



UNITED TRIBES  
TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
LAND GRANT EXTENSION

# UTTC LAND GRANT EXTENSION

## UTTC Lifeskills Lessons – Relationships & Family

### Lesson 19: Being a Woman

LS0019

#### “Mother” Earth’s Maternal Values

Today people buy land and forever pay taxes for parceled use of Mother Earth. Should the indigenous philosophy of respect and caring for all things; rocks, plants, soil, water, people, etc.; be considered wise and important?

In matriarchal systems, there is no private property or territorial claims and Mother Earth is not owned or divided into pieces. But, even parceled, she still bears the fruits of the fields and nourishes the young animals. Should we respect Mother Earth and not waste water, not litter the fields, not poison the soil, nor ignore her and try to change what she provides? We might not be able to live communally today, but should we be respectful to Mother Earth; who still carries, natures, nurtures, and nourishes us?

#### RESOURCES

- [©Nativeamericanfathers.org/event/motherhoodissacred](http://Nativeamericanfathers.org/event/motherhoodissacred).
- [www.kitchensisters.org/girlstories/story-9-the-brave-heart-womens-society/](http://www.kitchensisters.org/girlstories/story-9-the-brave-heart-womens-society/)
- <http://indianyouth.org/news/detail/brave-heart-society>
- [www.historicaltrauma.com/maria-yellowhorsebraveheart](http://www.historicaltrauma.com/maria-yellowhorsebraveheart)

#### Matriarchal Systems

We often hear, “Our tribes had a matriarchal system.” So did women rule? Did they boss their man around? Did they govern the whole community? Was their name the clan name?

By definition, matriarchies are not just a reversal of male dominated systems. Matriarchies are mother-centered societies, where values: of care-taking, nurturing, motherliness holds for everybody: for mothers, for women who are not mothers, and for men alike.

Matriarchal societies were common for indigenous tribes in North America. They were consciously built upon maternal values and motherly work. Those societies aimed to meet everyone’s needs and provided for each unique person or being. In matriarchies, mothering – which originates as a biological fact – is transformed into a cultural model. This model is different than the way most people see motherhood, which has the danger of making women, and especially mothers, into slaves, serving everyone ahead of themselves.

Not all indigenous tribes were matriarchal. Still, women had important roles. Women handed the mothering lessons to the next generation and women were treated with respect.



**At the greater societal level**, matriarchs are based on the clan or “symbolic order of the mother”. This means values are spiritual principles that humans take from nature, not just nurture. Mother Nature cares for all beings, however different they may be. A good mother cares for all her children, embracing differences. She does not compare her children based on creator-given differences. This holds true for all males, as well. If a man in a matriarchal society desires to acquire status among his peers, or even become a leader or “Elder” within the group,

he must be like a “good mother”.

In matriarchies, mothers do not have to have children and all children are “mothered” by everyone. This motherhood is founded on the freedom of women to decide on their own about whether or not to have biological children. Matriarchal societies are most often possible when people live together in kinship and/or understand that principle. The clan’s name, and all social status and political titles, are passed on through the mother’s family.

In today’s society, in the United States of American, the greater society is not matriarchal. For educational purposes, we defined how a matriarchal system might function, but this lesson will focus on respect for all girls, females, women, and including mothers in any social systems





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## Women Supporting Women

*Brave Heart Women's Society* supports generation-to-generation teaching. Writings report, "Due to government intervention, the boarding school system, and the breakdown of families due to poverty, the Dakota people lost much of their traditional knowledge. In 1994, the Brave Heart Society was formed by a community of grandmothers on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota with the mission of bringing back traditional knowledge by "calling home the spirit of the culture". The Brave Heart grandmothers believe that culture is medicine, and the success of their many projects show the true strength of the cultural practices of the pact.

Brave Heart Society hosts camps for young girls each year. One former participant reported, "Every year I try to teach what I know, bring that back to recreate that feeling I felt." Older Isnati girls return year-after-year to feed the younger girls and teach them ceremonial songs and beading. Throughout the days, the elders talk to the girls about modesty, courtship, pregnancy — and suicide, a serious problem on the reservations. About not being afraid of doctors and having to get a check-up. Sexual abuse and incest can pose a huge problem within families. There's no easy way to talk about these issues, so you just have to get them out there. And we're always talking about this concept of a camp circle. We can't be attacking each other and doing this mean girl's stuff." For more information go to one of the links listed in the Resource section of UTTC'S lifeskills lesson #19 "being a woman."

## When is a Girl a Woman?

Watch as a young girl tries to answer the above question for herself – in changes to how she dresses, in the way that she behaves, in what she says, and in what seems important to her. ***If we don't help our daughters and nieces to answer this question for themselves, others surely will.***

Some of the guiding influences are good ones, not all will be. Women get a sense of what is expected of womanhood from: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, godmothers, mother's friends, teachers, peer group, older girls, films, television, advertisements, books, magazines, websites, computer games, and other media. Do these things also support abuse of girls and women or do they support women and girls in learning about being strong female members of society?

How do girls know when they were a woman? Of course, there is no single minute when it happens, but many women remember some event which made them realize that they had taken another important step towards womanhood. It has little to do with menstrual cycles or relationships with others – marriage, employment, or friends – but, more to do with the relationship developed with themselves as a mature woman.

A concern is that we no longer, as a society, provide children, male or female, with clear markers to indicate that they are progressing along their path towards adulthood. The fact is that many adult age people never leave the adolescent stage. Every teenage girl longs for affirmation that she is on her way towards becoming a woman. Teenage girls often wear the clothes, make-up, and mannerisms of a woman and mistakenly believe this makes them appear like they have reached womanhood. Appearance is such a small part of what it means to be a woman, but who is teaching about being a lady, a mother, a female leader?

Mothers and all women, are the teachers. They must spend time with girls, be in the company of other women, doing things that women enjoy together. Girls should talk with older women about what it was like growing up through the teenage years, long ago. Stories are important and should be told. Women can remember aloud important events that marked progress towards adulthood. Adults should allow teens to overhear and join the conversations, woman to woman. This way girls will learn what it is to be a mature, strong woman.

**WOMEN are not  
marked with HICKIES!**

