

## **Rites of passage during adolescence**

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### **Abstract**

The literature on rites of passage in adolescence is reviewed, with particular attention given to the essential components for positive developmental outcomes. Three human development orientations – life course, life span, and life cycle – are presented to examine rites of passage as they relate to life transitions. Within these orientations, positive rites of passage are framed as requiring both events and cognitive processes of the event. In other words, rites of passage events must be significant for adolescents not only as experiences, but having special meaning, emotion, and understanding. A model is introduced that highlights the potentially positive and negative roles that rites of passage can play in the transition to adulthood. In addition, investigations are discussed to help understand the complex rites of passage mechanisms. Finally, the benefits of employing rites of passage strategies are illustrated through youth development programs.

**Keywords:** rites of passage, adolescence, transition to adulthood

### **Introduction**

Aries (1962) asserted that childhood emerged as a social category in 18th-century France, while Hareven (1977) traced the genesis of childhood to middle-class urban families in early 19th-century America. In both instances, the demarcation of childhood was related to specific cultural and historical features of the respective time periods and location. Work, home, and school life gradually became separate entities due to a variety of changing social conditions (e.g., increased numbers of secondary schools, child labor laws, factory growth) that affected societal outlooks on youth. Similarly, Kett (1977) discussed how various economic and practical aspects of life

impacted a “coming of age” for its younger members. For instance, boys served apprenticeships and girls learned about how to manage a kitchen, which at that time included putting up of foods and controlling a wood oven – no small task. Also, Kett (1977) described the meaning of dress in this regard – boys going from knickers to long pants, for instance. Together, these features underscore the fact that something “happens” both on the inside of the youth and subsequently is reflected on the outside, i.e., youth acquire skills, demonstrate those skills, and change outward appearances.

As childhood became more recognized as a distinct stage of development, adolescence subsequently emerged as a unique and separate developmental stage in the life span. For instance, the construct of adolescence was popularized in the work of Hall (1904) within his two-volume work *Adolescence*. Hall described adolescence as a breaking away from one’s childhood to prepare for adulthood, a period during which there are ever-present conflicting themes that the adolescent confronts (e.g., responsibility/irresponsibility, child-like ambitions/adult-like ambitions) in their social world.

Various academic disciplines have emphasized differently the impact of social context variables on adolescent development into adulthood. Sociologists generally emphasize how life events and transitions are shaped by group social norms; demographers address documentable events such as marriage, fertility, and death; and psychologists focus on phenomena related to the meanings and behaviors related to adulthood. The focal points of these disciplines have left large gaps in our quest for a comprehensive understanding of lifespan transitions.

Other disciplines help with understanding the history of life transitions through the eyes of folklorists, mythologists, and anthropologists. Here, as youth develop in their social context, they often are thought to experience what we subsequently refer to as a “rites of passage” in ways that create either a positive or negative orientation to their navigation through adolescence to adulthood. In general, these rites of passage have been the way our species have responded to individual and community stressors and the resulting imbalance that occurs during life transitions.

Arnold van Gennep (1960) first used the term “rites of passage” in 1908 in his seminal work *Les rites de passage*. The label was intended to give language an ability to describe the pattern and ascribe meaning to these human phenomena. During times of transition, van Gennep noticed a pattern of events that contained similar activities, which he classified as (1) **Separation** from a previous status; (2) **Margin or liminality** as a period of uncertainty characterized by anxiety, “betwixt and between” two different states; and (3) **Reincorporation** as an integration of new attitudes, values, and/or behaviors that connoted a new status. Each of these events is linked deeply to intrapsychic processes, and requires individual and community attention in order for the person to make a successful transition in concert with the community retaining its balance in

the face of the individual's change of status. These rituals could be considered our first human service programs – a “primal prevention” if you will. They were organically created as part of humanity's response to the conflicts created within a community during times of individual change and transition.

Although there may be debate about the tripartite structure (separation, liminality, and reincorporation) of rites of passage that van Gennep proposed, there exists overwhelming acceptance of their presence, historical importance, and the implications of their absence. Among the many who have made contributions in this area are Eliade (1958); Turner (1969); Foster (1980); Lincoln (1981); Mahdi (1987); Dunham, Kidwell, and Wilson (1986); Campbell (1988); Blumenkrantz (1992); Somé (1993); and Meade (1993).

