

Initiation Ceremonies and Rites of Passage

Karina Weichold¹, Sheriffa Mahama², and Nora Fehmer¹

¹Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, Germany

²University of Ghana, Ghana

In: *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, Second Edition. Elsevier.

in press (07.09.3023)

Author Names and Affiliation

Prof. Dr. Karina Weichold (corresponding author)

karina.weichold@uni-jena.de

Friedrich Schiller University of Jena

Institute of Psychology

Department of Youth Research

Am Steiger 3 / I

07743 Jena, Germany

Dr. Sheriffa Mahama (co-author)

smahama@ug.edu.gh

University of Ghana

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

College of Basic and Applied Sciences

P. O. Box 91

Legon, Ghana

Nora Fehmer, M.Sc. (co-author)

nora.fehmer@uni-jena.de

Friedrich Schiller University of Jena

Institute of Psychology

Department of Youth Research

Am Steiger 3 / I

07743 Jena, Germany

Abstract

Initiation ceremonies for adolescents are investigated as means to structure the transition from childhood to adulthood within a given culture, and to support adaptation during a challenging life phase. Concepts on the phases of initiation ceremonies, associated empirical findings, and examples including the benefits and risks of rites are reviewed. Thereby, the classical ethnocentric anthropological work with a broad categorization of traditional vs. modern societies is acknowledged. During the past decades, however, worldwide societies have undergone substantial social change (e.g., growing globalization, migration, and digitalization), and cultural traditions such as initiation rites seem to mix cross-culturally and are not as recognized by adolescents as in earlier times - this will be illustrated by current research. Based on that, avenues to study rites more in depth in today's societies based on an inter- and poly-cultural study approach are discussed.

Keywords

Coming-of-Age, Developmental Milestone, Incorporation, Initiation Ceremonies, Liminality, Performativity, Puberty, Rite of Passage, Ritual, Separation, Transition

Key Points

- The cultural structuring of adolescence varies between contexts depending on the ideal social timetable.
- During the past century, the role of initiation ceremonies or rituals marking the beginning or the end of adolescence were investigated primarily under an anthropological or ethnographic perspective, thereby applying a dichotomous categorization of traditional vs. modern cultures.
- Initiation ceremonies or rites of passage in general are a culturally structured transition; for adolescents, they are based on the developmental stage or chronological age (8-18yrs.) and can be understood as the social counterpart to biological maturation.

- Initiation ceremonies can be viewed within a stepwise transition model that includes three phases of rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation.
- In traditional and indigenous societies, rites of passage are deeply anchored in the culture, focused on the preservation of society and interpersonal relationships (both within a group and between groups), and mostly are related to a clear, wholistic status change.
- In modern and contemporary cultures, the main focus of rites of passage for adolescents is on individuation and personality development; they are more formal, age-graded ceremonies with a less clear change in the social status for the initiates and their communities.
- Adolescent initiation ceremonies can provide some benefits to the individual and community, but can also physically, socially, and/or emotionally harm the initiate.
- In today's societies around the world, initiation ceremonies seem to mix cross-culturally (e.g., due to growing globalization, digitalization, and migration), and they are not so widespread and recognized as in earlier times.
- Further studies on ceremonies and rites related to adolescence should apply a biopsychosocial, inter- and poly-cultural perspective while studying diverse samples of adolescents around the world, thereby considering ongoing social and cultural change.
- Knowledge gathered on adolescent initiation and its psychological and social effects has to inform practice to support adolescent positive development and health.

Introduction: The Cultural Context of Adolescence

The beginning of *adolescence* is characterized by biological transformations (especially during puberty) and psychological growth, developmental universalities leading to physical, reproductive, and cognitive maturity. The transition phase from childhood to adulthood is beyond biological but a more complex pattern of personal and social changes, embedded in the experiences of young people within their family, peer, and school contexts or communities that are shaped by the given history and culture (Crockett, 1997).

Broadly speaking, *culture* is defined as shared understandings between individuals that are reflected in the acts and works of a society (Redfield, 1941). According to Uri Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), cultural values and norms of a society act as a higher-order

system (macrosystem). The everyday exchanges within family, peer, or school contexts (micro systems) play a key role as provider of important proximal developmental mechanisms. For instance, via family interactions, the transmission of what is right and what is wrong, as well as what is desirable and what is to be avoided (or roles and expectations for behaviour within a certain social group) in different life stages is most directly communicated between children, adolescents, and their parents. Thus, culture offers the script for individual development of humans in society by means of socialization and enculturation.

Life stages such as adolescence are construed differently in different cultures, and age-typical developmental tasks are solved in culture-typical ways (Arnett, 2012). Although in many societies around the world, an adolescent phase or adolescent social stage exists (Schlegel & Barry, 1979, 1991) and all adolescents experience biological and social transitions, the particular experiences vary for young people across cultures and history, and also between different cultural groups within a society. The same applies to the skills young people are expected to acquire during adolescence and the ways in which the transitions to adulthood (also their institutionalizing, meaning, and consequences) are marked and celebrated (Crockett, 1997). Thus, the *cultural structuring* of adolescence within societies (along with their ideals for a life course) varies including the selection, meaning, and practice of developmental milestones, and the provision of social roles, settings, and activities shaping the content of the adolescent phase (Benedict, 1934; Crockett, 1997).

Key developmental cues structuring adolescents' social experiences are, for instance, the biological *markers of puberty* such as physical growth or menarche. In settings where puberty and reproductive readiness are closely tied to fertility and marriage, physical and reproductive maturity is desirable from the societal perspective; it increases the social status of families and is seen as an asset. Here, pubertal milestones like menarche are more likely to be celebrated. Adult skills and role behaviour are assumed to be learned gradually throughout childhood in interactions within proximal developmental contexts, primarily within the family and the wider community. Celebrating menarche as the beginning of the fertile life phase clearly indicates the status transition to others and leads to a different social status in the community (e.g., the beginning of adolescence), while marriage signals the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood (Brook-Gunn & Reiter, 1990; Schlegel & Barry, 1991). In such societies, the adolescent period is shorter, in particular for girls, more restricted (especially with regard to sexual activities before marriage) and associated with higher demands (e.g., earlier

responsibilities in religious activities or family duties) as compared to boys (Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

In societies in which pubertal events such as menarche are neither celebrated in public, nor are they related to any changes in social status of adolescents within the community (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990), *developmental cues such as school transitions / completion, moving out of parents' home, and obtaining a driving licenses* serve more often as indicators for the readiness of becoming an adult, reflecting more a pattern of several step-by-step transitions unrelated to fertility. Such transitions typically occur much later in adolescence than the physical maturation of puberty (consistent with trends of increasing ages also for entering work life, marriage, or parenthood in the western world; Arnett, 2012). Thus, the transition period from childhood to adulthood is prolonged and characterized by less observable status change with lesser degree of clarity. This lack of a clear status change is assumed to lead to ambiguity within the society as to how to treat a young person appropriately – as a child, adolescent, or adult. For youth, in turn, it is assumed that some ambiguity about their social status is the result, as they have to cope with inconsistent expectations, degrees of autonomy, and options for participation in the adult world, as well as different role expectations across contexts in their everyday lives (e.g., Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2018). This can lead to some insecurity about appropriate behaviour, frustration, and the tendency of adolescents to take over (prematurely) problematic adult-like behaviours, such as substance use. In addition, it is discussed that a relatively high focus on safety and education leads to increasing dependence on families particularly in the western world that is limiting opportunities for additional role experiences and gradual adult skills acquisition (e.g., from observing adults).

In sum, the cultural structuring of adolescence, in general, can vary between contexts informing what is to be considered the ideal social timetable. Differences can either ameliorate the (possibly stressful psychosocial) effects of pubertal development (e.g., by experiencing higher status and social solidarity in the community) or contribute to even more discontinuity and stress especially as a result of segregating adolescents from adult life.

The role of initiation ceremonies or rituals marking the beginning or the end of adolescence have been investigated primarily under an anthropological or ethnographic perspective, focusing (sometimes romanticizing) adolescent development in traditional vs. modern cultures (Benedict, 1934; Mead, 1928; Schlegel & Barry, 1979, 1991; Schlegel & Hewlett, 2011). More

specifically and in line with this classical research, the term “traditional” societies refers to small-scale, mostly homogenous societies that identify as hunting-and-gathering, agricultural, and horticultural societies (often indigenous societies) compared to those identified as industrial and post-industrial (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). Industrial or “modern” societies, in contrast, refer to societies driven by the use of technology, industrial production, and a market economy, that have a high capacity for division of labour and a certain range of political institutions (Nolan & Lenski, 2009). This binary classification system is used in most of the formative research and writing on puberty rites conducted in the 1950s to 80s and, therefore, requires mentioning and citing (Schlegel & Barry, 1980; Weisfeld, 1997).

