

Abstract

Coming of Age the *RITE* Way:

Youth & Community Development through Rites of Passage

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This book examines the relationship between adolescents' passage to adulthood and community adaptation, resiliency, and survival. It reviews the literature on initiation and rites of passage along with relevant concepts from community psychology, especially the notion of a psychological sense of community. Cross-cultural ethnographies and case studies offer examples of traditional initiation rites. Elements central to a psychological sense of community and community-oriented rites of passage are explored. Social service paradigms that promote independent programs designed to "fix" people are challenged.

This book sets forth guiding principles and clear methods for putting into practice a whole-systems approach to youth development through rites of passage that involves connecting and enhancing environments and building competencies, which promote the positive development of children and youth in their families, in their schools, among their peers, and in their community, and with a strong connection to the natural world.

Rites of passage language weaves a common story that links techniques for clinical practice in prevention with identification, treatment, and maintenance. When members of all sectors of a community, for example, professionals, parents, youth, and so forth, join together in learning the language of initiation and rites of passage they can collectively use this common language and shared techniques to improve interventions and therapy with adolescents and their families and integrate many different approaches, such as developmental assets, character education, asset-based community development, the social development model of youth development, academic and social-emotional learning, resiliency, and all education and youth development approaches.



When in the womb everything to be known about the Universe we know –
At birth we forget. Initiation helps children remember.

1. Let Me Tell You A Story

“Let Me Tell You A Story: Introduction” offers an overview of the conditions facing children, introduces the concept of rites of passage and how it has been misunderstood and misused in contemporary media and programs. It sets forth the landscape of the book and central questions that are explored and answered, such as, How do we help our children grow up well? What do rites of passage have to do with this in a diverse, multicultural society? What are rites of passage? Why are they important, and what is their purpose? If it takes a whole village to raise a child, as the ancient proverb says, what are the consequences of not having villages anymore? Can a society have a psychological sense of community without community rituals like rites of passage? And can rites of passage exist in a society without a sense of community?

2. “Whaddaya Read? Whaddaya Know?”: Invitation to Share Stories

“Whaddaya Read? Whaddaya Know?”: Invitation to Share Stories explores the power of stories. From the story of the Trojan horse to our collective story surrounding September 11, 2001, stories can change the world. The chapter describes how stories from the author’s forty-five years of practice illustrate key concepts and theories that have been brought together into a new approach called youth and community development through rites of passage. It introduces “different ways of knowing,” citing works and wisdom from indigenous people along with scholars who address the utility of direct experience as no substitute for the acquisition of knowledge. It closes by honoring and telling a story of the author’s relationship with the founder of the field of community psychology and longtime friend and mentor Professor Seymour Sarason.

3. The First Story—My Creation Myth

“The First Story: My Creation Myth” presents the first of two case studies. It offers a detailed narrative of a vision quest, which is one part of an initiatory process. Set in the one million acres of the Cranberry Wilderness Preserve in Hillsboro, West Virginia, the chapter describes the ritual protocols and experience of going forth to find a vision for one’s life, a near-death experience, and returning to share one’s vision for the sake and survival of the village. It discusses Huichol Shamanism and the vital role nature plays in rites of passage.

4. The Trinity of Inquiry: Rites of Passage and Our Quest for Community

“The Trinity of Inquiry: Rites of Passage and Our Quest for Community” introduces the concept of reciprocity and its relevance in rites of passage, which in western society are typically focused on individual transformation. An ongoing debate in evolutionary biology recognizes the tension between the role of the individual and community in the survival of human beings. This chapter lays the foundation for exploring the relationship between rites of passage and the psychological sense of community. It introduces each concept and their relationship by focusing on how an individual’s initiation strengthens

the bonds between citizens that increase both social capital and a community's capacity for adaptation, which serves survival.

5. The Meaning of Community: Symbols of Initiation—Reciprocity

“The Meaning of Community: Symbols of Initiation Reciprocity” explores the concept of reciprocity through examples contained in the vision quest narrative in chapter 3. It explores and expands on community psychology's definitions for community to include nature, ancestors, and Spirit in an “initiatory constellation,” which is central to adolescent identity formation. A working model for understanding and using the central elements in a psychological sense of community is introduced for guiding youth and community development through rites of passage design strategies. The chapter proposes three core questions to help frame our exploration into the intersection of rites of passage and community: What are youth being initiated into? By whom? and For what purpose? The answer to these key questions can guide the design of more viable and potent village-oriented rites of passage.

6. On Rites of Passage: Symbols of Initiation

“On Rites of Passage: Symbols of Initiation” returns to an analysis of the vision quest described in chapter 3 through the lens of rites of passage. It offers a rationale and provides examples that strengthen the argument that individuals could not be transformed without a context and connection with one's community and/or culture. If it takes a whole village to raise a child, then it could be suggested that it takes a whole community to recognize an adult. The rite of passage phase of “incorporation” is discussed in relationship to the essential need for youth to be initiated within and by their own community and culture.