Over the last three decades, additional studies and reviews have examined rites of passage in adolescence. Investigations have focused on suburban girls (Merten 2005), Navajo Kinaalda girls (Markstrom and Iborra 2003), males (Pollack 2004), Appalachian males (Maloney 2005), cross-national research (Scheer and Unger 1997), Africentric programs (Alford, McKenry, and Gavazzi 2001; Harvey and Hill 2004; McKenry et al. 1997), cross cultural ceremonies (Delaney 1995), clinical case studies with adolescents and their families (Gavazzi and Blumenkrantz 1993; Quinn, Newfield, and Protinsky 1985), the role of youth services (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, The Lutheran Volunteer Corp, City Year) as a positive rite of passage facilitator (Christopher 1996), and general reviews of rites of passage in adolescence (Eccles, Templeton, Barber, and Stone 2003; Scott 1998). These studies confirm that when youth lack a rite of passage experience, there are extraordinary consequences related to such problem behaviors as violence, substance use, gangs, bullying, and delinquency. Citations in professional literature and popular media ascribe risk-taking behavior of youth (Lewis and Lewis 1984; Merten 2005) as their attempts to create rites of passage for themselves. Given the significance for understanding how rites of passage may help youth move successfully from adolescence to adulthood, a model is needed to help guide positive youth development efforts of educators and youth workers. Theoretical orientations that contribute to such model building are presented first, followed by our rites of passage model.

### **Theoretical orientations: Life course, life span, life cycle**

The ways in which investigators classify adolescent transitions or rites of passage is closely related to their theoretical orientation. A review of the existing literature shows three primary approaches for studying rites of passage: the life course, the life span, and the life cycle.

The life course approach focuses on the timing of life transitions and the interaction of the adolescent with familial and historical conditions (Hareven 1977, 1986) resulting in developmental trajectories built upon previous experiences. The duration, spacing, and timing of

events (Elder 1974) – including rites of passage – all are thought to influence the developing adolescent. Hence, the life course perspective accounts for adolescent rites of passage based on terms of past experiences, family impacts on individual processes, and current environmental (social and political) factors.

Within this orientation, we posit that not all transitional events necessarily indicate the occurrence of life transitions. To illustrate – if a teenager gives birth to a child, does that experience bring about successful passage to adulthood? Hence, it is believed that both cognitive interpretation and integration are required before the event genuinely becomes a significant transition or rite of passage (Cowan 1991). In addition, the familial and community systems viewpoints of the transitional experience are thought to significantly determine whether a rite of passage becomes a healthy or unhealthy transformative experience (Blumenkrantz and Wasserman 1998).

The life span orientation focuses on the individual from conception to death (Featherman 1983), whereby development and rites of passage are thought to be related to both biological and cultural processes through sequences of stages over time. Of particular interest in the area of biological processes is the research on adolescent brain development. Changes in the frontal lobes during this life stage are thought to influence such aspects as self-control, motivation, and emotion (Dahl 2004). In turn, these physical development progressions affect decision-making abilities and other cognitive tasks (Zarrett and Eccles 2006).

As youth manage these issues, outcomes may lead to normative (on-time) events that tend to promote positive developmental progress, while non-normative (off-time) events may create a crisis for individuals either by deterring or accelerating progression through stages of development (Baltes 1979). Within this orientation, rites of passage can be associated with turning a particular age or reaching an age of majority (e.g., to vote, purchase alcohol, join the military). A person who experiences these life span rites of passages may perceive that he or she has reached adult status.

The life cycle orientation centers on the stages of family development as its gauge for maturational progression (Duvall 1988). Rites of passage viewed through this lens are considered cumulative, progressive, and normative. Examples of significant life experiences associated with family development include marriage, the birth of children, families dealing with and launching adolescents, parents becoming empty nesters, and the family in later life that deals with the death of a spouse or partner. Coinciding examples of life cycle rites of passage include the marriage ceremony, entry into college, and leaving home to begin a career.