However, this is by no means to suggest that societies today fall neatly into this dichotomy. Although similar dichotomies still are often used but nevertheless strongly criticized (e.g., individualistic vs. collectivistic, independent vs. interdependent, *Gesellschaft* vs. *Gemeinschaft*), it seems to be more appropriate to conceptualize the traditional / modern dichotomy as polar ends of a continuum with most societies falling on different points along this continuum. Even within countries, there can be vast differences and variations of aspects of modernity and traditionality (Höllinger & Haller, 1990). Along with this, others argue that such categorization of cultures are largely considered irrelevant today (Germond-Duret, 2016; Hermans & Kempen, 1998), as they are too oversimplifying while not mirroring the rich cultural diversity between and within countries or societies (Ghai, 2021). Such arguments reflect increasing worldwide cultural interconnections, interactions, and complexities among societies around the world with the emergence of a global system. Driven by the worldwide mega-trends of digitalization and migration, and the ease of digital connectivity and social exchange, people not only acquire knowledge on other cultures more easily, but also more readily use this knowledge. In that sense, cultures mix and become more and more plural instead of categorical (as recognized by poly-cultural psychology; Morris, Chiu & Liu, 2015). This, in fact, may also reduce differences between regions of the world and increases diversity in rites around puberty and adolescence within single societies.

Based on this discussion, we decided in this chapter to use the classical “traditional vs. modern” dichotomy of cultures only as anchors for grouping the grounding research from ethnocentric anthropology of the former century in the first part of the chapter. Here, initiation ceremonies and rites of passage into adolescence and adulthood are defined and related empirical findings and models are summarized. Rites in traditional vs. modern context, along with illustrative in-

depth examples, are presented for several countries and societies. Then, possible psychosocial benefits and risks of rites of passage for adolescents and their surroundings are discussed. The chapter ends with a contemporary view on adolescent initiation rites with opening avenues to study them under a biopsychosocial perspective in the 21st century, as illustrated by current research findings on adolescents from 16 countries around the world.

Initiation Ceremonies and Rites of Passage

Definitions, Features, and Functions

Initiation ceremonies or *rites of passage* in general are culturally structured transitions throughout the life cycle. In the context of adolescent development, they are based on developmental stage or (to a lesser extent) on chronological age, and happen mostly between the ages of 8 and 18. Thereby, the *initiation ceremony* is the process or the event, while the *rite or ritual* is referring more to the actual acts of becoming a member of a social group of a given community (here more specifically regarding *passage* from childhood to adolescence).

Initiation ceremonies can have an explicit emphasis on the reproductive maturity associated with puberty (*puberty rites*). Initiation ceremonies and rites of passage can be understood as the social counterpart to biological maturation, including cultural training and education, a testing period, and introduction into the world of adults – all of which are supposed to offer some general adaptive advantage. This is because structured transitions are presumed by the community to help prepare the adolescent for social maturity (“a crash course in adulthood”, Weisfeld, 1997, p. 30). Through initiation ceremonies and rites of passage, maturation is recognized by others (adults) with respect, young adolescents are supported, and the society guides their behaviour in their new roles as women and men, all of which helps ease adolescents’ transition from childhood to adulthood (Van Gennep, 1960; Weisfeld, 1997; Werbner, 2009). Thereby, the initiation ceremonies and the associated rituals may preserve a relative equilibrium and may structure the sequence of the life course (Janusz & Malkiewicz, 2018). Moreover, they can add to the establishment of conventions, help to seal social contracts, construct conventional orders, define morality, and maintain the cultural and socio-political status quo. Thus, rites of passage are assumed to having potential benefits for the individual

and the community. However, rites of passage can also be accompanied by risks which will be further explained later in this chapter.

The *rite* or *rituals* themselves as the *specific building blocks of initiation ceremonies* are relatively invariant sequences of formal acts or utterances, varying across cultures. Rituals can include behavioural taboos (e.g., fasting), physical manipulations (e.g., genital manipulation), and public celebrations of incorporation among others. They have specific cultural meanings and psychological salience leading to transformations of the initiate as well as the society's perception of the initiate (Markstrom, 2008). Without performance and the contemplative process associated with rituals (i.e., personal reflective thinking), rituals are just carried out by young people as a habit. In that way, rituals may become dead cultural artefacts. The actual performance of rites is compared with dramatic performances – and to perform the rite is to accept the canonical order. Rituals with its performativity appeal to several sensory channels (e.g., burning candles and scents, singing, dancing, and praying) by often combining aesthetic and religious functions. Within the social drama of rituals (see examples below), the performances often include both, elements arousing anxiety but also ways to effectively regulate them – creating via symbolic structures options for emotion regulation and self-shaping. Thus, rituals can offer security and stability in times of challenges and dilemmas (Janusz & Malkiewicz, 2018).

Empirical Findings

A pioneering study on adolescent transition, a *classical anthropological study*, published in 1979 compared adolescent initiation ceremonies in 186 societies representative to all world regions except for industrialized societies at that time (Schlegel & Barry, 1979; Schlegel & Hewlett, 2011; based on the cross-cultural sample by Murdock & White, 1969)¹. Here, initiation ceremonies were defined (and data accordingly coded) as a form of social recognition of the transition from childhood to adolescence and/or adulthood in a ceremonial form, at any time between 8 and 18 years of age, covering longer time periods to shorter events. However, ceremonies were only accepted as social transitions if they were not limited to just one domain,

¹ Unfortunately, no comparable study in this format exists for the modern cultures until now.

for instance, when significance is limited to religious life or practice and not related to a broader social recognition of the new status (Schlegel & Barry, 1979, 1980).

Using this definition, findings indicated that in almost half of the cultures studied some form of initiation ceremonies or rites of passage into adolescence existed – most commonly in traditional societies, for girls, and for marking the beginning of adolescence. For girls and boys, ceremonies were usually at or close to puberty, and often maturational milestones such as menarche or spermatarche were anchors. Initiations for girls were more likely to be conducted individually (within the family and close kinship), while boys within larger groups of the community, often together with other boys, making the transition. In one-third (girls) or two-thirds (boys) of the cultures, initiation ceremonies and rites involved painful components, including genital operations. Many cultures shared components of knowledge transfer before and during the ceremonies (e.g., learning skills, sharing secrets). Sexuality and fertility were main topics for girls, responsibility and contribution to society for boys. The actual transition from childhood to adolescence was often marked by a public ceremony / ritual and communitywide recognition, usually the first one young people took actively part in. Thereby, transition signals, communicated either visually (e.g., painting, hair style, dress) or verbally (e.g., different style of communication), labelled the new status as no longer a child but as an adolescent or adult (Schlegel & Barry, 1991; Schlegel & Barry, 1979).

In sum, primarily based on studies conducted decades ago, initiation ceremonies and rites around the world are understood as a mark of the beginning of adolescence or adulthood. They may differ for boys and girls; however, there are also differences in the ceremonies themselves and their functions. In traditional and indigenous societies, rites of passage have been more commonly associated with biological maturation, puberty, and fertility. In the world today, structured rites of passage, either with a long history or newly invented, also exist (mentioned in detail later in this chapter). However, the different initiation ceremonies or rites of passage for young people, across all societies, often share similarities and reflect typical phases of rites of passage.

Models and Phases of Initiation

The ethnologist Arnold van Gennep developed a general *phase model for rites of passage* on the *structure of initiation rituals* across the life course, based on his investigations primarily in

non-industrialized and indigenous, traditional societies in the 1960s. He argued that transitions between different life phases that are undefined are potentially harmful for the individual, thus making it necessary for the community to assist and support the transition via structured culture-specific rituals. He differentiated three phases of rites of passage within a stepwise transition model, outlining a general structure of initiation ceremonies (Van Gennep, 1960; for summaries see Bigger, 2009; Weisfeld, 1997; Table 1).

(1) The first phase, *separation* from parents and other parts of the community (e.g., in the form of a spiritual retreat) often characterizes the beginning of the initiation ceremony, signalling an increase in independence and autonomy. The separation phase is associated with specific rites of separation. Young girls and boys may sleep separately from close family, for instance, at same-sex other relatives' home or at special residences (including boarding schools, camps, etc.).

