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## **'RITE OF PASSAGE' AS SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURE IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

### **PREVENTING CRIMINAL CAREERS AMONG YOUNG MEN**

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#### **Abstract**

*Cultural anthropologists study constancies in different cultures. Transition towards adulthood is one such constancy. Boys in every culture have to make the difficult crossing into the adult world. This stage of life brings about a specific transitional, liminal vulnerability. Conflicting loyalties, the main source of bad feelings and strong tensions, are triggers for dangerous and risky behaviour. The 'locus operandi' for initiation of many criminal careers is the provocative atmosphere of the peer group. In rural regions and traditional societies supporting transitional structures, called 'rites of passage', are still in operation. Cultural translation of these structures with regard to urban youth problems offers new roads in local preventive programs for youth at risk. Rites of passage have three stages starting with separation from the old ways and old social contexts. The second is being on the threshold, the so-called liminal period: no longer a boy but still not a man. The final stage is the ceremonial reintegration into the community as an adult. Different kinds of rite of passage programs can be developed from this basic structure. Groups of boys, preferably in their own neighbourhood, can be taken into rite of passage programs that fit their own class, ethnicity and religion.*

#### **Introduction**

Cultural anthropologists look for and study constancies in cultures. They analyze cultural similarities and differences. The transition to adulthood is one such constancy. No matter which society they belong to, boys have to make the transition into the adult world. In so doing, they are vulnerable because they have to let go of their boyhood world in order to construct an adult personality. Characteristic of this period is the relatively large amount of potential conflicts of loyalty. This article will attempt to locate the impulse to start a career in crime, during the transition from boyhood to manhood. Two aspects in this transition are of central importance. What roles do conflicting loyalties play and which roles do peer groups play in the process? Quite a few non-European societies had and continue to have supportive structures to keep adolescent vulnerability to a minimum during this period of transition. These are 'rites de passage', rituals for transition, also called initiation rituals when they deal with becoming an adult (van Gennep 1906). In some of the regional areas of the Netherlands and migrant groups there are still (parts) of these supportive structure available to assist in the passage to the adulthood. Various rites of passage were in fashion according to the social class. Workers and farm boys were doers and fighters, while in last century there were young gentlemen from the upper classes who had more time to make the transition to manhood in a more 'civilised' manner. For the upper classes the initiation into the 'old boys network' was often a product of ragging, or hazing; undergoing initiations during your time as a student. Compulsory military service, abolished in the Netherlands, could also be seen as an initiation into Dutch culture and it exhibited many similarities with traditional transitional structures. In the United States certain rites of passage programmes are utilized to enhance the sense of community in deprived neighbourhoods. Survival trips, work camps and other similar supervisory structures used in a penitentiary situation, such as Samster in Groenlo, resembles rites of passage. There are rites of passages programs in use in South Africa for juvenile detainees. In the Netherlands, a Surinamese self-help organization set up a rites of passage module along the lines of a method developed in the United States for black male youths (Lee 1990) Psychotherapists and family therapists for adolescents having been making use of the rite of passage concept for over a decade (Hart 1978, Gutknecht, 1982, Preto 1989) In contemporary urban

environments there are few integrated rite of passage structures left due to increased urbanization, secularization and rapid demographic changes in the population. Urban demography has changed drastically over the last century, at first due to industrialization and later immigration. This accounts for the disappearance of various social functions for juveniles as an age group. There appears to be a direct correlation between the loss of the social position of juveniles in society and at least part of the negative (group) behaviour they express. Moreover, the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood has more than doubled, in part due to the strong emphasis our (western) society puts on personal, individual development through education and leisure activities. This is why structures are necessary that offer long term support during periods of transition. In a number of cases this could be for more than ten years. The concept of rite of passage as a supportive structure deserves special attention in preventative, curative and penitentiary child care because it is so close to a child's own experiences. The concept offers opportunities to cross sectors, disciplinary and cultural borders. New projects can be set up as a result of this and existing programs modified. An important corollary question would be: how to make it possible to gain insight into the complex (multicultural) social world of adolescents in the midst of weighing up their needs, desires, obligations and determining their borders. On the basis of years of research and counselling young men, the author has developed a transitional approach in five domains. This article is adapted from a chapter in *Handboek voor Jeugdbeleid* (Handbook for Youth Policy) (van Bekkum 1998e)

