, children and other relatives. True accountability requires accepting the consequences of their behavior, and making significant changes in their belief systems and behaviors based upon non-violence and respect for women and all other relatives.

**Systems' accountability** – means creating and enforcing laws, policies, procedures and protocols that provide safety and resources to those who are battered/raped and upholding batterer/rapist accountability. Laws, policies, procedures and protocols are a means to justice, safety and respecting the status of women and others who are disenfranchised, including those who are poor, differently-abled or gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. If the law, policies, procedures and protocols are utilized as an end in themselves (no real action beyond creating paperwork) or to support the offender’s agenda, this amounts to collusion, resulting in revictimization. Collusion is the opposite of accountability.

- **Advocacy/Advocate** – Advocates recognize that battering and rape are gender-based crimes: the vast majority of victims of battering and rape are women, and the vast majority of batterers and rapists are heterosexual men. An advocate for victims and survivors of battering and rape is, therefore, the biased supporter primarily of women. The patriarchal hierarchy that creates sexism also creates all other oppressions, so heterosexism, homophobia, etc., are part of advocates' pro-active agenda. The goal of advocacy is to help ensure women's safety and status, as well as offender accountability. Our work is based on the understanding that the battering and rape is a result of oppression, and that ending violence requires social change and is personal and political.

The job description of an advocate is comprehensive: to pro-actively assist, support and provide resources to individual women and their children, and advocate within communities and political, legal, medical and social services programs to seek systemic and societal change so that all forms of oppression will end.

- **Anger management** – a mental health treatment that teaches people to become aware of their anger and its impact on their bodies, thinking, emotions and relationships. "Healthy expression" is generally the major goal of this approach. This approach assumes that anger itself is healthy and is the cause of violence. Often anger (an internal reaction, feeling) is not clearly distinguished from violent behavior.

Generally, issues of gender and culture are not addressed in anger management programs, nor is the fact that violence and tactics of violence are aimed almost exclusively at the intimate partner of the batterer. Acting angry, stomping around, slamming things, yelling, etc., are tactics batterers consciously use to send the message that everyone better be on guard and constantly pay attention, "or else." This is anger management in that the batterer has a specific purpose in managing his anger – power and control of his partner.

Anger management fails to recognize the importance of the fact that batterers choose the time, place, method and target for his violence. The batterer's anger and choice of violent behavior is rarely displayed at work, towards the boss, or other places where the "target" has more power and control than him. The issue is not loss of control, which is usually a subtopic in these groups: batterers choose their methods, body parts to hit where the bruising will be hidden by hair or clothing and their victims, who are their female partners, in most cases.

Anger management programs often fail to make the connection between beliefs, feelings and behavior. Changing beliefs about the nature of anger, men's right to control women and use violence will ultimately change their treatment of women, use of violence and emotional reactions.

- **Battering** – a system of ongoing tactics aimed at maintaining power and control over another. The tactics of battering include all forms of abuse and violence, including physical, sexual, emotional/mental, economic, using the children, ritual and cultural abuse, threats, intimidation and coercion. The element of fear for one's life is very real and constant as a result of these tactics.

Battering is not a mental health issue – it is a violent crime and violation of human rights. Communication skills work, stress and anger management approaches make the possibly lethal assumption that both parties have equal power and control. A batterer's goal in communication is establishment of power and control over his partner, not mutual understanding and caring.

- **Collusion** – any act that intentionally or unintentionally supports bad, deceitful or illegal behavior. In terms of battering, it is any act that discounts, condones or ignores any of the tactics that batterers use to maintain power and control over their partner. The results of colluding are increased danger to the woman/victim, her children, family and friends. Collusion means the woman must now protect herself, her children and relatives from the batterer and from those that collude with him. Those that collude are, in effect, revictimizing her.

Collusion makes batterers more powerful by reinforcing their use of abusive and violent tactics. The batterer is allowed to enlist other people and systems to assist him in controlling his partner. The result is the creation of more barriers and elimination of support, resources and safe places battered women need to access to escape the violence.

Colluding also prevents the batterer from being accountable for his violence. If not held accountable, batterers continue to do violence to their partner, relatives and own spiritual being.

