

## **Abstract**

### **Coming Home to Gaia: Mentored Earth-based Rites of Passage for Adolescent Girls**

by

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The experience of co-creating a rite of passage with adolescent girls was examined over a seven-week period with brief follow-up interviews of mentors. The researcher (a middle-class Native American/Anglo woman), six middle-class Anglo women, and one middle-class Latina woman served as mentors for nine adolescent girls—eight Latinas and one Anglo—throughout the process of preliminary education, design, and enactment of the rite of passage. The rite of passage addressed the issues of trust, commitment, and self-empowerment in a multicultural population. Utilizing a blended research method (organic inquiry, feminist research, participative inquiry, and heuristic inquiry), the study evolved from the researcher's exploration of her own experiences while raising daughters and working with adolescents from multicultural backgrounds in group homes, detention centers, and on the street. The literature review placed the study in the context of multicultural education and counseling, adolescent female development, feminism, and earth-based (indigenous) and ecofeminist spiritualities. An intuitive analysis of the data revealed the themes of the experience, including (a) intergenerational and intercultural trust, (b) personal power versus external power, (c) passionate commitment to the pursuit of one's goals, and (d) transformative change. The study concluded that while girls and women derive mutual benefit from the mentoring relationship, and that ritual can

provide a safe and flexible container for transformative intergenerational work, the issues of trust, self-empowerment, and passionate commitment arising in adolescence—which often extend into young adulthood and even into middle age and beyond—are more critical for multicultural populations. Results contribute to further understanding the integration of multicultural relationships, Earth-based spirituality in transpersonal psychology, and the psychospiritual development of girls in patriarchal society. This process might be useful to spiritual guides, teachers, therapists and mental health professionals, and youth group leaders.