

Hawaii International Conference on Education

January 7 - 10, 2003

Sheraton Waikiki Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

Proposal Submission

Title - “The Medicine Way: Understanding Native American Women’s Health”

Topic Areas–Health Education, Diversity Education

Keywords–Health Education, Native American Women, Diversity Education

Session Format–Research paper session: a thirty-minute overview of the research findings followed by questions and answers is preferred.

Type of Submission: Research Proposal–The research proposal is an abstract of an ethnographic study conducted with Native women residing in the continental United States. The main question driving this qualitative inquiry was “What is medicine?” From this project, the researcher will offer evidence that understanding the practice of medicine within Native communities expands the worldview of health and illness constructs. It is through these women’s lives that participants will be offered knowledge, education and teaching methods of some American Indians. Additionally, the vitally significant contribution of Native voices in classrooms and academic works will be promoted.

Presenter and Contact Information:

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“My Apache ancestors believed that both health and the lack of health spring from the totality of a person’s relationship with the great spirit, mother earth, the person’s brothers and sisters, and with one’s own mind, body, and spirit.”

--Billie Topa Tate

Healing that is medicine does not occur from the outside in a didactic form but is a vehicle that, transverses an array of entities (relationships with spirit, earth and community). It takes on an existence that supercedes the treatment of an illness and even ultimately some definitions of health. Moreover, healing exists beyond the constraints of prescribed treatments and pharmaceuticals. In fact, the word healing is used as a descriptor often illuminating the actions associated with “doing medicine” which does include thanks, prayers, gifts, kindness, generosity, and such.

Ultimately, the principles of healing are intertwined with the beliefs and philosophy of community, nature, past, present and future and the mind, body and spirit of an individual.

Because everything in the indigenous world is interrelated, the integrity of the Native American community and an individual’s sense of well-being is based on balance and holism. All forces, both animate and inanimate, must be taken into account in order for the whole person, and by extension, the entire community, to remain in good health -physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.¹

Research objectives:

- * What are health, illness and medicine for Native American women?
- * How and in what ways is health and healing taught e.g., at home, in school? When? Why?
- * What influences the practices or who partakes in this education?
- * How does this understanding contribute to health education, for diverse cultures?
- * How does history and cultural heritage impact youth education regarding diversity and health?

¹ Lobo and Talbot, page 366

Proposed methodology:

This is an ethnographic study completed during 2000-2002. The primary data analyzed was obtained by in-depth interviews of the participants' from seven different nations residing in numerous locations across the country. Several participant observations were also included in this research project. There is a forty-year span in the ages of the participants and most women were raised either on or adjacent to their birth nation.

Expected outcomes:

Attendees of this research discussion will gain a perspective on the ways of knowing regarding some indigenous cultures. This is a vital addition to any educational setting and a necessity in our ever-growing diverse environments. An expanded worldview of health, illness and medicine will also unfold as the participants hear and witness the stories and lives of the women involved in this project. This expanded worldview includes a place for ceremony and ritual in our daily lives which will only enhance our teaching in health education. Lastly, attendees will see the benefit of including indigenous research by indigenous researchers to their curriculum.

We have to actively resist the suggestion that something is going to make us sick. It is not easy to talk illness ... without believing strongly that we may have to deal with [it]. ...and we know what happens when someone tells us we do not look well. We begin to take our pulse and wonder whether we should lie down. When we shut down on it [these notions of illness] and begin to talk health and begin to talk about excellent opportunities, then we open the way to be well and prosperous.²

References:

Lobo, Susan and Talbot, Steven. 1998. *Native American Voices: A Reader*. New York, NY: Longman Educational Publishers, Inc.

Hifler, Joyce Sequichie. 1992. *A Cherokee Feast of Days: Daily Meditations*. Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books.

About the researcher: Doreen E. Martinez is of Mescalero, Apache and Dutch heritage. Prior to her enrollment in the doctoral program at Syracuse University, she was in

² Hifler, Page 29

Student Affairs for nine years. During this time, she did teach in the School of Education at Ohio University and Colorado State University (community development, workshop methodologies and leadership skills). For the last six years, she has been an instructor for courses in Sociology, Social Work, Women's Studies and an interdisciplinary course. Her specialty areas are race, ethnicity, gender, inequality, diversity and human development.