- **Conflict** – Dictionary definition: “to come into collision or disagreement; be contradictory, at variance, or in opposition; clash.”

When two people disagree, or when our thoughts and behaviors are different, we have conflict. Conflict can be good. It can motivate us to think, grow or do things another way. Conflict is not the same as violence or abuse.

If one person's intention is to “win,” rather than resolve their differences through dialogue and compromise, the conflict can move from a mutual disagreement to abuse or violence.

- **Coordinated community response (CCR)** – an interagency effort that prioritizes the safety and integrity of women (and their children) and batterer/rapist accountability. This effort promotes the spiritual and cultural traditions of the sacredness of women and children. An outcome of CCR is the establishment of policies, procedures and protocols that consistently promote the safety of women and the accountability of those who batter/rape and the systems involved in this response. This initiative also promotes and honors the leadership and expertise of women who have been battered/raped.
- **Cycle of violence** – a theory that was one of the first attempts to describe the dynamics of battering. It is an outgrowth of a mental health/medical model that recommends stress management and communication skills approaches and implies complicity by the victim i.e., a form of victim-blaming. This theory postulates that battering occurs in three cyclical stages: tension-building, beating and honeymoon. Many women do see similarities between the reality of their experience and this theory, at least in the beginning of the relationship with their batterer.

In the past 25 years, however, much has been learned from the experts: the women who have experienced battering. The tension-building stage discounts the cause of violence as a matter of poor stress reduction and relaxation skills. The beating stage

acknowledges only the physical form of violence and distorts its occurrence as an isolated event that happens every so often. The honeymoon stage is when the batterer attempts to “make up” and may show remorse or act nice, e.g., doing dishes, bringing groceries, and offering to watch the children. Sometimes it means having sex, ignoring the fact that the woman has been physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually beaten, and is unable to safely say “no.” Less than 50% of battered women report having experienced anything resembling a honeymoon stage. Those that have say that over time this stage stops happening and the violence worsens.

Defining battering as a systematic pattern of continual violent and abusive behaviors aimed at maintaining power and control over the batterer’s partner helps assure realistic responses to ending the violence.

- **Disabilaphobia** – the fear of those who are differently-abled and the inability to acknowledge people whose needs are other than the accepted “norm.” (Contributed by Deborah Beck-Massey of Domestic Violence Initiatives for Women with Disabilities.)
- **Empowerment** – language sometimes used to describe the purpose of advocacy. Empowerment is about supporting women in a way that reflects respect and the belief that women are experts about themselves and their lives. They have the right to define what help they want, when they want it and whom they want to provide it. This concept is compatible with the understanding that violence against women is about power and control and avoids the mistaken notion that women who are battered cause or in some way contribute to the violence.
- **Internalized oppression** – the unjust exercise of authority and power by one group over another. It includes imposing one group’s belief system, values and life ways over another group. Oppression becomes INTERNALIZED when we come to believe and act as if the oppressor’s belief system, values and life way are reality.

The result of internalized oppression is shame and the disowning of our individual and cultural reality. Internalized oppression causes violence against women, children, elders, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or transsexual people and other relatives who are different from the “norm.” Oppression combined with internalized oppression results in alcoholism and other self-destructive behaviors.

Internalized oppression is an effective means for keeping entire groups and communities divided and under control. The oppressor no longer needs to exert physical control, because we now are violent and disrespectful to those in “our group,” to those in other groups and to ourselves. We resist internalized oppression by relearning respectful and non-violent belief systems.

Internalized oppression is also called “self-hate,” “internalized sexism,” “internalized homophobia,” “internalized racism” and “lateral” or “horizontal” violence.

- **Men’s re-education or batterers’ programs** – focus on the accountability of the batterer and safety of women through the examination of the batterer’s belief system and behaviors. For Native people, and actually all people, violence against women results from internalized oppression, i.e., colonization. This approach is therefore framed in an historical/cultural context. For instance, the term “re-education” acknowledges that violence against Native women can be unlearned, and non-violence and respect for women can be relearned as an integral part of Native life ways.