### **Statistics and Nuances**

According to estimates by the Dutch parliamentary Montfrans commission two-thirds (!) of all juvenile crime is committed in a group context. This would appear to be a blind spot in preventative policy development and implementation strategies (Bunkers en Baerveldt 1995). A report called *Group Criminality* indicated that careers in crime and (drug) abuse is often 'initiated' in peer groups (Hakkert e.a. 1998, Zoja 1989). Some studies link up the lack of integral 'rites de passage' as is customary in traditional societies, with the formation of youth gangs (Bloch & Niederhoffer 1958, Yablonski 1969). These American researchers make a direct correlation between the inner conflicts associated with adolescence and the outset of criminal activities. In the absence of supportive structures in their turbulent social world they develop of form of self-initiation: the 'gang'. The vast majority of those involved in serious transgressions of social norms are boys and young men in the midst of transition to adulthood. The number of charges pressed against young men under the age of eighteen has risen 65% since 1980. Those involved in juvenile crime are getting increasingly 'younger' and more violent. This statistic has grown from 6 to 15% since 1980 (Lambooy 1998). Let me qualify these statistics. In most western countries victims of crime have remained stable or decreased over the past 20 years. The Netherlands occupies a favourable place compared to other countries. Historically speaking, violence in our country has always been low. However, violence in urban areas is growing (Haen-Marshall 1998). According to the 'Monfrans' commission one out of two people in mid-sized Dutch cities have been victims of one form of juvenile crime or another. With street robberies it is even worse: in the Randstad, the conurbation in western Holland, it is 75%. Certain neighbourhoods are afflicted more than others in this regard. Delinquent behaviour of boys between the ages of 12 and 18 is often linked to behaviour to see what they can get away with. It usually remains limited to the period of adolescence. After the age of 18 more than 95% of boys no longer are no longer occupied with criminal activities. A very small percentage of those over the age of 18 have not learned how to restrain themselves during intense external impulsive behaviour and great inner tensions. Under pressure from this kind of stress, they will be willing to transgress into violence and criminal behaviour in certain circumstances. Dramatically enough, the absolute numbers of young men still involved is quite high. The more anonymous the situation the easier the transgression. Rapid demographic changes in the last century is one of the reason for the increase in anonymity in the big cities. Anonymity is one of the drawbacks of the emphasis placed in the West on individuality and the need for independence. Anonymity and alcohol are key factors in groups associated with acts of juvenile crime (Justitie 1998). Marginalization, structural discrimination and criminalization all reinforce one another (Bovenkerk 1994, Nijboer 1995, Schuyt 1995). Despite its *poldermodel* (called the third way in English) the Netherlands has one of the highest rates of unemployment of migrant groups among its neighbouring countries. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that a higher percentage of juvenile delinquents come from ethnic minorities. If you have the feeling of not having a future then a criminal career came seem a tempting alternative. But a policy of repression alone does not prevent marginalization, nor this temptation, on the contrary (CRIEM 1997). A great deal of what has just been described also holds true for young women, but I will limit myself

to addressing young men as a male counsellor, researcher and mentor. Girls follow different routes in the transition to adulthood. They are more apt to internalize tension but are more willing to talk about it than boys. With girls, unresolved conflicts of loyalty led more often to intra-psychic disturbances and their consequences. Their inner conflicts are also partly of a different order. In her book 'Confusing Times', Naomi Wolf describes the interdependence of the female and male worlds from the girl's point of view. She proposes that gender specific forms of 'rites of passage' also be developed for girls (Wolf 1997). Boys externalize the tensions caused by those dilemmas. They have more accepted ways of living it up and externalizing their behaviour. The central problem with which policy makers are faced working in (multi-cultural) city neighbourhoods, is striking the right balance between reaching young people, developing the greatest diversity of programmes possible and visibly achieving the most coherent mix for everyone concerned. We can learn from other cultures how to help young people structure the transition to adulthood. The transition to adulthood is an important subject of (collective) care in all societies. In many traditional cultures supportive structures for young people in their transition to adulthood are brought together in a short term 'rite of passage', a ritual of transition, an initiation. Core elements from several 'rites of passage' can be translated from anthropological research to the specific context of a neighbourhood, district or village. For a boy becoming an adult, more than with girls, demands that you have a big mouth, can compete with others, take risks and do dangerous things. And in most cases the social environment sets limits as to what is allowed. Sanctioning authorities appear whenever a serious violation of social rules occurs which the social environment has not sufficiently limited or structured.

