



Empowerment of North American Indian Girls: Ritual Expressions at Puberty

Carol A. Markstrom

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Empowerment of North American Indian Girls is an examination of coming-of-age-ceremonies for American Indian girls past and present, featuring an in-depth look at Native ideas about human development and puberty. Many North American Indian cultures regard the transition from childhood to adulthood as a pivotal and potentially vulnerable phase of life and have accordingly devised coming-of-age rituals to affirm traditional values and community support for its members. Such rituals are a positive and enabling social force in many modern Native communities whose younger generations are wrestling with substance abuse, mental health problems, suicide, and school dropout.

Developmental psychologist Carol A. Markstrom reviews indigenous, historical, and anthropological literatures and conveys the results of her fieldwork to provide descriptive accounts of North American Indian coming-of-age rituals. She gives special attention to the female puberty rituals in four communities: Apache, Navajo, Lakota, and Ojibwa. Of particular interest is the distinctive Apache Sunrise Dance, which is described and analyzed in detail. Also included are American Indian feminist interpretations of menstruation and menstrual taboos, the feminine in cosmology, and the significance of puberty customs and rites for the development of young women.

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