(2) The second phase, *transition*, refers to the instructional period supplementing earlier knowledge transfer with regard to social aspects of a given culture (e.g., values, duties, codes of conduct), ceremonies, and myths of the society. The transition phase is associated with specific rites of change and threshold rituals (e.g., "exam" on the transferred knowledge by adults of the society). Usually, this process is longer for boys than girls, and training can last up to years. For girls, often at the end of puberty, it is assumed that they have learned all the necessary skills for partnership and parenthood.

(3) Finally, the third phase, *incorporation* in the adult world, is the culmination of the cultural training. The incorporation phase is associated with specific rites of affiliation, often including a formal ceremony (more than one third of the sample studied by Schlegel and Barry, 1980). These events signify independence from family, higher personal responsibility, permissions to adult behaviour (e.g., sex, marriage), and all together a new social status in the community. Incorporation often is the endpoint of the education period. Food taboos and changes in physical appearance, for instance, introduced by high calorie diets, fasting, tattooing or hair changes, signals that a new identity is taken over by the initiate.

The structural functionalist view on rites of passage and the related model by van Gennep, was later extended by Turner (1967, 1995) (for a summary see Bigger, 2009). Turner argued that *the rites of passage do not necessarily build structure but offer an anti-structure* (e.g., a process

that breaks structures down) to the existing everyday social life and existing norms within a culture, thereby offering alternatives to the current roles and inviting experimentation with them. In addition, through participation in transition rituals, the adolescent initiates also have the potential to affect and infuse social statuses and roles. Thus, ritual processes are in this sense *arenas in which social change emerges* and stimulate change processes in the social practice for a common good.

< Insert Table 1 here >

Adding to the three-part phase model of rites of passage and, thereby, expanding the concept for all societies, embracing all transitions and rituals anywhere, Turner focused more in depth on the threshold from one social status to another within the transition phase, called *liminality*. The associated state of mind is called liminal, in-between statuses or “betwixt and between”, referring to individuals within a “fertile nothingness”. During liminality, individuals are neither characterized by the earlier nor the later states; thus it is an ambiguous status. Apart from naturally occurring threshold periods like puberty, liminal conditions can be also voluntarily induced, for example by participating in drama or theatre. Positive liminal coping can be associated with creativity and thinking “out of the box”. In that sense, anti-structure within the liminal process could be also interpreted as a productive process for adolescents and their surrounding contexts (Bigger, 2009).

Rites of Passage in Traditional and Indigenous Societies

Adolescent Rites of Passage are prevalent in traditional and indigenous societies with about 70% of such societies having some kind of rites for adolescents (Lutkehaus & Roscoe, 1995). The characteristics of the adolescent rites of passage here vary widely from society to society and can differ in the activities involved and the duration of the ceremonies, as well as the themes of the ceremony (Schlegel & Barry, 1980).

Some components or activities present in initiation rites, to varying degrees, include fasting; seclusion; instruction on the culture, customs, and traditions; circumcision; ingestion of obnoxious substances and harsh treatments; use of costumes; exclusion of the opposite sex and

uninitiated; themes of death and rebirth; change of name; formation of contemporaries; and phallic symbolism (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). For instance, the *Ulwaluko* – the traditional initiation ceremony for Xhosa boys in South Africa – involves circumcision and fasting in seclusion, whereas the rites of passage for Tikuna girls in the Brazilian Amazon involve isolation after menstruation and instruction on the tribe’s history and adult responsibilities, ingestion of an intoxicating drink, and “purification” by jumping over fires (Henda, 2021; UNFPA, 2020).

The duration of ceremonies ranges from about 3 days to weeks to sometimes a year. Longer ceremonies are more likely in African societies than in Pacific, Mediterranean, and North American societies, and boys’ ceremonies are likely to be longer in duration than those for girls. For instance, the Aboriginal walkabout rites of passage where boys (typically aged 10 to 16) undergo a journey in the wilderness can take up to six months (Prout, 2008). Whereas the *Na’ii’ees* or Sunrise rites of passage for Apache Indian girls after their first menstruation lasts about 4 days.

Themes that run through initiation ceremonies tend to parallel the society’s values. The most common themes are responsibility, fertility, sexuality, wisdom, and bravery (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). The themes for a ceremony differ according to gender. For boys, the foci are status, responsibility, fertility, and sexuality. For the girls, the order is fertility, responsibility, and then sexuality (Schlegel & Barry, 1980). Although initiation ceremonies can be faith-, culture-, or school-based, traditional puberty rites, as the name suggests, are deeply embedded in culture and tradition. The rituals reflect and highlight the values of the society regarding gender and social class (Alcorta & Sosis, 2020). They foster a sense of belonging for the initiate, educating them about their history and customs with the goal of continuity of the society and its culture (Weisfeld, 1997). In traditional and indigenous societies, only a few initiation rites are centered around religion. One such religious-based ceremony is the Zulu puberty rites in honor of Inkosazana, the Zulu deity for agriculture (Schief et al., 2018). Currently, with many traditional societies adopting the world’s dominant religions, Christianity and Islam, more churches and mosques are organizing initiation ceremonies to replace traditional ceremonies they deem as harmful or ‘idolatry’. These replacement ceremonies leave out the negative practices but still provide a ceremony for the initiate to transition into adulthood (Schief et al., 2018).

Example for Girls: The Dipo Rites of Passage of the Krobo People of Ghana

Dipo is a female-only initiation rite performed by the Krobo ethnic group of Ghana. As is typical with traditional female rites of puberty, themes of purity and morality, fertility, and conformity, as well as vocational and homemaking skills, are highlighted. These are skills considered essential for successful marriage and motherhood, and a 3-week pre-rite isolation period is set aside for training in these skills. The rites occur after a girl's first menstruation. However, in current times it is performed earlier to ensure that the initiate is a virgin before the rite, and this is checked by having the initiate sit on a sacred ceremonial stone. During the actual 3 to 4-day rites, the girls are stripped of everyday attire. Their hair is shaved, and they are clothed in multiple strings of colourful beads, each colour having distinct meanings: prosperity, maturity, and magical powers. This stripping signifies the shedding of the child status and the transition to a new adult status. As part of the rituals, there are special meals, a ritual bath, and smearing of the body with a mixture of water and millet. *Dipo* initiates learn and perform a special dance known as *Klama*, during which the ancestors are believed to participate with the initiate. Connection to the ancestors is an important part of the ethos of the Krobo. The final parts involve the pouring of libation, body incisions, and markings and dancing to show the successful completion of the rites (Abbey et al., 2021; Adjaye, 1999). The *Dipo* rites have been linked to positive psychological wellbeing (Abbey et al., 2021). Within their communities, girls who successfully take part in *Dipo* gain respect and are held in high esteem even in current times.

Example for Boys: The Warlpiri (Central Australian Aboriginal) Initiatory Journey known as *Kurdiji*

Kurdiji is a ritual ceremony that marks the first stage of a *Warlpiri* boy's initiation into manhood. First, boys about 10 to 16 years old are 'caught' by older males in the community and taken into seclusion. The boys' bodies are painted with red ochre, a clay pigment, and a belt made of woven strands of human hair is tied around their waists. They traditionally are taken on a journey to different communities, gathering people to participate in the rituals. There are several days of ceremonies involving singing ceremonial songs, dancing, and learning sacred knowledge, as well as paintings associated with the boys, culminating in circumcision, which marks the transition from child to adult. During the ceremonies, strong bonds are formed with other initiates (*yarlpurru*) and family members (especially the brothers-in-law, *Juka*, who

play a significant guardianship role during the ceremony). Initiates are ‘reborn’ as new social beings with new sets of relationships and responsibilities, and often marital associations for the initiates are made at this point. Unlike other boys’ rites of passage, women participate in the Kurdiji although they perform gender-specific and separate roles from the men. Throughout the Kurdiji initiation journey, themes of community, relatedness and kinship, identity, bravery and resilience are continuously emphasized (Curran, 2011).