This approach was developed as an alternative to earlier programs such as anger

management that did not identify violence against women as a crime resulting from colonization and oppression. This approach instead addresses battering as a system of tactics aimed at power and control.

- **Oppression** – the unjust exercise of authority and power by one group over another. Oppression includes forcibly denying people their individual, cultural and spiritual ways and imposes the oppressor’s values and belief system. Oppression includes, but is not limited to, sexism, racism, heterosexism, homophobia, classism, ageism, able-bodyism, anti-semitism/"religionism."
- **Personal sovereignty** – We are most familiar with the concept of tribal sovereignty, meaning all tribal nations possess or have a right to, 1) a land-base, 2) self-government, 3) an economic base and resources, 4) a distinct language and historical and cultural identity. The following definition was originally written for and by native women, but applies to all women, all people:

Native women’s personal sovereignty is defined as a woman’s possession of or right to:

- 1) their bodies and paths in life: to exist without fear, but with freedom;
- 2) self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning themselves, without others’ approval or agreement;
- 3) an economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries that women choose;
- 4) a distinct identity, history and culture: each woman defines and describes her history, including the impact of colonization, racism and sexism, tribal women’s culture, worldview and traditions.

- **Power and control tactics of battering** – a system of on-going, purposeful behaviors used to take and maintain power and control over another. Power and control tactics may be emotional, psychological, physical, financial, sexual, etc., in nature. The tactics change according to the individual batterer but the goal is coercion to maintain power and control. (See “battering.”)
- **Predominant aggressor** – for lack of a better term, is utilized in reference to mandatory domestic violence arrests to indicate that only one person should be arrested. It charges officers with the responsibility of determining who has the most potential for doing the most harm and what was done in self-defense, and refraining from “equalizing” the violence or “leaving it up to the judge.”
- **Principle/primary aggressor** – language similar in intent to “predominant aggressor,” but allows the arrest of “secondary” aggressors, i.e., the victim, instead of making determinations about self-defense.
- **Probable cause** – defined in Black’s Law Dictionary as “The existence of circumstances that would lead a reasonable and prudent person to believe in the guilt of the suspect.” The existence of probable cause is the determining factor in making a mandatory arrest. It does not require officers to find grounds to “convict” on the spot, but usually includes fear of imminent harm. The intent of probable cause is to prevent re-assaults and possible homicides.

- **Safety** – being protected from violence in all forms. It means having power and control over one’s own life and body. It includes respectful support, access to resources, no barriers and being treated as a relative, not as “sick,” “crazy” or “co-dependent.” It means having one’s civil and human rights honored.
- **Shelter** – a place that provides safety and protection from violence, time and space to rest, advocacy and resources to create a non-violent life. Shelter includes advocates that are respectful and non-judgmental; defend women’s confidentiality; provide accurate information, transportation and accompaniment to court; and support women’s decisions and freedom to choose, including returning to the abuser, without giving up other rights.
- **Survivor** – a term many women who have been battered or raped use to describe themselves. It indicates a person who has experienced a violent, life-changing crime, but has regained power and control over her life. It is a life-affirming term.
- **Victim** – language that reflects a person who has had power and control taken from them, and has not yet been able to regain power and control over their life. The focus is on “loss” due to violence. Sometimes appropriately used, too often it ignores the strengths, gifts and other relationships a woman possesses.
- **Violence** – too often seen as physical harm resulting in blood and broken bones or actions leading to arrest. However, violence moves beyond physical abuse, instilling not just pain, but intense fear for your life. Violence impacts all levels of our existence - physical, emotional, spiritual and mental. Violence takes power and control over our lives and bodies away from us, at least momentarily.
- **Woman** – reflects the concept that a female is not defined by one particular experience or relationship. It reflects a dynamic female human being who possesses physical, mental, emotional and spiritual gifts. “Woman” acknowledges a powerful, whole human being.

Words like “client,” “lady,” “victim,” “patient” and even “survivor,” minimize or ignore the many aspects, gifts, experiences and relationships a woman has. These words emphasize an unequal relationship and negative experience.

When inappropriate to refer to someone by their name, using their “relative name” (sister, mother, grandmother, etc.) or the word “woman” reflects respect and honor.