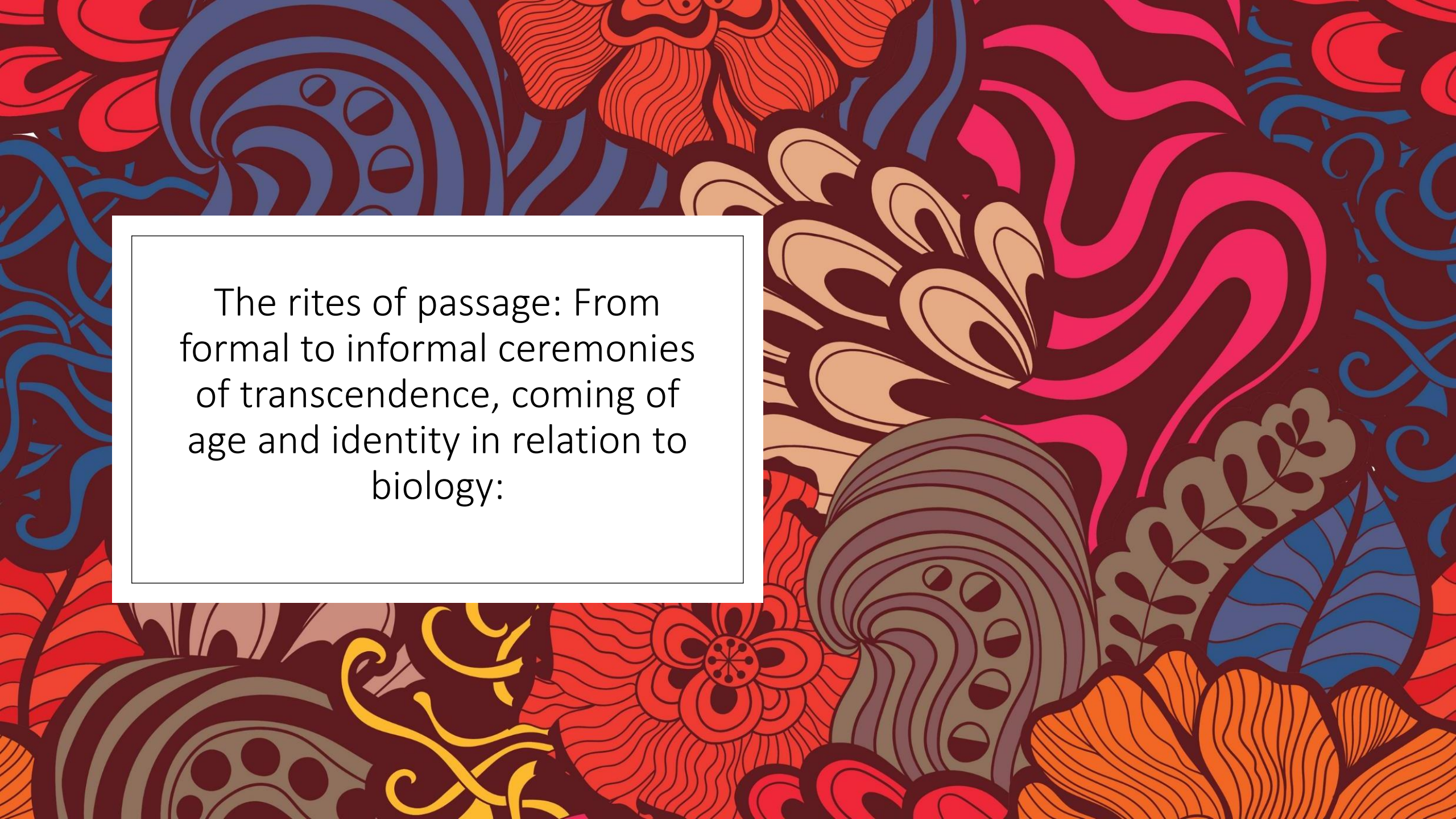




The rites of passage: From
formal to informal ceremonies
of transcendence, coming of
age and identity in relation to
biology:



Disclaimer:

Van Gennep's theory outlines the key stages in which ritual is formulated and will help form a foundation on which the ritual process is built upon. My own family ritual occurs within these conditions, the women of the family separate from the men (separation); and conduct a form of Dowsing, using a needle and thread to predict the number of children a menstruating woman will bear. The 'ritual' occurs after a girl's first period as a confirmation of fertility and heritage within the family. It can occur on past menstrual women as a confirmation of their offspring or conducted on an already pregnant woman as a way of predicting gender (liminality). Furthermore, the women of my family see this tradition as a confirmation of their biological right as women – it consummates our ability to bear children and leaves the practitioners transcended in society with their new title as 'fertile' and future title as 'mother' (Incorporation). Despite my own 'ritual' of fertility in respect to a woman's biological ability; other cultures and groups within selective societies approach these rituals differently despite their overlapping similarities; (symbolism).