Rites of Passage in Modern and Contemporary Societies

Initiation ceremonies and rites of passage during the transition from childhood to adulthood also exist in contemporary societies, including rituals with a long history and those newly invented. Whereas in a traditional / indigenous society, rites of passage are deeply anchored in the culture and focus on the preservation of society and interpersonal relationships (both within a group and between groups), the focus in modern / contemporary cultures is rather on individuation and personality development – but can also focus on community. In most cases, they are more *formal, age-graded ceremonies*, with less actual change in the social status for the initiates and their communities. Thematically, the background of modern initiation ceremonies can be faith and religion (e.g., confirmation in the Protestant church), school graduations, age-graded privileges within a society (e.g., driving, legally drinking), a special birthday celebration (e.g., *Sweet 16*) or initiations constructed by the adolescents themselves (e.g., first sexual experiences, first cigarette). Initiation rites in the modern world are almost never explicitly linked to the biological processes of puberty, such as menarche or spermarche. Instead, they are rather meant to signal the increasing autonomy or individuality of the adolescents, acknowledging their readiness to take on “adult” duties in specific spheres of their lives (Crockett, 1997), but also as a sign of becoming part of the (ethnic / religious) community similar to in traditional societies. In contrast to traditional initiation ceremonies, which tend to be for a shorter period of time (a few days to a week; exceptions exist), the phase of transition from childhood to adulthood in modern and contemporary cultures tends to extend over a longer period of life (adolescence) with several rituals (step-by-step transition process, granting the new social status piecemeal with low clarity). That is, the process of growing up and acquiring the new social status fully takes years. The consequence of this is that the point in time at which a young person actually becomes an adult cannot be clearly determined.

A large number of initiation ceremonies and rites of passage in the modern world are directed at both girls and boys (e.g., Protestant or Catholic Confirmation; graduation ceremony), but there are nevertheless separate rites for girls (e.g., *Rites for Girls*) or for boys only (e.g., *Phoenixtime* – see below for further elaboration) – often these are newly invented and privately organized. More traditional rites of passage in the modern world are also subject to social change, an example being the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony for girls, which was not initiated until the 19th century due to rising gender equality. Until then, only the bar mitzvah ceremony for boys existed – which can be traced back to the classical gender roles in more conservative Judaism (Dreyer & Hattwich, 2019). Modern rites of passage can sometimes have deeply anchored traditional roots and have developed over the centuries influenced by religion, migration, and globalization (e.g., *La Quinceañera* – celebration of the 15th birthday of a girl). Many of the traditional rites of passage are determined by focusing on the traditional gender roles (girls: marriage, giving birth; boys: taking care of the family) (Schlegel & Barry, 1980) – in contrast, growing up in the modern world is characterized by a broader range of different transition rituals - which in the vast majority apply equally to girls and boys (Garrison, 1988; Markstrom et al., 1998).

Example for Girls and Boys: The Protestant Confirmation

Protestant Confirmation represents an example of a faith-based rite of passage for female and male adolescents within the traditional Protestant church worldwide, mostly in Europe, America, and Africa, but not in the US. This rite of passage is for individuals who were baptized (typically in infancy) and symbolizes the first time young people personally say “yes” to their faith and to the Protestant church. The ritual signifies full membership in their respective church and religious community. The process of a confirmation can be roughly divided into three parts: the preparation time, the festive service, and the subsequent family celebration. The preparation period begins around the age of 14 and lasts a year and a half. During this time, the youth attends confirmation classes, reads the Bible, and discusses faith, God, and questions about life and death. In some congregations, adolescents also help organize and conduct church services or get involved in the congregation’s projects and activities. The preparation time is also often supplemented by a joint confirmation trip (Lübking, 2018). During a festive service, faith is publicly affirmed, and confirmation is performed. The young people receive the blessing and usually take part in the Lord's Supper for the first time. Confirmation is traditionally celebrated with the family and godparents. Gifts for confirmation often relate to the entry into adulthood

(e.g., jewellery, a watch, money for a driver's license). After confirmation, young people are considered adults in the Protestant church – which means they are spiritually mature and morally responsible – and can now become godparents themselves. Confirmation is a biographically significant event, in which the family celebration and the reception of the blessing are of particular importance (Adam, 2019). Similar forms of this rite exist for adolescents baptized in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anglican church.

Example for Girls: La Quinceañera for Latino Girls in the US

The term *La Quinceañera* refers to the celebration of a girl's 15th birthday and of the girl herself. It was originated as a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood among the Aztecs and was expanded to include Catholic religious customs due to Christian missionization. Although its roots are in Mexico, this celebration is widespread throughout Latin America. Due to migration, the Quinceañera nowadays is celebrated by many Latino Americans in the United States, as well as in other Latino communities in societies around the world (Philipps, 2005). The age of 15 used to mark the time when young women could leave home, marry, and become mothers. They were prepared for this new role before the Quinceañera and presented to potential husbands afterwards. These days, the new status after the rite of passage is more likely to allow the young woman to go on dates and have other privileges such as wearing high heels (Hurtado, 2003). The Quinceañera follows all three phases of a rite of passage outlined above (separation, transition, and incorporation) and represents a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood that includes religious and secular elements. A girl must be baptized and have received First Communion to participate in the mass for her Quinceañera, where she receives the holy communion, gets a gift (e.g., a ring or tiara), and is blessed by the priest (Hill & Becker, 2008). The girl wears a puffy white or light pink dress that symbolizes purity (even if nowadays often other colours are also worn). The mass is usually attended only by close family members, reflecting a physical and symbolical separation from friends and extended family. The reception or party afterwards is celebrated with friends and family, and it includes secular elements celebrating the transition from a girl to a woman. It starts with the formal entry (often through an arc) in which the Quinceañera is escorted by her *Damas* and *Chambelanes* (girls and boys chosen by the Quinceañera). Afterwards there is a formal toast, called *Brindis* and the change of shoes. This change of shoes is one of the most significant events during the ritual. The father removes his daughter's flat shoes and puts on high heels to symbolize that she is not a girl anymore. All this is followed by the first dance, often a choreographed waltz dance with her

father (Philipps, 2005). Experiencing these rituals (both the religious and the secular) represents incorporation into the adult world within their community (Hill & Becker, 2008).

Example for Boys: Phoenixtime in Germany

Because of the positive effects a rite of passage may have on adolescents, recently programs are increasingly being developed to visualize and accompany transitions more clearly. These programs are based on ceremonies performed in traditional and indigenous societies. *Phoenixtime* is an example from Germany. This is a program developed by educators that aims to support boys on their individual paths toward manhood. The program is aimed at male youths between the ages of 13 and 15 and offers opportunities to try discover new skills and gain new experiences. Each of the 6 to 12 participants within one group searches for a male mentor from his social environment before the program starts. Phoenixtime begins with units for getting to know each other and talking about several puberty-related topics. After that, the actual Phoenixtime takes place: The Phoenixdays. At the beginning, parents say a solemn farewell to their son. The boys and their godparents, together with Phoenixtime professionals, spend four days in nature to say goodbye to childhood and participate in a ritual of transformation. Afterwards, parents receive their son within a dramatic performance - now as young man - back. This is celebrated with friends and family (Phoenixzeit, 2023).

In sum, the transition from childhood to adulthood in modern / contemporary societies is marked by many age-related transitions that have a major impact on the adolescent's position in society. These include voting, obtaining a driver's license, legally drinking alcohol, and officially coming of age before the law. Even if these transitions sometimes do not follow the original phases of a rite of passage, they reflect important milestones on the way to adulthood. In addition to rites of passage initiated by culture, religion, or society, adolescents also construct their own rites of passage on the way to adulthood. These include, for example, smoking their first cigarette, drinking alcohol for the first time. or having their first sexual experiences. Also, youth may engage in their peer contexts in tests of courage, tattoos, or daredevilry (Stokrocki, 1997) – risk-taking behaviour in the already vulnerable phase of adolescence that has the potential to compromise health and positive adaptation.

Benefits and Risks related to Initiation Ceremonies and Rites of Passage

Adolescent initiation ceremonies can provide benefits to the individual and community. For the individual, *identity formation* is the much often mentioned benefit (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003). Formation of identity is the foremost psychosocial task of adolescence as propounded by Erikson (1968). Through the social enactments of rituals, the initiate's self-perception and the society's perception of the initiate are transformed into a new identity and held to a more respectable position within the community. Also, initiation ceremonies and rites often provide gender-specific education, instruction, and socialization before the ceremony itself. This includes education on adult gender role behaviour, promotion of the youngsters' identification with their own culture, and, finally, the signal of social accomplishment of the mature status to the community, thereby permitting adult eligibilities such as marriage and activities related to sexual selection (Weisfeld, 1997). For the community or society, rites of passage ceremonies serve as a '*compressed form of education*' on the culture's values, customs, etc.. They are the key to passing on cultural, social, and sometimes religious education and traditions as well as a society's history and identity (Schroeder et al., 2022; UNFPA, 2020). In addition, rites of passage provide for social integration and thereby safeguard the society's future. The educational training and other rites foster bonding and integration with other initiates and the community at large (Kennedy, 2005).