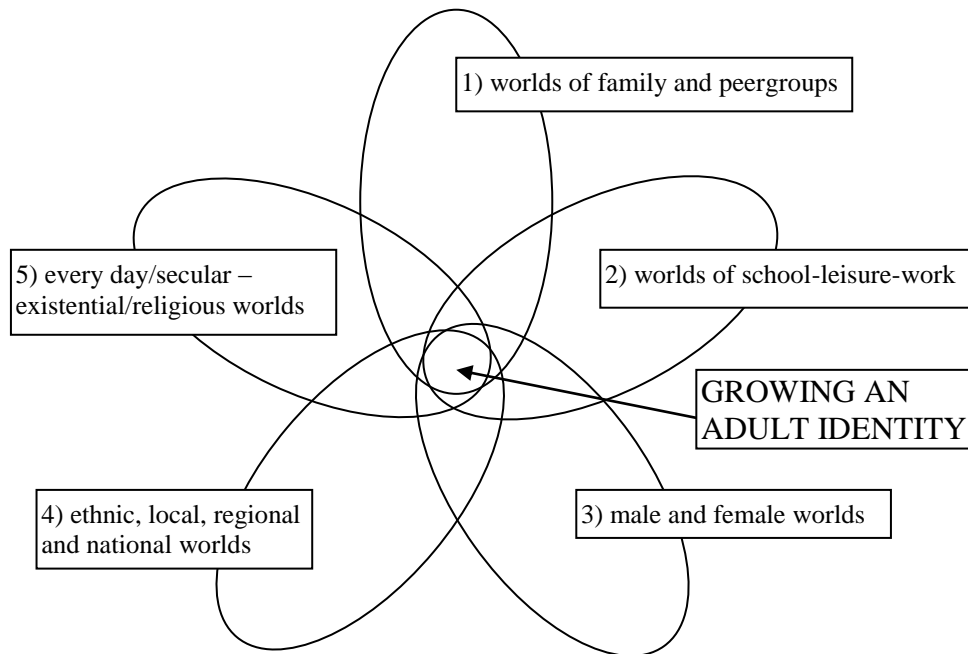
### **Conflicting Loyalties**

How to give both young men and the various sectors and scientific disciplines more insight into the inner turbulence they experience? Psychoanalytic, ethological and system therapy studies indicate that long term inner conflicts have a deleterious effect on a person's stability, health and welfare. In some cases this can lead to depression, psychosis, criminality and even suicide (Connors 1994). Kurt Lewin formulates the phenomenon of the self-organization of all kinds of impulses in his 'Principles of Topological Psychology' as follows: "If the motor system were to be guided by all the needs (and impulses d.v.b) of a person at the same time, his behaviour would become chaotic." (1936, 179). In ethology, the study of animal behaviour, conflicting impulses and emotions are unavoidable, problematic and dangerous (Lorenz 1964, Tinbergen 1969). Conflicts of loyalties between father-mother-son-daughter forms the basis of psychoanalytic theory. In the Freudian Oedipus complex, a central and dramatic role is reserved for the unsolvable conflict of loyalty. Murder, suicide, incest, neuroses and psychoses can result from intense and long term conflicts of loyalty not being resolved. An important instrument of intervention, that builds on the psychoanalytic tradition, are how intra- and interpersonal boundaries are dealt with in family and social relations in family therapy and system theory. The concept of 'loyalties' has been developed in the American system therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy en Spark 1973). The concept of loyalty sheds light on the quality of family and social relations. Nagy links loyalties to what Martin Buber called 'the order of the human world' (ibid. 37). Loyalty is the cement of all human relationships. Members of families and social networks are loyal if they treat each other fairly and with integrity and have certain rights with and enter into certain obligations that do not apply to people outside these networks. Loyalty presupposes reciprocity, it concerns interpersonal actions and reactions. The outside world of family and social networks has its counterpart in the inner world of each real individual, including juveniles. Since the outside world is never stable, the inner world will also display a permanent dynamic which is referred to by the term 'balancing loyalties'. The adolescent finds himself in a phase of life in which the constant weighing of diverse interests, needs and loyalties is extra dynamic because the mature adult personality is still in the process of being formed.