Cutting across each of these orientations is the classic work of Erik Erikson (1963) who proposed “eight ages of man” in terms of the individual’s psychosocial development. Perhaps

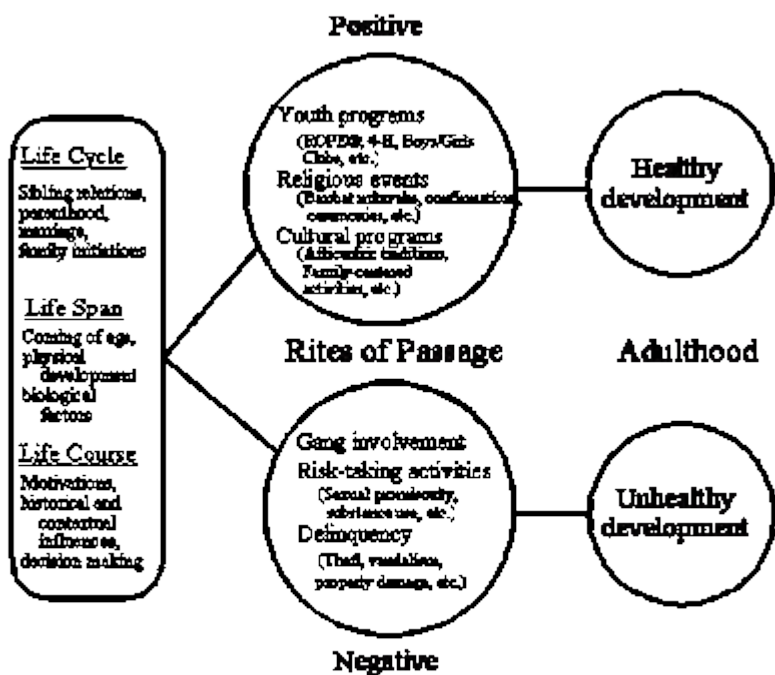
most relevant for understanding rites of passage is the psychosocial crisis of “identity vs. role confusion” typically associated with adolescence. During this stage, youth learn to master more adult-oriented views of themselves in order to enter the work world and to associate with other youth who have similar interests. Erikson recognized the importance of the intersection between self and context (peers, family, and society) for the developing adolescent, which was thought to include rituals and other initiatives. Erikson wrote in his seminal work that

The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult. It is an ideological mind – and, indeed, it is the ideological outlook of a society that speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by his peers, and is ready to be confirmed by rituals, creeds, and programs which at the same time define what is evil, uncanny, and inimical. (Erikson 1963, 263).

Hence, Erikson was clear in noting the aspects of rituals and other community-based processes that provided meaning for adolescents during their transitions to adulthood.

We have developed a model that illustrates how developmental outcomes are mediated by positive or negative rites of passages during adolescence as predicated by the combination of life course, life span, and life cycle orientations. (See Figure 1.) Figure 1 is based on healthy or unhealthy life trajectories as determined by rites of passage experiences. Here, positive experiences (e.g., Africentric rituals, Rite Of Passage Experience®, ROPE®, 4-H youth development, YMCA, etc.) or negative experiences (e.g., gang involvement, drug use, or problem behaviors) are thought to play a critical role for the developing adolescent.

It is important to note that today’s youth have various opportunities to participate in programs that contribute to rite-of-passage-type experiences. These programs are part of the larger youth development movement that has been active in the United States for decades. Some of these youth programs include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, YMCA, Sunday school programs, 4-H Youth Development, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. These programs or organizations often include rites of passage activities (religious rituals [bar/bat mitzvahs, confirmations]; achievement awards [recognition patches, project awards], and community service experiences [AmeriCorp, community revitalization activities]).



**Figure 1. Rites of passage model during adolescence**

The positive and negative components of the rites of passage model (Figure 1) mirror Bogenschneider's (1996) ecological risk/protective theory in that the model is designed to capture both positive youth development activities while underscoring the need to prevent problem behaviors. The positive component coincides with protective processes (Steinberg 1991, Werner 1990) while the negative component is associated with risk-oriented processes (Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller 1992). Ultimately, we support the position that prevention science and positive youth development efforts are both similar and necessary components of healthy adolescent development (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, and Arthur 2002; Small and Memmo 2004). Similarly, recent research by Richard Lerner and his associates at Tufts University found that both asset- and prevention-based approaches are necessary for positive youth development (2006). In addition, to understand the impact of positive youth development programs, they should be viewed within the context of the program's community (Carter, Betts, Marczak, Rogers, and Huebner 1998; Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, and Villarruel 2003).