Despite the aforementioned potential benefits, some initiation ceremonies and rites, can also physically, socially, and / or emotionally harm the initiate. For boys, there is a risk of *injury or death* from infection during ceremonies that involve non-medical circumcision and rough initiation practices (Schroeder et al., 2022). Schlegel and Barry (1979) reported that about 30% of traditional boys' initiation rituals involve some form of pain including beating and bullying. Some reports also show that participation in initiation rites is accompanied by early sexual activity onset (perhaps due to sexual education or heightened sexual awareness) which is in turn accompanied by negative outcomes such as multiple partners, sexually transmitted infections, and early fatherhood (Munthali & Zulu, 2007; Schroeder et al, 2022). For girls as well, these negative effects have been mentioned. In a study by Rehema et al. (2014), for instance, interviewed girls blamed initiation rites as the cause of their *early engagement in sex, early marriage, and early pregnancies* (again due to sexual education or heightened sexual awareness).

Girls tend to be affected disproportionately by the *harmful consequences* of puberty rites compared to boys. For girls, there are other physical and psychological harmful and/or traumatic practices related to initiation ceremonies such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), the use of a ‘fisi’ (an older man who is paid to have vaginal sex with initiates), and labia minora elongation (LME) (Nyangweso, 2022; UNFPA, 2020). For the *Chindakula* rites in Malawi for instance, the use of a ‘fisi’ is considered exploitative and a *violation of girls’ rights* and carries with it the risk for sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancy, miscarriage, fistula, and death (Schief et al., 2018). LME also has risks of pain and difficulty with urinating, and serves the purpose of keeping girls subordinate (Perez et al., 2014; Schroeder et al., 2022). The complications of FGM/C have been well documented and in the short and long term include severe pain, hemorrhage, fever, infections, urinary problems, and wound healing problems, as well as further urinary, vaginal, sexual, and psychological problems and death. Despite these risks, the practice still continues with girls below the age of 15 in about 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia (WHO, 2023). Some of the aforementioned negative puberty rites practices are considered human rights violations, and therefore many organizations (e.g., UN organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations) are working actively to address these violations through educational programs, incentives, and sanctions (Schief et al., 2018).

Additional negative psychological effects of initiation ceremonies especially for girls are *feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, and mistreatment during the ceremonies*. Some of the rituals involve dancing naked or nearly naked publicly, and discussing and publicizing their menarche. Examples of such ceremonies are the Dipo ceremony in Ghana and the ‘*half-saree*’ or ‘puberty celebrations’ for girls in India (Abbey et al., 2021; Patnaik, 2023). These practices, some argue, may disempower the girls and take away their sense of rights over their own bodies (Schief et al., 2018; Schroeder et al., 2022). Another aspect of this is mistreatment during the ceremonies. In a report on the *Morogoro* initiation ceremony in Tanzania, girls reported being shouted at, beaten, slapped, pinched, and humiliated during the cleansing ritual where they had to stand naked with some experiencing psychological trauma as a result (Rehema et al., 2014; Schief et al., 2018;).

Puberty rites also tend to emphasize and *reinforce gender stereotypes and the cisgender gender binary*. Most often, the rites are separated by gender assigned at birth. Gender roles are also reinforced with boys educated to be leaders and wield power while girls are taught to be

submissive and good wives, and to please their husbands (Schief et al., 2018; Schlegel & Barry, 1980; Schroeder et al., 2022). This has been argued to be disempowering to the girls (Rehema et al., 2014).

Finally, initiation rites can also be *costly* in terms of time, resources, and energy (Alcorta & Sosis, 2020). The time costs for initiation ceremonies can mean adolescents lose valuable school time which can impact their future education, work, and financial outcomes. For instance, some Tanzanian Morogoro girls interviewed after their initiation rites stated that the rites took them away from school and some dropped out of school entirely as a result (Schief et al., 2018). Resource expenditure, specifically money for these rites, can also be significant. Parents have to start saving money early for their daughters Quinceañera (some opting for group celebrations to cut costs). Modern initiation rites like the Phoenixtime and modern versions of traditional initiation rites, such as the Ulwaluko, are very costly (Ginsberg et al., 2014; UNFPA, 2020). This takes away valuable resources from the home.

Not all cultures have initiation ceremonies or rituals of passage for marking the transition from childhood to adulthood, or individuals do not take part in them (e.g., because of too high costs, exclusion, non-conformity to cis-gender binary). For modern societies where clear and powerful initiation rites often do not exist, it is argued that this is because rites no longer serve the purpose of educating the adolescent on their future roles, nor of conferring adulthood status to adolescents. These roles have been taken over by schools and rituals such as attainment of voting age, a driving license, or school diploma. These rituals, however, do not clearly signal the end of liminality and transition to an adult status. With this “piecewise” transition process, adolescence may be longer and several times caught within liminal phases relating to several phases of higher insecurity (Bigger, 2009). On the one hand, adolescents living in these societies have the freedom to pursue their own interests and different roles compared to an adolescent living in a traditional society. They have the latitude to select and create their own rites of passage that may be more meaningful to them (Goethals, 1967). On the other hand, a lack of a clear status change could potentially increase uncertainty and a lack of direction for adolescents and young adults, and may promote apathy or destructive behaviors, for instance within gang culture (UNFPA, 2020).

A view on Adolescent Initiation in the 21st century

Adolescents have to navigate several biopsychosocial transitions and, thereby, must adapt to contextual demands – offering opportunities but also risks for behavioural changes (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). As demonstrated, primarily for traditional and indigenous societies, decades ago, and by applying an anthropological perspective, initiation ceremonies and rites of passage may ease the transition from childhood to adulthood (Van Gennep, 1960) – but is this still the case in contemporary societies of the 21st century?

Future studies have to further investigate if and under which circumstances initiation ceremonies or rites of passages within a given culture and during modern times can facilitate positive individual and social adaptation processes at the transition from childhood to adulthood from a *psychological viewpoint*. For instance, it is still unclear, who within a given culture profits from existing initiation ceremonies and who does not. In addition, it needs to be studied where potential positive effects of initiation ceremonies and rites of passages as documented in traditional cultures result from. Is it the proper “education” of adolescents regarding the “appropriate” role behaviour within a society, the assistance and support the youth receives, or the (community-wide) ceremony associated with social incorporation that can lead to wellbeing in adolescence? Or could it be that a lengthy process of several step-by-step transitions into adulthood as typical for most parts of the western world, associated with several phases of liminality and exploration, has also psychological benefits for adolescents?

Moreover, the main body of existing anthropological literature on initiation ceremonies and rites of passages in and out of adolescence are based on the classical ethnocentric studies from Mead, Schlegel, Barry and others that were conducted in the mid of the last century (for a summary see Schlegel & Hewlett, 2011). Since then, the numbers and meaning of ceremonies and rites associated with puberty and adolescence in the different societies may have undergone substantial *social, economic and cultural changes*. As a consequence, contemporary studies on ceremonies and rites related to adolescence are urgently needed to catch up with the *Zeitgeist* in current societies, thereby including sociological perspectives. At least three major worldwide trends have impacted the lives of adolescents recently with possible effects on initiation rites at the passage from childhood to adulthood: digitalization, migration and increasing acceptance of diversity (Weichold, in press, a).

Digitalization

Recent social change is closely tied to the massive increase towards worldwide digitalization. A high percentage of young people are technically equipped and have the infrastructure to go online. Leisure behaviour has changed by increasing time spent on the internet and being active in social media – which carries pros and cons for individual development in adolescence (Salmela-Aro & Stefanidi, 2022). Due to increasing digital and social media use and the ease of connectivity and exchange via the internet, today almost no adolescent grows up in just one culture. It is more the case that young people are becoming more and more aware of the cultural differences of initiation rites into adulthood and their possible psychological effects, and they are more likely to position themselves in terms of what they want for themselves. Overall, this may lead to a reduction in differences between cultures as rituals and ceremonies mix cross-culturally.