### **Balancing on the Cutting-Edge**

Conflicting loyalties lead to more tension and stress. Every person, including a young person, wants to alleviate this. Extremely profound and sudden dilemmas, such as a deep hurt or announcement of a divorce can cause individual explosions of violence. A longer period of unresolved conflicts of loyalty with boys can result in all kinds of risky behaviour and incidents but also to lapses into criminal and violent behaviour (Boszormenyi-Nagy en Spark 1973, 223) were the first to coin the term balancing of loyalties. This process continually has to do with exploring boundaries. Should I get angry because my parent keep calling me lazy? Or should I laugh, should I get mad and start hitting somebody, or should I walk away? Social contact and communication is only possible between people if those involved

know their physical, sexual, social and emotional boundaries. For instance, the boundary between public and private exists everywhere and at all times. Young people are allowed to experiment more with boundaries more than adults are. We accept it when young people kiss for long periods in public, but when adults or senior citizens indulge in it, we do not find it acceptable. In my psychiatric investigations conducted among military conscripts and on the basis of my observations and bibliographical research I finally distinguished five realms in their social worlds in which they had to balance loyalties. To these young men the domains were strongly interrelated. They had to strike a balance in and between each and every one of the domains in order to take the step to adulthood (1998e).



- between their own personality, immediate family/distant relatives and friends (peer group)
- between leisure time, school and work (van Bekkum 1994, 1998c)
- between the world of women and men (van Bekkum 1998d)
- between ethnic/local/regional and national worlds (van Bekkum 1998b)
- between the secular (everyday) and religious (supernatural) world

Diagram I: Balancing of loyalties in the five domains in the transition to adulthood

### Key Moments

Adolescents, more so than children or adults are caught between conflicting loyalties because in their transition to adulthood they have to let go of all sorts of (childish) patterns of behaviour without having formed any new adult behaviour to take its place. Adolescents are expected to act as responsible individuals on each step of the way. A young man with limited schooling and hardly any money, with an absent father, or one collecting unemployment or disablement benefits, who drinks and beats him, is exceed the boundaries of socially accepted behaviour. If you are a young man from a migrant family and your social environment constantly reminds you that you are a stupid Turk, then the risk of going astray increases. If a girl has turned him down, he has been expelled from school, and as a Turkish boy he no longer attends the mosque, then delinquency is around the corner. Moreover, if the boy finds himself in a peer group with criminal tendencies he also finds himself in an environment where he is more likely to start a criminal career. The number of conflicts of loyalty become too much for him. He cannot see a way out of his feelings of powerlessness associated with his age. Feeling like shit is not something you want to experience every waking hour of the day. So you look for a way to release the tension. That is where danger lurks. You go out on the town with your mates (buddies) and a mate dares you to pop some pills, shoot up, beat somebody up or commit a robbery. Individual tension channelled by a peer group is the locus operandi for preventive childcare. How can you tell if a boy is in the grips of a long term and serious inner conflict and how can you win his trust to give