Together, the life course, life span, and life cycle orientations help to frame the multiple ways that rites of passage can be viewed. Common threads across these orientations include a focus on events (social status) and the meaning or interpretation (cognitive) of those events by the

developing adolescent. In turn, the combination of social status and cognitive factors are thought to provide the ideal ingredients for framing rites of passage experiences.

### **Framing rites of passage**

Scheer and Palkovitz (1994) discovered that both cognitive and social status (events) factors were the most common factors identified by individuals who perceived their adulthood status. These categories are helpful for examining rites of passage, and we propose that successful rites of passage encompass both event and cognitive factors. Past research in this area has been on either cognitive (Keniston 1970) or social (Hurrelmann 1992) factors, but few have emphasized both dimensions.

Keniston's (1970) theory is thought to be helpful in understanding rites of passage during adolescence because it incorporates a cognitive component, although it tends to de-emphasize social events that contribute to becoming an adult. He proposed a period between adolescence and adulthood he called "youth" that is based on the individual's psychosocial functioning and reasoning. More recently, Arnett describes this same period in terms of "emergent adulthood" (2004).

In contrast, Hurrelman (1992) has focused almost exclusively on the social status perspective, evident in his study of European youth who were experiencing structural contradictions to the traditional event sequences (e.g., school-to-work-to-marriage), transitions, or rites of passage. He claims that political unrest and high unemployment were major societal factors that affected European youth as they passed through normative stages associated with (1) the acquisition of skills, as in education; (2) the obtainment of employment; and (3) the establishment of one's independent household.

Thus, our work is supported by previous human development research (Arnett 1998, Marini 1984, Riley 1982, Scheer and Palkovitz 1994) and represents a combination of both cognitive (Keniston 1970) and social status (Hurrelmann 1992) viewpoints. This approach recognizes the cognitive and social dimensions for understanding rites of passage in adolescence. As this area of study is advanced in future work, the subtle events and cognitive processes that help adolescents move successfully into adulthood will be uncovered. That said, some investigations already have been conducted that begin to reveal the mechanisms behind these rites of passage processes.

### **Investigations related to rites of passage**

Rites of passage studies include those focused on cross-national research (Scheer and Unger 1997), Africentric programs (Alford, McKenry, and Gavazzi 2001; Gavazzi, Alford, and

McKenry 1996; McKenry et al. 1997), and clinical case studies with adolescents and their families (Gavazzi and Blumenkrantz 1993).

A cross-national study conducted by Scheer and Unger (1997, 1998) on the role of the family environment in Russian adolescent substance use and depression discusses how youth organizations in Russia are dissolving because of their political orientations and the impact of their absence. To illustrate – before the fall of communism, Russian youth participated in government youth groups such as the Young Pioneers, which assisted them in their “rites of passage” before entering adulthood. These social rites brought continuity during the transition to adulthood. The more recent vacuum of support may have led youth in these societies to develop their own rites of passage, such as experimenting with illicit drugs, gang initiations, and risk-taking behaviors (Hurrelmann 1994). Similarly, many years ago it was suggested that U.S. culture was lacking in these same types of rites of passage (Benedict 1938, Mead 1964).

The Scheer and Unger investigation (1997) stressed that caution must be used so as to not impose U.S. cultural views of adolescence on other countries, regardless of the desire to prevent the decay of healthy rites of passage (whether found in government-, religious-, or more culturally based rituals). Here, rites of passage for adolescents are not a stop-gap approach for prevention and intervention programs, but rather are thought to be a set of developmental processes to be employed with youth throughout their approach to adulthood. Hence, consideration should be given to how rites of passage for youth may exist in a cultural context that provides assistance in helping adolescents to survive and thrive through adolescence into adulthood.