Migration

Contemporary adolescent development is also characterized by globalization, dislocation, and immigration. For adolescents, migration can occur as individuals or as part of a family unit. For those for whom puberty rites are part of their culture, how the migration affects the performance of the rites is determined by many factors at the family, community, national, and international levels including poverty, traditions, and the migratory experience. Migration adds a layer of complexity to the adolescent transition process, including a different environment, reduced control of the adolescent's behavior, more autonomy from cultural constraints, and reduced traditional influences, as well as differences in attitudes and behaviors, while also being a source of vulnerability (Juárez et al., 2013). How migration will affect the salience and performance of pubertal rites may depend on how well and to what extent the individual or family acculturates to their new environment. Jensen and Arnett (2012), adapting from Berry (1997), theorized that based on a person's pattern of adaptation to their new environment and culture, they may incorporate and merge aspects of their culture's rites in their new setting and current life (integration), reject the old rites and culture altogether (assimilation), or hold on to their previous culture and seek to perform these rites as they would have in their previous environment (separation) (Berry, 1997; Jensen & Arnett, 2012; see also Hall & Jefferson, 2006). Consequently, in some instances, migration dilutes the performance of the traditional initiation rites, due to the ability of the migrant to seek greener pastures (e.g. temporary employment as colonial laborers in colonial Ghana) and return successfully to their community

which is itself considered an initiation into a higher social status (Dougnon, 2016). For Mexican adolescent migrants, for instance, migrating to the US may mean leaving school and entering the job market, all signaling adulthood status without the actual initiation ceremony. In other instances, the performance of initiation rites becomes a way for migrants to hold on to their identities in the new environment. For instance, initiates of Chewa immigrants (originally from Malawi) perform *Gule Wamkulu* dances in Zimbabwe as one of the only ways to identify them as Chewa and not indigenous Zimbabweans (Daimon, 2008). However, sometimes the components of some rites are illegal to perform in the immigrated country, and then such practices go underground (Nyangweso, 2022).

Diversity

In addition, cultural changes towards a greater acceptance of various gender identification and sex orientation influence the notion of “appropriate” gender role behaviour and challenge traditional belief systems within a society. Possibly, the ceremonies and rites offered for girls, boys, and also non-binary youngsters may be revisited. However, the intersection between gender, sexual identity and traditional cultural rites of passage has some historical precedents. For instance, among the Azande found in central Africa, warriors often had young male “wives” (who play the role as a rite of passage) as they travelled for warfare (Adam, 1986; Herdt, 1997). In India and among many indigenous and First Nations peoples, there is a long historical presence and acceptance of *hijra* (eunuch/transvestite) and Two-Spirit individuals respectively, and culturally they tended to occupy spiritual and religious roles in society (Nanda, 1986; Pearson, 2015). Presently, LGBTQ+ adolescents must navigate their identities and orientations alongside their ethnicity and the rites of passage rituals that are expected and practiced. These rites most often enforce heterosexuality and heteronormative gender ideals, and consequently, LGBTQ+ adolescents may either endure the rites, completely opt out of these ceremonies, or adapt them to suit their identity. Often, they risk estrangement from family, friends and the community if they attempt to question, resist, or change these norms or practices. This is especially salient for transgender youth for whom the physical pubertal changes during adolescence may be a source of distress. For LGBTQ+ adolescents, ‘coming out’ has been described as a rite of passage akin to puberty rites, because it is part of the individual’s identity formation and integration into a community and place in society (Biswas & Chaudhuri, 2019; Herdt, 1997). Currently, some traditional rites ceremonies have become more open towards LGBTQ+ adolescents. Among the amaXhosa, for instance, the transition to manhood during

the *ulwaluko* ceremony is currently inclusive of homosexual males although they tend to have varied experiences, some negative, and some families use the ceremonies as a way to “convert” them to heterosexuality (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016). Currently and mostly in western societies, rites of passage programs have been created by private organizations to cater for LGBTQ+ adolescents although there are usually fees involved.

Example LGBTQ+ Community: Queer Crossing

As an example of newly created rite of passage, the *Queer Crossing*, is one of the programs offered by The Rite of Passage Journeys, serving LGBTQ+ youth (from 14 to 18), offering a safe space and supportive community of queer mentors and peers. The program takes the adolescents out of modern everyday life, and away from technology and mass media, to explore nature with accompanying guides and peers. The program also includes a solo one-night vigil for each participant to reflect in solitude. The expected outcomes of the program are a sense of belonging for the adolescent, self-acceptance, resilience, and a sense of identity (Queer Crossing, 2023).

In essence, the worldwide trends affecting adolescent development may also impact the existence, spread, and effects of initiation ceremonies and rites of passage around the globe, calling for new avenues to research them under a contemporary study frame and focusing on diverse samples of young people. In the following, an example for a current study will illustrate one of such possible approaches. This work underscores that referring solely to the classical research on initiation rites and relying on a dichotomous categorization of traditional vs. modern societies is oversimplifying and neglects the large heterogeneity within and between countries and ethnic groups (see also Mahama, Weichold, Fehmer, Mvungu, & Natsuaki, under review).

Study: Today's Rites of Passage Around the World

In a recent study, male and female adolescents from 16 countries around the world representing four continents (N= 715, M= 13.1, SD = .47, range: 12-15 years; Female= 50.3%,) were studied regarding their perceptions on puberty (Puberty x Culture Study; P.I.: Karina Weichold; Weichold, 2018b; Weichold, in press, b). These countries were selected with the aim of having a diverse sample of countries with a range of cultural and societal contexts, value systems, religious backgrounds, and traditions focused on puberty rites. In each of the countries, data were collected by local cooperation partners within schools, which were selected to be as

representative of their country as possible. All came from urban areas for better comparability. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from adolescents on their experiences around puberty and on puberty rites, and country-related information was reported by the local collaborators. Qualitative data were coded by an international team of researchers, and interrater reliability ranged from .61 to .83.

< Insert Table 2 here >

Both adolescents and the country representatives responded to questions about the presence of puberty rites in their respective countries. In nine out of 16 countries (see Table 2), the presence of puberty rites was indicated by the local researchers. The existence of rites of passage differed between countries within the same continent and within assumed categories of traditional vs. modern cultures - pointing to a *high between-country heterogeneity*. Only some adolescents in the countries with existing puberty rituals participated in these ceremonies themselves. The highest share was found in Brazil, Kenya, Iran, and the US, where up to 41% of adolescents experienced some kind of transition ceremony. The most widely celebrated rites among youth were religious ones such as Protestant Confirmation and La Quinceañera performed in the Americas or Jashne Taklif in Iran. In addition, in Kenya, besides circumcision, food and eating together seemed to play a major role in the celebration of transitions. In contrast, even in countries known previously as having strong and vivid puberty rites with a long tradition, today, many adolescents were unfamiliar with them and did not participate (e.g., Half-Sari in India or Dipo in Ghana) - indicating a *waning of the importance and performance of these rites today*. Moreover, the qualitative descriptions of the celebrations to mark the transitions from child to adult, as reported by the adolescents themselves, revealed that *rites seem to mix between cultures*. For instance, in countries previously assumed to fall into the category of modern cultures, hunting and killing an animal can be an initiation ritual in the eye of an adolescent (Poland), or birthday parties (14th, 15th, or 16th birthday) for adolescents in many countries (regardless of assumed modern or traditional dichotomy) signal transition to adulthood. Finally, young people themselves reported taking part in some kind of transition rituals even if there were no rituals at a country-wide level (for instance, in China).

In sum, although based on relatively small number of countries and primarily homogenous samples within the participating countries, the findings of this study deliver a snapshot on the spread of transition rites within and between current societies, and on the subjective reflection of and participation in the rites by the adolescents themselves. Thereby, the results point to effects of globalization, migration, and associated modern adoption (or decline) of rites of passage in today's youth worldwide, which challenges the traditional view on rites of passage and *possibly inspires new research in the field*.

Application into Practice

Nevertheless, knowledge gathered on adolescent initiation ceremonies and their psychological and social effects until today can *inform practice* to support adolescent positive development and health worldwide. First, transferring knowledge with regard to biological maturation or sexuality (but not appropriate adult social or sexual behaviour) is in some countries conducted in puberty education or as part of sex education in school or on an individualized and secret level from parents and peers (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). The hope is to promote positive coping with puberty, especially in societies where the physical changes during puberty are negatively connotated (see Weichold, in press, b). Second, negative consequences for youngsters as a result of painful, confusing, health- and life-threatening practices (often detached from essential education and festivities) must be avoided. One extreme example for this is female genital mutilation (FGM) which is considered a cultural tradition with severe negative consequences (physically and mentally) for girls and young women (WHO, 2023). To reduce at least some health-related and psychologically negative consequences while maintaining the practice as an inherent part of cultural belief systems (e.g., as sign of cultural pride), FGM now is more often a sanitized, less harmful procedure, conducted by professionals. Some cultures prohibit FGM, with mixed success – thus, more education on the negative consequences of FGM within these cultures seem to be necessary.

