

A photograph of a young child in traditional Indigenous clothing, holding the hand of an adult, standing in a field. The image is framed by a decorative border on the left and top. The child is wearing a patterned tunic with fringes and a headscarf. The adult is wearing a patterned skirt and arm bands. The background shows a grassy field with some trees and a building in the distance. The photo is in a warm, sepia tone. The decorative border on the left and top features repeating geometric patterns in blue, red, and white on a dark background.

Both men and women must acknowledge the sacredness of this role. This way, they may better honour it.



These pamphlets were made possible by the knowledge of our elders.



Photo by Catherine Orr for Emma Coon Come



In the vision of the *liiyiyuu-liyinu*, the feminine principle refers to the sacredness of women and the role they accomplish. Knowing the responsibilities of women, as well as the many ways of honouring the feminine role will allow us to better understand this principle in question. This way, we may see the importance of reclaiming our rightful place as women in accordance the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* way of life.

Roles and responsibilities

To better understand the importance of women, one must first understand the way each role is defined.

Traditionally, men were considered as protectors and providers. Their role as hunters entailed that they were responsible to find enough food to keep their family strong. Sometimes, they had no choice but to leave for long periods of time to complete a long and difficult hunting expedition. In times like these, women became responsible of assuring the functionality of the camp, occasionally completing some of the men’s daily responsibilities in addition to their own when necessary.

Being so, women were held in high regards as multi-taskers and devoted caretakers. From cleaning the animals to taking care of the children, women assured the continuity of the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* way of life through their day-to-day tasks.



Photo by Jacko Otter



Photo by Jacko Otter

Complementarity

Such is the case for many other nations, the roles and responsibilities of men and women both hold equal status in *liiyiyuu-liyinu* culture. Although a strong division can be observed between the two, one is not above the other. Both complete each other and respect a fine balance between the two.

Complementarity can be seen in traditional tasks such as the making of snowshoes. While the men are responsible to make the wooden frames, it is the women who take care of the weaving. Both rely on each other. Like teamwork, every one is assigned a specific task to achieve a common goal.

In regards to traditional beliefs, the fact that women are responsible to keep a clean dwelling is another example of how these roles complete each other. If they failed to do so, animals may deem their home unworthy of their presence. In this case, the spirit of the animal would refuse to give itself to the hunters.

In regards to our post-colonial context, however, we have integrated certain *waamishtikushiiyu* concepts which are not entirely compatible with our traditional and gender-balanced ways. For the *waamishtikushiiyu*, men often occupy a greater place than women which does not follow the inclusive holistic vision of the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* people seen in the *miichiwap* teachings (medicine wheel).

Colonization has pushed women aside, denying them the right to fulfill their roles. For this reason, many social issues, which stem from the many inequalities between both roles, are presently observed within our communities.

The Sacredness of Women

Women are sacred. As water carriers, they have been given the ability to bring a new spirit into this world. Bearing life represents a strong connection with the spirit world, which, in turn, allows the *miichiwap* to carry on.

The moon represents both the grandmothers and the feminine energy of this world. Women considered most powerful when they are in their Moon Time, as it is a time of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual cleansing.

In fact, a young woman’s passage into adulthood starts with her first period. From then on, she is gifted with the ability to bear life in her womb. When a young woman had her First Moon Time, a ceremony was done to welcome her into adulthood and she received teachings necessary to a woman’s well-being. During this time, women draw energy from the elements around them. For this reason, it is important to understand the sacredness of the Moon Time.

To honour the power and sacredness of femininity, women must wear traditional skirts while in ceremony as a means of protection. Through the skirt, and even the shawl, the symbol of unity aims to ultimately create a protective barrier for their power of reproduction. By wrapping themselves as such, they form a barrier against the negative energies that may surround them.



Photo by Jacko Otter