A set of studies surrounding the use of culturally specific programs for at-risk youth has yielded a complex and interesting pattern of results surrounding the use of rites of passage. For instance, one qualitative examination (Gavazzi et al. 1996) of an African-American rites of passage program (used as an adjunct to an independent living program) generated support for the notion that a rites-based curriculum could facilitate indicators of positive youth development. In particular, portions of the thematic analyses showed that elders from the larger African-American community played an important role in fostering the adolescent’s sense of connection to whom they were (in terms of their identity) and from whence they came (in terms of their social support network).

A more quantitative examination of a similar program (McKenry et al. 1997) provided a related yet distinct picture of the impact of this culturally specific rites of passage offering. Here, a strong and pronounced association between self-esteem, racial identity, and at-risk behaviors was reported, and the amount of time spent in the rites of passage program was significantly associated with at-risk behavior reduction. At the same time, however, the indirect pathway from program involvement through racial identity and self-esteem was not significant. While the



relatively small sample size used in this particular study may have increased the chances of Type II error, further study incorporating additional variables could better measure the effects of this type of program.

From a more clinical orientation, Gavazzi and Blumenkrantz (1993) provided case study examples of how the adolescent's participation in a rites of passage primary prevention program could be used in subsequent therapeutically based intervention efforts. Here, great emphasis was placed on the use of concepts embedded within modern day "initiation rituals" that can sustain and support the adolescent's (and family's) ability to adapt successfully to transitional events. Particularly important in this regard is the notion that rites of passage can help separate adolescents from their childhood status – where they may be "stuck" – through the adolescent transition period in ways that can transform teenagers and reincorporate them into the social realm as successful adults.

### **Rites of passage into practice**

There are some programs or directives that exist specifically for the purpose of fostering positive rites of passage in the lives of youth. One such effort is the Rite Of Passage Experience©, ROPE®, which follows the guiding principles discussed earlier and has been described extensively elsewhere (Blumenkrantz 1992, Blumenkrantz 1996, Blumenkrantz and Gavazzi 1993, Blumenkrantz and Wasserman 1998, Gavazzi and Blumenkrantz 1993).

This section will also examine other youth development programs and organizations (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 4-H Youth Development, YMCA, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, religious programs) that aid in rite-of-passage-type opportunities for healthy adolescent transitions.

ROPE® is a three-phase process. Phase I employs a core curriculum of life-skills training to help prepare youth who are finishing elementary school (about fifth grade) by building self-esteem, resiliency, and problem-solving skills. The curriculum is implemented according to the environmental context with parent and community involvement. Phase II typically occurs during middle or junior-high (sixth to eighth grade) years, connecting youth with community resources. Participants develop a contract with parents, schools, and representatives from community groups or agencies for positive leisure activities. In doing so, youth form positive community relationships that promote altruism and cooperative values with community leaders including coaches, volunteer professionals, local government leaders, and church officials. Phase III (high school years) instills the importance of community service. For example, high school youth are paired with mentors from their community, and these youth can also serve as mentors themselves for those in Phase I and II. Youth in Phase III are given the opportunity to put their skills and community relations into action (Blumenkrantz and Wasserman 1998).

In short, the phases can be described as such: Phase I (skill building), Phase II (positive leisure-time activities) and Phase III (community involvement). Through these rites of passage phases, youth develop a sense of “who they are,” their connection with society, and a more optimistic orientation toward the future. This model functions best as it is refined according to contemporary rites of passage within a community’s unique context and culture.

Consistent with ROPE® is the College ROPE® initiative (Blumenkrantz, forthcoming). Through this program, college is reframed as a place of initiation where young people come of age and adults are trained as mentors to participate and guide students during their college experience. In the United States, many youth are educated beyond high school, and the college experience often extends the period of adolescence. Youth create their own rituals during this time – sometimes positive (leadership positions in college organizations, volunteer efforts) sometimes negative (binge drinking, risk-taking behaviors). College ROPE® is a purpose-driven approach to implement effective rites of passage for college students while strengthening the community and civic development.