Conclusion

Research on initiation ceremonies and rites of passage during adolescence in the 21st century should be addressed from an interdisciplinary and inter- and poly-cultural perspective, enriching the classical anthropological and ethnocentric view on the topic by incorporating

expertise from biology, psychology, and sociology. Major historical and current trends in social, technical, and cultural change and their effects on adolescents around the world have to be considered when investigating initiation ceremonies and rites of passage. In line with this, gaps in current literature call for action to focus on understudied populations, such as LGBTQ+ youth or young immigrants (Deardorff et al., 2019), and their exposure to, and the psychological effects of initiation ceremonies and rituals on the threshold from childhood to adulthood.

References

- Abbey, E. A., Mate-Kole, C. C., Amponsah, B., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2021). Dipo Rites of Passage and Psychological Well-being Among Krobo Adolescent Females in Ghana: A Preliminary Study. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 47(6), 387-400.
- Adam, B. D. (1986). Age, Structure, and Sexuality. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11(3-4), 19-33, DOI: 10.1300/J082v11n03_02
- Adam, G. (2019). Taufe und Konfirmation. In M. Rothgangel, H. Simojoki, & U.H. Körtner (Eds.), *Theologische Schlüsselbegriffe* (pp. 415-427). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Adjaye, J. K. (1999). Dangerous crossroads: Liminality and contested meaning in Krobo (Ghana): Dipo girls' initiation. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 5-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696819908717837>
- Alcorta, C. S., & Sosis, R. (2020). Adolescent religious rites of passage: An anthropological perspective. In S. Hupp & J. D. Jewell (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development*, 7(1-12). Hoboken: Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171492.wecad326>.
- Arnett, J. J. (2012). *Adolescent psychology around the world*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Benedict, R. (1934). *Patterns of culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *International Journal of Applied Psychology*, 46, 5-34.
- Bigger, S. (2009) Victor Turner, liminality, and cultural performance, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 30(2), 209-212.
- Biswas, D., & Chaudhuri, A. (2019). Coming Out Of Closet: A Rite Of Passage towards Emerging Queer Identity. Available at SSRN. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3431027>
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P.A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon (Ed.-in-Chief), & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development* (5th ed., pp. 993-1028). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Brooks-Gunn, J., & Reiter, E. O. (1990). The role of pubertal processes. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 16 –53). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crockett, L. J. (1997). Cultural, historical, and subcultural contexts of adolescence: Implications for health and development. In J. Schulenberg, J. L. Maggs, & K. Hurrelmann (Eds.), *Health risks and developmental transitions during adolescence* (pp. 23-53). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Curran, G. (2011). The 'Expanding Domain' of Warlpiri Initiation Ceremonies. In Y. Musharbash & M. Barber (Eds.), *Ethnography and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge: Essays in Honour of Nicolas Peterson* (pp. 39–50). Canberra, Australia: ANU ePress.
- Daimon, A. (2008). Migrant Chewa Identities and their Construction through Gule Wamkulu Dances in Zimbabwe. In B. Zewde (Ed.), *Society, State and Identity in African History* (p. 304). Oxford: African Books Collective.
- Deardorff, J., Hoyt, L. T., Carter, R., & Shirtcliff, E. A. (2019). Next steps in puberty research: Broadening the lens toward understudied populations. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 29(1), 133-154.
- Dougnon, I. (2016). Reinterpreting Labor Migration as Initiation Rite: "Ghana Boys" and European Clothing in Dogon Country (Mali), 1920-1960. *African Economic History*, 73-90.
- Dreyer, J., & Hattwich, S. (2019) *Jüdische Lebensfeste – Beschneidung und Bar Mizwa*. <https://www.planet-wissen.de/kultur/religion/judentum/pwielebensfestederjugendbeschneidungundbarmizwa100.html> [30.03.2023]
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Garrison, R. W. (1988). Educated rites of passage. *School Safety*, 10-11.
- Germond-Duret, C. (2016). Tradition and modernity: an obsolete dichotomy? Binary thinking, indigenous peoples and normalisation. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1537-1558.
- Ghai, S. (2021). It's time to reimagine sample diversity and retire the WEIRD dichotomy. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5(8), 971–972. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01175-9>
- Ginsberg, P. E., Kariuki, P. W., & Kimamo, C., (2014). The changing concept of adolescence in Kenya. Three generation speak. *Psychology Thought*, 7(1), 55-65.
- Graber, J. A., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1996). Transitions and turning points: Navigating the passage from childhood through adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 32(4), 768.
- Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Henda, N. (2021). The Rites of Passage of AmaXhosa Revisited. *Academia Letters*, Article 3860. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3860>.
- Herd, G. H. (1997). *Same sex, different cultures: Gays and lesbians across cultures*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1998). Moving cultures: The perilous problems of cultural dichotomies in a globalizing society. *American Psychologist*, 53(10), 1111–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.10.1111>

- Hill, J., & Daniels, P. (2008). *Life events and rites of passage: The customs and symbols of major life-cycle milestones, including cultural, secular, and religious traditions observed in the United States*. Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics.
- Höllinger, F., & Haller, M. (1990). Kinship and social networks in modern societies: a cross-cultural comparison among seven nations, *European Sociological Review*, 6(2), 103–124, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a036553>
- Hurrelmann, K., & Quenzel, G. (2018). *Developmental Tasks in Adolescence*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780429452055
- Hurtado, A. (2003). *Voicing Chicana Feminism: Young Women Speak Out on Sexuality and Identity*. New York, NY: NYU Press
- Janusz, B., & Walkiewicz, M. (2018). The Rites of Passage Framework as a Matrix of Transgression Processes in the Life Course. *Journal of Adult Development*, 25, 151–159.
- Jensen, L. A., & Arnett, J. J. (2012). Going global: New pathways for adolescents and emerging adults in a changing world. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(3), 473-492.
- Juárez, F., LeGrand, T., Lloyd, C. B., Singh, S., & Hertrich, V. (2013). Youth migration and transitions to adulthood in developing countries. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 648(1), 6-15.
- Kennedy, E. J. N. (2005). Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah: Rites of Affirmation and Integration. In K. M. Jackson (Eds.), *Rituals and Patterns in Children's Lives* (pp 58-78). Wisconsin: Madison.
- Lübking, H. M. (2018). Konfirmation. *Kursbuch Konfirmation: Ein Arbeitsbuch für Konfirmandinnen und Konfirmanden*, 152-156. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Lutkehaus, N. C., & Roscoe, P. B. (1995). Preface. In N. C. Lutkehaus & P. B. Roscoe (Eds.), *Gender rituals: Female initiation in Melanesia* (pp. xiii–xvii). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mahama, S., Weichold, K., Fehmer, N., Mvungu, E., & Natsuaki, M. (under review). Pubertal Status and Body Image: An Inquiry into Experiences of Adolescents in Ghana and Kenya. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.
- Markstrom, C. A. (2008). *Empowerment of North American Indian girls: Ritual expressions at puberty*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Markstrom, C. A., & Iborra, A. (2003). Adolescent identity formation and rites of passage: The Navajo Kinaalda ceremony for girls. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13(4), 399-425.
- Markstrom, C. A., Berman, R. C., Sabino, V. M. et al. (1998). The ego virtue of fidelity as a psychosocial rite of passage in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 27(337–354). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02589260>

- Mead, M. (1928). *Coming of Age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for Western Civilization*. New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Morris, M. W., Chiu, C., & Liu, Z. (2015). Polycultural Psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 66(1), 631–659. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015001>
- Munthali, A. C., & Zulu, E. M. (2007). The Timing and role of Initiation Rites in Preparing Young People for Adolescence and Responsible Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour in Malawi. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 3(11), 150–167. doi:10.1038/jid.2014.371
- Murdock, G. P., & White, D. R. (1969). Standard cross-cultural sample. *Ethnology*, 8(4), 329-369.
- Nanda, S. (1986). The Hijras of India. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11(3-4), 35-54, DOI: 10.1300/J082v11n03_03
- Nolan, P., & Lenski, G. (2009). *Human societies: An introduction to macrosociology* (11th ed.). Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Ntozini, A., & Ngqangweni, H. (2016). Gay Xhosa men’s experiences of ulwaluko (traditional male initiation). *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 18(11), 1309-1318.
- Nyangweso, M. (2022). Contending with Health Outcomes of Sanctioned Rituals: The Case of Puberty Rites. *Religions*, 13(7), 609.
- Patnaik, E. (2023, February 8). The Embarrassment of Puberty Rituals for Girls. Disha Bytes. Retrieved from: <https://odishabytes.com/the-embarrassment-of-puberty-rituals-for-girls/> [03.08.2023]
- Pearson, C. S. (2015). *Androgynous Individuation and Two-Spirit-uality: A Queer Male Workshop*. Pacifica Graduate Institute.
- Pérez, G. M., Tomas Aznar, C., & Bagnol, B. (2014). Labia minora elongation and its implications on the health of women: A systematic review. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 26(3), 155-171.
- Phoenixzeit (2023). Retrieved from: <https://phoenixzeit.de/> [30.03.2023]
- Phillips, W. E. (2005). The Quinceañera: Ritual Roots Transcending Borders. *Diálogo*, 9(1), 9. Press, Canberra, pp. 39–50.
- Prout, S. (2008). On the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia. *CAEPR Working Paper* (48). Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.
- Queer Crossing (2023) Retrieved from: <https://www.riteofpassagejourneys.org/home> [30.03.2023]
- Redfield, R. (1941). *The folk culture of Yucatan*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rehema, M., Verhan, B., Emmanuel, M., & Douglas, M. (2014). Effects of Initiation Rituals to Primary and Secondary School Girls in Morogoro Rural District. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research*, 6(1), 9–17.