Van Gennep:

- Van Gennep, writing in 1909 developed an early anthropological approach to ritual, he highlighted the three stages of ritual as separation, liminality and incorporation: each stage being representative to the transition an individual goes through within society through the ritual process.
- “the life of an individual in any society is a series of passage from one age to another and from one occupation to another” (Van Gennep, 2004).
- “Some rites are both individual and collective” (Van Gennep, 2004).
- “Van Gennep is too hasty in generalizing his propositions, thus emptying his concept of ‘passage’ of any precise content.” (Coppet, 1992). This suggests Van Gennep’s theory can be argued as too generalised for application to any specific anthropological case, isolated it merely works within a spectrum of group activity – the connections between cultures.
- Theoretical triangulation.
- Multidimensional data.
- Ritual and identity are global concepts, despite an individual’s differences there is a commonality. “We may have different religions, different languages, different coloured skin, but we all belong to one human race” (Annan, 2016).



The Sambia – Herdt:

- “Ritually powerful not only in shaping social ethos, but also in articulation, redefinition and legitimation of cultural realities” (Bell, 1990). The redefinition of an individual is an example of the transformative power of ritual.
- “Female substances-such as skin flakes, saliva, sweat and vaginal fluid- are also classified as polluting and dangerous to men” (Herdt, 1987). Due to this belief male children are removed from their mothers in adolescence to participate in their own coming of age ritual. The ritual follows elder males using sticks to rupture the nasal cavity of and cause a nosebleed “the ritual nose-bleeding is the critical means of expelling these harmful female materials from the male body” (Herdt, 1987). These mimics female demonstration of ‘periods’ signalling the removal of feminine impurities relayed to their offspring at birth from close contact with their mother throughout pregnancy. Menstrual blood is believed to relate to the child's circulatory blood despite gender. The impurities in female children lost during their own coming of age which presents itself as a period; males biologically cannot remove these impurities and thus the nose-bleeding ritual was formulated. This suggests gender equality in relation to a child's innocence and or ‘purity’ despite the imbalance between gendered adults due to male dominance.
- Unity is formed through the generations of men within the Sambia as they inform each other and thus collectively accumulate the shared title of ‘men’; despite their own conflicting identities they are unified with their title – Mary Douglas recognised this connection stating “rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience” (Douglas, 1966).

“What Ever It Takes to Become a Man | Exploring the Social Foundations of Sex and Sexuality”.
(n.d.). , available at: <https://sexselvesandsociety.wordpress.com/2014/10/03/what-ever-it-takes-to-become-a-man/> (accessed 5 March 2020).

Gypsy-Traveller and Okely:

- Gendered taboos and social beliefs surrounding the concepts of ‘impurity’ and menstruation within woman.
- The segregation between genders is shown as women's interactions with the environment (household), relationships and livelihood are adapted during times of menstruation; “Specific mention of menstruation is not supposed to be made in front of men” (Okely, 1983).
- Traveller segregation of male and female clothes to avoid contamination of the male purity; (Vs Menstrual huts).
- Menstruation can arguably be classed a ritual passage in this instance as a woman is transcending from an ‘impure’ to a ‘pure’ form.
- Overall, both the Sambia and the Gypsy Travellers hold significance of impurities in their rituals, however there is significant difference in how these effects the everyday life of the community.



“Pin on Family History - History of Ireland”. (n.d.). , available at:
<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/384143043197547303/?d=t&mt=login> (accessed 5 March 2020).

Overall:



- 'Rite of passage' and can be found within many areas of society and within an array of culture.
- In Britain participation in ritual is not necessarily dependent on religious affiliation or an individual's self-identity
- Rituals are ambiguous.
- Many rituals share common themes such as impurity most rituals appear to be transformative in some way.
- Ritual commonly either re-enforces or divides against gender roles.
- 'Nature' of women is a common global concept.
- Mimicking of Biology.
- Ritual is a unifying factor between many areas of society despite the differences between cultures found within society.
- Separation from the subject allows anthropologists to apply unbiased reasoning to the concept of ritual.
- provides insight into the lives of social actors, instigating a flow of information about individuality in a changing world.

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