Qualitative and quantitative evaluations of ROPE have been conducted since 1982 (Blumenkrantz and Gavazzi 1993). A series of studies with five cohort groups totaling 410 participants revealed positive gains at both the individual and family levels. In terms of involvement with family, the ROPE group showed significant increases of involvement as compared to the control group. Also, the ROPE group reported more positive attitudes toward school than the control group. For drug use, ROPE participants decreased their drug use by 60 percent, while the control group increased substance use by 57 percent. Finally, the ROPE group reported significantly greater levels of connectedness and belonging after ROPE, while the control group had increased levels of alienation. Qualitative findings from youth and parents revealed common themes in the areas of self-confidence, decision making, and commitment to school. Comments included “I can make decisions on what to do and not worry about peer pressure” and “This is the first year my daughter insists on going to school even when she’s ill” (Blumenkrantz and Gavazzi 1993).

While programs such as ROPE specifically target rites of passage processes, other youth development programs have been instrumental in helping prepare adolescents for the transition to adulthood. These programs include the Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of the USA, YMCA, religious programs (Sunday school), 4-H Youth Development, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. A brief examination of these youth development organizations sheds light on the unique characteristics and contributions of these programs.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) have served more than 4 million youth since 1906 (Boys and Girls Clubs of America 2007). Key features include a safe community-based youth facility that is open daily and professional staff at the facility are available and affordable

to all youth. Programs focus on character and leadership, education and career, health and life skills, the arts, alcohol/drug and pregnancy prevention, gang prevention, and athletics. The overall effort of these programs is to help youth become responsible and caring citizens who acquire the necessary skills to become successful participants in adult society (Boys and Girls Clubs of America 2007). Unique club programs include CLUBService for older youth (17-18 year olds) in partnership with the Corporation for National Service (AmeriCorps), which promotes community service and involvement. In turn, CareerLaunch is available for 13-18 year olds to help them explore career possibilities with support from mentors. Research has shown youth in BGCA have reduced their use of illegal substances and helped with making healthy sexual decisions (St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider, and Aikin 1995). BGCA provides an opportunity for adolescents to participate in rite-of-passage-like meaningful (cognitive) experiences (events).

4-H Youth Development began in 1902 as a youth program in Ohio, and when the U.S. congress created the Cooperative Extension Service in 1914, it included support for 4-H youth programs. Today it is the largest out-of-school program in the United States, with more than 7 million members and 500,000 youth and adult volunteers (National 4-H Headquarters 2007). The 4 Hs – head, heart, hands, and health – serve as reminders that youth development is about the whole person: social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. Healthy development is achieved by promoting life skills through 4-H projects and activities across numerous content areas – earth and the environment, science and technology, and community expressive arts. The essential elements of 4-H programs promote positive youth development by providing opportunities for youth to experience belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence (Kress 2007). These elements can be linked to rites of passage phenomena in that youth experience events such as camping and community service to help instill life skills of decision making, self-determination, and self-worth. A recent national 4-H study found that 4-H youth were more likely than youth in other structured after-school activities to be in the high contribution cohort, displaying greater competence, confidence, character, caring, and connections (Lerner et al. 2006).

The YMCA exists in communities across the United States, serving children, youth, and families. With its roots in London, England, dating back to 1844, the first U.S. YMCA started in Boston in 1851 (YMCA 2007). The YMCA is about “building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities” with core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Millions of youth and families are involved in Y programming each year. Specific programs for adolescents include Teen Leadership programs whereby teens participate in community service projects through Leaders clubs. Also, Youth and Government clubs provide participants with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities connected to state government. The YMCA’s Black Achiever program (also known as Minority Achievers) is designed to help young African-Americans gain self-confidence and set high standards for education and career goals. African-American professionals serve as role models and mentors (YMCA 2007). The YMCA thus is

another program with rites of passage components designed to help youth through planned experiences (events) that have a lasting impact (cognitive).

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) are separate organizations with similar goals of positive youth development. The BSA started in 1910 and has reached more than 100 million youth since its inception, with the overall goal of building character, developing citizenship, and achieving personal fitness (Boy Scouts of America National Council 2007). Venturing, a specific BSA program for boys and girls age 14 – 20, uniquely focuses on helping young people through positive experiences that prepare them to become responsible and caring adults. Research has shown the BSA positively affected boys through character development, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and family relationships (Harris Interactive 2005).