him positive support? How do you become enough of a friend to replace the criminal tendencies step for step with positive alternatives? Every policy, all projects, interventions, and counselling should be aimed at recognizing these young people and groups and offering them support and a sense of boundaries. Negative control and repression are counter-productive. It makes little difference to our model whether or not the individual is white, black, well or poorly educated, privileged, underprivileged, a Rotterdammer, Turk, Frisian or Cape Verdean. It has to do instead with being able to spot the intensity and the dynamics of someone trying to find his balance on the cutting edge and his position in his system of peer groups. I know plenty of young men in similar positions who have been able to withstand the temptation of resorting to a life of crime. What matters is the dynamics of the situation, of the moment at hand. Or rather, of a number of key moments in which a criminal career might be initiated. If there is sufficient support and a supportive structure of older boys and adults available, then the risk run by most boys rapidly diminishes. In my view, these key moments, together with other preventive aspects are undervalued in current research. I can remember from my own experiences that a certain fascination for violence and crime played a role in the initiation phase of criminal activities. In nationally conducted research and in many urban policies regarding juveniles and security measures a) the findings and recommendations were insufficiently translated to daily experience, b) the (local or multicultural) uniqueness of a neighbourhood or context was insufficiently taken into account and c) and the preconditions insufficiently worked out in order to make the policy work in the long run. The author works in a neighbourhood in Utrecht in collaboration with all parties involved to present an integrated plan to address these deficiencies.

### **Urban Context and Criminal Careers**

Boys and young men of every day and age and in all cultures look for kicks and push boundaries. They do so precisely to get to know themselves and become mature as a result. The transitional vulnerability of boys leads by definition to conflicts of loyalty. The inner tension which conflicting loyalties brings causes explosive situations in social (public, school, peer, family) contexts. You are more anonymous in a group and if you are outside your neighbourhood or own city, then the fuse burns more easily. Dares and provocations by mates form an important risk factor for these boys and their possible criminal career. Why have peer groups in modern cities now become breeding grounds for criminal careers? This is a complex problem about which little research has been conducted. From a historical and comparative cultural perspective a few insights and facts are set out to help prevent serious transgressions of social boundaries by gangs (peer groups). Without peer groups young men could not make the step to manhood, while the reducing crime actually calls for their control and curtailment. In the introduction I already referred to a few factors that have led to increased chances of peer groups becoming criminalized.

- A) Through rapid changes in the demographic make-up of the population in the last 100 years as a result of industrialization and immigration and together with urban renewal old neighbourhood connections have become more tenuous or broken down altogether.
- B) The transitional period from adolescence to adulthood has more than doubled, in part due to the strong emphasis our (western) society puts on personal, individual development through education and leisure activities. This is why structures are necessary that offer long term support during periods of transition. In a number of cases this could be for more than ten years.
- C) Since the nineteen sixties, young people have more influence and feel they can find their own ways of becoming adults. Before that, young people had little influence on the adult world in European culture. Adults determined taste, music, literature, and the smoking and drinking habits of youngsters and so forth. The shift heralded by the sixties was that young people, much more than before, could determine their own values and norms. They made their own (youth) culture which in part was modelled on that of the adult world. But the sixties revolution also threw them back onto their own resources. Yet they still need adults to reach maturity. For the next decade, the task for policy makers, media, and those implementing policy should be to bridge the gap between the adults and young people (van Bekkum 1995).
- D) Part of negative group behaviour can be attributed to the loss of their social position at the local and national level of community. The Dutch historian Herman Pleij describes the role of a group of young men or '*charivari*' in the Middle Ages in his book about the *Blauwe Schuit* \*. They guard the prevailing values and norms and have an very important social function. Courting, trying out things to see how far one can go, having erotic and sexual experiences, flirting and fighting for a girl's favours or defending her against boys from another (neighbourhood) community took and

take place in groups. Rural customs, in which unmarried men played an important social role, slowly came into the new rapidly growing communities: the cities. The city took over rural customs thereby giving youngsters a position in the community. What is remarkable in a comparative cultural framework, is the especially supportive role played between groups of boys and girls. There was a constant coming and going between them throughout the year at parties, events and annually reoccurring rituals. Their group behaviour took place under adult supervision. In present-day urban situations adult no longer supervise groups of young people. Young people no longer have a positive social role and that is why they no longer have any real place in the goings-on of a given neighbourhood. That makes them even more vulnerable than they already are (van Bekkum 1998a).

