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## The therapeutic role of the rituals of passage

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### Abstract

Rituals accompany people throughout history. Changing, acquiring new forms and meanings, the rituals of passage occupy an important place not only in the subjective world of man, but also in the social collective space, being an internal dialogue among the past, present, and future. The article carries out a brief analysis of modern theoretical views on and methodological approaches to the study of the rituals of passage. It makes an attempt to consider such a social phenomenon as the rituality of the processes of passage, and also studies their impact on modern society. The hypothesis about the possibility of considering therapeutic aspects of social processes allows the researcher to move from the initial understanding of the essence of the rituals of passage to wider interpretation, which leads to viewing them as a special kind of cultural position within the framework of humanities discourse. The author of the article investigates theoretical approaches to the issues of the social role of the rituals of passage and reveals the tendencies of the development of the concept of the rites of passage in the context of the modern development of scientific thought. The article finds the presence of the signs of therapeutic influence within the psychological trend in medical sciences.

### For citation

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### Keywords

Ritual of passage, rite, self-awareness, worldview paradigm, ritual and mythological space, rite of passage, seasonal ritual, liminality.

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## Introduction

There is a wide variety of scientific sources devoted to the study of rituals. The works of William Robertson Smith [Khrustalev, Tsaregorodtsev, 2007, 22] and James George Frazer [Kondrat'ev, 2002, 18] pointed out the priority of the mythological context. The essence and functional features of rituals were studied by Émile Durkheim [Ibidem, 19]. Sociological views on rituals can be found in the works of Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, and Robert Hertz. The theoretical basis for the rituals of passage is formed by the work of Arnold van Gennep. The interpretation of the rites of passage in the concepts of the life cycle is investigated in the works of Alfred Tozzer, Henri-Alexandre Junod, Elsie Clews Parsons, Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, and Ruth Benedict. The liminal vector of the rituals of passage is thoroughly studied in the works of Victor Turner. With all the variety of scientific works, the therapeutic role of the rituals of passage has not been fully investigated and requires critical rethinking under modern conditions.

The research is relevant due to the need to comprehend the phenomenon of rites of passage at the present stage of the development of human society—their essence, origins, the forms of influence on human consciousness. The materials of this work can be used as a basis for further research, development of tools and theoretical methods of scientific analysis of various aspects of the rituals of passage.

The purpose of the research is to briefly analyze modern theoretical views on and methodological approaches the study of the rituals of passage. The purpose defines the content of such tasks as analysis of theoretical views on the social role of the rituals of passage and identification of trends in the development of the concept of the rites of passage in the context of the modern development of scientific thought.

The concepts rethinking the processes and content of modern forms of social rituals of passage are the object of the research; the social forms of the rituals of passage and their impact on the modern development of society are its subject.

The terms *rite* and *ritual*, despite the differences, are viewed as identical concepts in this work.

## Research methodology

The article uses Arnold van Gennep's conceptual ideas of the personal crisis and Victor Turner's theory of the rituals of passage as a methodological basis. The methods of procedural analysis and comparative symbology are used to investigate the causes of the social phenomenon of passage in the ritual context.

## Research results

The ritual as a form of symbolic action is usually devoid of utilitarian (self-valuable) meaning and expresses the inherent connection of the agent with any structure of social relations and values. In the broadest sense, a ritual is an action and carries the forms and ways of the sequence of its performance. Ritual actions called the rituals of passage by the modern anthropological school can be one of the significant sources of information about cultural transformative crises [Treshchenok, 2016, 180]. Understanding and recognizing the significant scientific value of these unusual states of the agent's consciousness provide for the study of deliberate techniques, sets of sequential actions designed to bring about such situations.

Ceremonial actions and rituals existed in almost all ancient societies and still exist today. The main

purpose of such rituals is to reevaluate, transform, and incorporate both individuals and social groups of people into the new social [Eliade, 1994, 42].

The rituals of passage can be means of overcoming crises. They organize a homogeneous social process, during which groups and communities are able to mutually negotiate. In this case, the homogeneous process is designed through the socialization of agents to inculcate the same type of social characteristics for the consolidation of the whole society. In such conditions, rituals can influence the formation of “communicative unity” and be a tool for solving social problems.

The rite of passage as a scientific term was first explicated by the famous French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in 1909. In his work *Les Rites de Passage* translated into English as *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep consistently justified the similarity of the structures of various social rituals [Gennep, 1999, 34]. The researcher explained this similarity by the transition of the agent from one stage of life to another within a certain social environment. Significant events, turning points in a person's life, as a rule, are accompanied by ritual actions, often representing a system determined by the surrounding society. According to Arnold van Gennep, the rites of passage can be divided into three categories: the rites of territorial passages, life cycle rites, and calendrical rites.

The rites of territorial passages provide for practical actions in the process of crossing any territorial borders. Nowadays, such rituals are not anachronistic. In Russia there are many notable, iconic, even—to some extent—sacred places. For example, the territories of small local “ejins” are specially marked in modern Buryatia. People passing by often leave ceremonial objects, and this is not an exclusive way of action of the ethnic population. The rituals of territorial passages and ritual actions associated with them are performed by many people who are not connected with the region and with Buddhism.