The GSUSA dates back to 1912, with 18 members, and has grown to 3.7 million girls in the United States and the world, with an overall emphasis on developing girls to their fullest potential through relationship skills, strong values for decision making, and a desire to improve society (Girls Scouts of the USA 2007). Many of the GSUSA programs instill real-world leadership abilities that can last a lifetime. A study from the Girl Scout Research Institute has shown that the scout experience has made a significant impact on the lives of those women who have made major contributions to society and leaders in their communities (1991). Both scouting organizations, BSA and GSUSA, have rite-of-passage-type events/ceremonies which mark achievements through awards, patches, and ceremonies.

Religious organizations also have been committed to youth and their healthy development for hundreds of years, whether through Sunday school programs or rite-of-passage rituals, including bar/bat mitzvahs, confirmations, and baptisms (Ream and Witt 2004). These public rituals often signal the transition to becoming an adult, at least in the religious community responsible for these events. Numerous programs from many different religions help youth connect to family and community as they affirm their faith. Studies indicate that these religious rites of passage have a positive influence on the youth through spiritual development, supportive peer relationships, and mentorships (Ream 2001).

Within these previously discussed programs, there are synergic combinations of events and cognitive factors that frame the positive rites of passage as discussed earlier. When rites of passage (events) have unique meaning (cognitive) and are understood as being significant for the developing adolescent, the transition to healthy adulthood as responsible, mature, and contributing members of society is more likely to occur. To illustrate, a few of these components are listed below:

- YMCA programs such as the Black Achiever program help to establish mentorship relations in order to bring about a sense of youth empowerment through the experiences and knowledge gained from successful adults in their community (YMCA).
- Girl Scouts participate in community service activities such as their “Family Literacy Project” (events) in which girls and their families are involved in local reading activities. Through this community service project, the girls learn (cognitive) to connect to their community by helping to improve society as whole (Girl Scouts of the USA).
- The CareerLaunch occupational and mentoring program offers youth experiences (events) for what may interest them as they explore career options. Mentors assist them in processing (cognitive) what it might be like to work in particular occupational fields (Boys and Girls Clubs of America).
- Scouts can experience “High Adventure” activities in their Venturing program through challenging positive risk-taking experiences. Participants connect the experiences (events) with a greater sense of self-confidence (cognitive) and belief in ones’ abilities (Boy Scouts of America).
- Religious rite-of-passage rituals often mark the beginning of adulthood in one’s church or community through confirmations, non-infant baptisms, and bar/bat mitzvahs (events) which provide special meaning (cognitive) to the adolescent through family and community support (religious programs).
- Celebration event(s) mark significant transitions between elementary, middle, and high school in which the initiate demonstrates competency skills from his or her rite of passage experience (ROPE).
- Youth Boardsmanship and Youth in Governance programs help youth serve in leadership roles, whether as club officers or in community programs (events) for youth to gain skills and knowledge (cognitive) to guide them in settings that help them as emerging adults in their community (4-H Youth Development).
- Use of College Rite Of Passage Experience© (events) helps orient students to college, building skills necessary for academic (*Initiation of Scholars*®) and social success and competence (cognitive). This enables them find “their place” for the pursuit of happiness and healthy fun, explore opportunities to be of service, and to mentor others (College ROPE).

## Conclusions

Rites of passage are powerful social events that help guide and affirm a transition from one status in life to another. One of the most critical transitions is from adolescence to adulthood, where much hangs in the balance. Youth will either progress into adulthood with life trajectories for success (responsibility, financial independence, healthy relationships) or difficulties (crime, unemployment, irresponsibility). Rites of passage can be viewed according to life cycle, life span, and life course orientations, which are helpful in understanding the multifaceted rites of passage components. Investigations in this area have revealed that for rites of passage to have lasting impact, they should be framed as events that have special meaning for the adolescent in the context of community and culture. Positive youth development programs demonstrate the formidable combination of rites of passage events in conjunction with cognitive processes. As more studies and programs engage in rites of passage research and practice, youth and society will benefit through the expansion of our knowledge base and refinement of our programs.

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