7. Ritual Form—Design Elements

“Ritual Form—Design Elements” explores the pervasiveness of the sacred rather than the secular in the initiatory experience. The connection of the individual within a community and into the sacred world, the world of Nature and Spirit, is central. How we get to the

sacred is examined within a generic five-part structure for ritual that includes similar elements evident across different cultures and contexts within the ritual process. These elements integrate specific design symbols and principles that can be adapted into contemporary strategies for rites of passage experiences. The five-part structure includes separation, purification, invocation, identification, and transformation. These provide guideposts in our analysis of the vision quest described in chapter 3 and are exemplified in the ritual designed by Malidoma Patrice Somé and described in chapter 9. They are also used as primary elements in the construction of contemporary rites of passage.

8. Which Write, Wright, Rite Is Right? Knowing Your Rites from Your Rights

“Which Write, Wright, Rite Is Right? Knowing Your Rites from Your Rights” explores the history of ritual and its relationship to myth. It introduces eight general properties of myth and discusses these properties in relationship to theories in science. Rites of passage are proposed as a contemporary story that has the properties of myth and provides more potent and effective design strategies to link together and improve contemporary education and youth development practices. The chapter explores the connection between rituals and a psychological sense of community that contributes to adaptation, resiliency, and survival. It presents youth and community development through rites of passage as a “meta-myth” that can serve as a unifying story in a community’s efforts in education and fostering healthy youth development.

9. It Is a Long Journey to a Ritual

“It Is a Long Journey to a Ritual” provides another case study of a ritual as an example of the general principles and structure of myth, ritual, and rites of passage. The famed educator and ritual-maker Malidoma Patrice Somé, Ph.D., who grew up among the Dagara in Dano, Burkina Faso, West Africa, fashioned the ritual, based on his tribe’s funeral customs. It highlights the relationship between ritual, the individual, and the community. The chapter illustrates the general principles of myth described in chapter 7 and the tripartite structure of rites of passage—separation, liminality, and incorporation.

The chapter explores the relationship between death—funerals and coming of age—rites of passage and the similarity and need for a ritualizing process.

10. Something Happened: Stories to Dream By

“Something Happened: Stories to Dream By” includes information from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) at Yale University. These files constitute one of the largest collections of ethnographies that explore the intricacies of human relations among 340 different cultures from around the world. This chapter reviews the Human Relations Area File on “puberty and initiation rites” and identifies common elements in initiation rites that appear central to many diverse cultures. The common elements are synthesized and inform the formation of twenty design principles for youth and community development through rites of passage. The chapter makes a compelling case that “something happens” around the time of puberty. And what happens is essential for the individual, their family, and the community in specific ways that serves to ensure adaptation for the survival of their culture and community.

11. Making Something Happen: Community Institutions as Places of Initiation and Rites of Passage

“Making Something Happen: Community Institutions as Places for Initiation and Rites of Passage” provides specific integrated design strategies in a whole systems approach for helping communities become places of initiation and rites of passage. Specific opportunities include the “collision of transitions” (midlife and adolescence), the separation of children from biological parents/guardians, defining and engaging elders and mentors, program replication—innovation transfer and emergent design, and reframing therapy with adolescents and their families as part of the ongoing initiatory process. The “story” of rites of passage was used for a large-order systems change process to organize and mobilize ten communities, which engaged almost seven thousand people. The chapter discusses the results of the community mobilizing project and the inadequacy of evidence-based random control trials paradigm to effectively assess a

whole systems approach to youth development through rites of passage and proposes a new citizen-centered model.

12. End Notes: Reflections of a Public Artist: A Call to Inquiry and Action

“End Notes: Reflection of a Public Artist: A Call to Inquiry and Action” expands on what we would be doing when institutions that mattered in the lives of children were considered to be places of initiation and rites of passage. It brings together almost fifty years of work in community organizing, education, social work, and youth development into a new story of youth and community development through rites of passage. Community organizing, intervention, therapy, education, and youth development are linked together through the common language of rites of passage. Powered by the synergy of myth and science, values that inform and guide expectations for behavior are transmitted to the next generation. Public policy and design recommendations are provided that can transform and integrate the practice of education, social work, and youth development in ways that improve the conditions for raising our children.

The Learning Continues On-Line:

Additional resources for putting youth and community development through rites of passage into action along with information about the 4th edition of the international model Rite Of Passage Experience© ROPE® Guide for Promoting Youth & Community Maturation & Health can be accessed at www.communityritesofpassage.org.