Life cycle rites in different cultures are performed to mark important life events, e. g., childbirth, marriage, coming of age (some researchers call this event compulsory initiation), graduation, and death. The burial ritual shows the rules for dealing with mortal human life. Such a ritual is designed to restore thoughts about the finality of human life in a person's mind on the cusp of inevitable death and prepare them for their own death. The symbolism of such events as birth and death is the main thing in the process of understanding the essence of the rites of passage. A person, being an imperfect and incomplete being, must go through a series of trials (transitions) during their life and at the end of their life perform the main ritual—the transition from worldly life to spiritual one. In any transitional situations, the agent (or group) makes the transition from one social system to other social systems that are significantly new. Such processes experienced by the agent or group can be brought to a single scheme that includes sequential transitions. The first stage—separation (preliminal actions)—is characterized by the fact that the old social framework is no longer the content of the life of the agent. The second stage—liminality (liminal actions)—is a period during which the neophyte is “neither here nor there” and can both experience social loneliness and share their condition with the group. The third stage—incorporation (postliminal actions)—marks the inclusion of the agent (or group) in a new social system.

Calendrical rites, according to Arnold van Gennep, are also rituals of passage [Ibidem, 54]. Crossing a conventional time boundary (a birthday, a new year, a new multiyear cycle, etc.), the agent (or social group) performs symbolic actions associated with calendrical ritual forms.

The rites of passage not only exercise a mutual influence in the system of the agent and the external environment, but also have an impact on the psychoemotional state of a person, as well as the formation of images, concepts, meanings in human consciousness.

Modern researchers, as a rule, distinguish three directions in the study of rituals—biological, political, and social rituals. Scientific approaches to this issue can be limited to two quite distinct positions: (i) scholars adhere to Arnold van Gennep's conceptual views and socialize the content of the

rituals of passage, interpreting the essence of the issue under study to the limits of the personal crisis; (ii) scholars adhere to Victor Turner's views, using the concept of phenomenological sociology as the main trend [Turner, 1983, 108]. Modern medical science views human diseases as a result of complex, sometimes unambiguously contradictory interaction between the human body and the environment [Khrustalev, Tsaregorodtsev, 2007, 319]. Accumulating knowledge of diseases, developing methods of treatment, medicine explores ways to influence natural, spiritual, and social factors on a person [Eliade, 1994, 102].

A patient's condition in medicine passes through several stages. The intermediate stage separates health and illness. Doctors sometimes say that their patients are not healthy anymore, but are not sick yet. Such an unusual transitional state in medicine is called subclinical.

Transitional states from a physiological state to a pathological one are a dialectical process, and in this case the whole process is a ritual of passage. Reaching a certain qualitative level, one opposite, changing its properties, transforms to the other state.

An enormous influence is exerted on a person not only by a doctor, but also by medical staff and the environment surrounding the actions with a patient. The doctor's relationship with the patient is based on the special psychogenic factor. Such a factor can act both positively towards a patient, psychologically inciting them to recovery, and negatively, causing iatrogenic diseases. The famous Russian and Soviet physiologist Ivan Pavlov noted that the word for a person is the strongest conditioned stimulus, which makes it possible to consider the actions of a doctor in relation to a patient to be psychogenic ones [Pavlov, 1952, 31].

Health and illness are significant parameters characterizing the human condition in such medical aspects as physiology and pathophysiology, and largely reflect the level of adaptability. A high level of adaptation allows a person to better adjust not only to natural, but also to social conditions. Despite the fact that the state of health is always manifested physically, it is the psychological attitude of a person that is a basis that makes it possible to influence the public mental state [Anokhin, 2006, 318].

The way of thinking allows us to move from individual characteristics of human health to general sociological patterns. Since a person's way of life is a form of their living, which depends, among other things, on the level of the socioeconomic basis of society, the way of thinking in this context can be viewed as a psychological form of consciousness that affects not only ideological and social factors, but also the adaptive properties of society [Grebnyuk, 2016, 99]. The need to form a healthy way of thinking in this context becomes an important sociohumanistic and therapeutic task within the framework of medical science and health protection in modern society.

## Conclusion

The rituals of passage exist in all social groups and societies, change the internal state of a person, play a constitutive role and perform the functions of preservation and change. Being a force that creates the social, the rituals of passage contribute to the development of the processes of the formation of the structure of social communities. The proposed hypothesis concerns medical therapeutic experience in a cultural context.

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## Терапевтическая роль ритуалов перехода

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### Аннотация

Актуальность исследования определяется необходимостью осмысления феномена обрядов перехода на современном этапе развития человеческого общества – их сущности, истоков, форм влияния на сознание человека. Изучению ритуалов перехода уделено достаточно много внимания в многочисленных работах, находящихся в рамках философии, религии, антропологии, однако терапевтический аспект феномена является практически неисследованным. Материалы данной работы могут быть положены в основу более глубокого исследования, разработки средств и теоретических методов научного анализа различных аспектов ритуалов перехода. Цель исследования заключается в осуществлении краткого анализа современных методологических подходов и теоретических взглядов к исследованию феномена обрядовых форм ритуала перехода. В данной работе предпринимается попытка краткого анализа такого социального феномена, как ритуальность процессов перехода, а также рассматриваются вопросы их влияния на современное общество. Гипотеза о возможности рассмотрения терапевтических аспектов при освещении социальных процессов позволяет перейти от исходного к более широкому осмыслению сущности ритуалов перехода, что приводит к их рассмотрению в качестве особого вида культурной позиции в рамках гуманитарного дискурса.

### Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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**Ключевые слова**

Ритуал перехода, обряд, осознание себя, мировоззренческая парадигма, ритуально-мифологическое пространство, обряд перехода, сезонный ритуал, лиминальность.

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