- Rothbaum, F., Pott, M., Azuma, H., Miyake, K., & Weisz, J. (2000). The development of close relationships in Japan and the United States: Paths of symbiotic harmony and generative tension. *Child Development, 71*, 1121-1141.
- Salmela-Aro, K., & Motti-Stefanidi, F. (2022). Digital Revolution and Youth. *European Psychologist, 27*(2), 73–75.
- Schief, M., Lin, Q., & Haenni, S. (2018). Harmful traditional practices: Child marriage, initiation rituals, FGM/C. *Center for Child Well-Being and Development*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ccwd.uzh.ch/assets/pdf/2017-01-01-malawi-traditional-practices-desk-review.pdf>
- Schlegel, A., & Barry Iii, H. (1991). *Adolescence: An anthropological inquiry*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Schlegel, A., & Barry, H. (1979). Adolescent initiation ceremonies: A cross-cultural code. *Ethnology, 18*(2), 199-210.
- Schlegel, A., & Barry, H. (1980). The evolutionary significance of adolescent initiation ceremonies. *American Ethnologist, 7*(4), 696-715.
- Schlegel, A., & Hewlett, B. L. (2011). Contributions of anthropology to the study of adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*(1), 281-289.
- Schroeder, E., Tallarico, R., & Bakaroudis, M. (2022) The impact of adolescent initiation rites in East and Southern Africa: Implications for policies and practices. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 27*(1), 181-192, DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2022.2052123
- Stokrocki, M. (1997). Rites of passage for middle school students. *Art Education, 50*(3), 48-55.
- Turner, V. (1995). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (Original work published 1969).
- Turner, V. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- UNFPA, (2020). *The Impact of Rites of Passage and Cultural Practices on Adolescents' and Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health in East and Southern Africa -A Review of the Literature*. Retrieved from: https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/j7651-8_unfpa_literature_review_-_rites_of_passage_electronic.pdf
- Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1909).
- Weichold, K. (2018). *Cultural differences in the meaning of and the developmental processes related to pubertal maturation in adolescence*. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Studying Behavioral Development (ISSBD), July 15-19, Gold Coast, Australia.

- Weichold, K. (in press, a). Psychosoziale Anpassung: Problemverhalten und positive Entwicklung. In P. Noack, B. Kracke, & K. Weichold, *Entwicklung in Jugend- und frühem Erwachsenenalter*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Weichold, K. (in press, b). Pubertät: Interindividuelle Variationen. In P. Noack, B. Kracke, & K. Weichold, *Entwicklung in Jugend- und frühem Erwachsenenalter*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Weisfeld, G. (1997). Puberty rites as clues to the nature of human adolescence. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 31(1), 27-54.
- Werbner, P. (2009). The hidden lion: Tswapong girls' puberty rituals and the problem of history. *American Ethnologist*, 36(3), 441-458.
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Female genital mutilation*. World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> doi: 10.1177/ 146040860000200208 [30.03.2023]

Table 1: Summary Phase Model Rites of Passage (based on van Gennepe 1960; Turner, 1995; Weisfeld, 1997)

<i>Phase</i>		
Separation	Description	Isolation or separation from the family and/or community Alone or in a group Symbolic reference to loss Accompanied by physical alterations or behavioural taboos
	Function	Disentangling from family comfort Increase insecurity Testing limits Intensive instruction and mentoring Preparing for a culminating ritual
Transition	Description	Deconstruction and Integration Uncertainty, disruption of order, increasing insecurity Crisis phase Phase between two statuses: liminality Between dying of the old and birth of a new structure / betwixt and between Deconstruction and Integration
	Function	Convergence of the opposites (e.g., individual vs. social, biological vs. cultural influences) Creation of a new social definition
Incorporation	Description	Reincorporation back into the community Rituals (less demanding) Ceremony Clearly defined performativity
	Function	Regulation and recreation Dealing successfully with anxiety Marking the new period of life




Table 2: Rites of Passage Around the World

Country	Puberty rituals* (yes-no)	N (% female)	Participated in Puberty rituals %	Themes (Describe celebration to mark transition from child to adult)	Frequency (female)
Africa					
Ghana	yes	46 (57)	2	Rites for girls – <i>"Mine is 'dipo', it is done in manya krobo in the eastern region. You will be placed on a spiritual stone three times to tell that you are grown and have not had sex before."</i> (f)	3 (2)
Kenya	yes	40 (50)	38	Celebration/a lot of food – <i>"There is a lot of eating: chapatis, rice chicken and traditional foods."</i> (m) <i>"I have been respected by my relatives because when they have celebrations they must invite me."</i> (f) Circumcision – <i>"The boys are circumcised and made to be men."</i> (f)	10 (3) 1 (1)
Americas					
Brazil	yes	39 (49)	41	15 th birthday celebration – <i>"I believe you are talking about the popular party when you turn 15 years old, when the girl dances the waltz with a prince, etc."</i> (f) <i>"The 15 years old parties, in which the girl leaves childhood and enters the phase of wearing high heels."</i> (f) (Birthday) party – <i>"It is a party where we celebrate the passage from childhood to adolescence."</i> (f) Prank from friends – <i>"Yes, generally friends celebrate it with a prank, when we go through this phase."</i> (m)	7 (6) 9 (5) 1 (0)
Ecuador	yes	45 (58)	9	-	-
USA	yes	57 (53)	25	Quinceañera (Sweet 15) – <i>"In my culture we celebrate Quinceañera because that is known when a girl becomes a woman and has been going through puberty for a while."</i> (f) Sweet 16 – <i>"Sweet 16. When you turn 15, you have like a big party if you're Mexican. Sweet 16 is a big party when you turn 16."</i> (f) Car – <i>"Well, usually at 17 my parents buy us a car for school purposes only."</i> (m) Party – <i>"My parents had a party and we invited family and we ate food."</i> (m)	12 (11) 2 (2) 1 (0) 3 (0)
Asia					
China	no	40 (50)	10	14 th birthday celebration – <i>"The birthday of 14 years old."</i> (m)	4 (1)
India	yes	40 (50)	0	-	-
Iran	yes	41 (49)	37	Ceremony (religious) – <i>"After the ceremony, others could accept us as an adult person."</i> (m) <i>"Transition ceremony, in which we had veils and got presents and prayed."</i> (f) Celebration – <i>"Girls in the family gather and celebrate together."</i> (f)	4 (2) 9 (0)
Japan	yes	75 (47)	7	-	-
Turkey	no	44 (46)	5	-	-
Europe					
Bulgaria	no	40 (50)	0	-	-
Georgia	no	40 (50)	20	-	-
Germany	yes	44 (52)	7	Confirmation – <i>"Confirmation"</i> (f) Circumcision – <i>"Circumcision"</i> (m)	3 (1) 1 (0)
Lithuania	no	41 (51)	5	-	-
Poland	no	45 (49)	9	Celebration – <i>"Cake, alcohol, friends and family."</i> (f) Go hunting – <i>"A young person needs to go hunting."</i> (f)	3 (3) 1 (1)
Portugal	no	38 (45)	8	Christian celebration – <i>"It is Christian and I participate in it."</i> (m) 18 th birthday party – <i>"It is a little party during which we celebrate a new phase of life, normally at 18 years old."</i> (f)	1 (0) 1 (1)

Note: * Answered by local cooperation partners. (Puberty x Culture Study; P.I.: Karina Weichold; Weichold, 2018b; Weichold, in press, b)