- E) The last factor is that integral supportive transitional structures have been gradually disappearing in the contemporary urban environment through urbanization (more anonymity, less social ties), secularization (disappearance of boy scouts and youth clubs) and de-socialization (disappearance of left wing youth organizations). A recent development is the 'zap' culture in leisure activities. Sport clubs are becoming less and less tied to neighbourhoods which makes the collective release of tension no longer viable through 'ritualized' forms of aggression. All this means that most socially accepted functions of young people as a group have vanished.

### **Peer Groups as Basis for Support**

We know that a great deal of behaviour that seriously transgresses social boundaries is committed among groups of young men. A number of criminal careers are initiated among peer groups. But we still know very little about how it takes place in various Dutch contexts, or we have forgotten there is already plenty of knowledge available (Werdtmölder 1986). Most of the young men experience quite a bit of support from these groups (Buysse & van de Ploeg 1992). The significance of these peer groups for boys and girls is both underestimated and misunderstood. Without them it is very difficult for young people to take the giant step to adulthood unscathed. In peer groups young men have ample opportunity to test their individual strengths against one another and other groups in the development of their adult identities. Not just in physical terms or behaviour intended to impress for when they are older. Several levels of communication and negotiating are practised in youth groups. Quite a few young men lay the basis of their male identities in the peer groups. Every conceivable loyalty dilemma is addressed verbally and non-verbally. The remedial educationalist Jan van de Ploeg published an article in 1995 about the distinguishing characteristics of peer groups. He concluded that peer groups do not necessarily have to form a counterculture to the family. If that is the case then the potential conflict with the boy would be even greater. The peer group is first and foremost a laboratory: "in order to allow diverse qualities to be expressed outside the family environment." Friendships in peer groups are extremely important, if not vital for a successful transition to adulthood. 'Belonging or not belonging' can have a major influence on the formation of personality. Building up social networks outside the family is an important function of peer groups. One of van de Ploeg's other conclusions is that a timely survey of peer groups can play an important role in preventive youth care (van de Ploeg 1995, 83). This is also one of the recommendations of a report on group criminality (Hakkert e.a. 1998). Making a connection between concrete work with youths and high risk peer groups is still a big problem. Policy and evaluation reports about criminality among (migrant) youths seldom, if ever refer to the preventive importance of linking up with peer groups. In their evaluation of several approaches to the interests of the group, Van Dijk, Someren and others recommend: "Do not just approach youngsters alone, but his or her social context as well." (1996). The report does not give any concrete instructions as to how to go about this. For years youth workers have been warning that this is indeed a bottleneck. The British sociologist said in 1996 in an interview with Anil Ramdas: "...adolescents like being noticed, not understood. Perhaps they don't want outsiders to break their secret code, because it is great to hang out with each other and show one face to the outside world." This is asking for a concept such as 'rite of passage' which is close to the social world of young people regardless of their (ethnic) group.

### **Rites of Passage**

In Poland, on the eve of their departure for compulsory military service young men take leave of their friends in their village, town or city. Those that stay behind are jealous. Their families are sad and realize that childhood is now over. The boy leaves home full of expectations on the way to a period of



adventure and excitement (separation). But it is also a period of great insecurity and danger. He will have to roll up his sleeves, endure periods of hardship and have his courage and bravery tested. During the period of his compulsory military service he will be neither man nor boy. He will be 'on the threshold' (liminal). When he returns to his hometown after his tour of duty he and his fellow conscripts are given a huge celebration. He will have successfully endured his 'liminal period' and 'test of manhood' and now be received with the status of adult male (reintegration). In villages in the Dutch province of South Limburg the '*Jonkheid*' (Esquire-ness) still exists. It is a fellowship of unmarried males. You enter the group when you leave elementary school (separation). As an age group they have a name, a positive place and tasks in community life. The period that they remain members as boys and young men varies, but can last for as long as fifteen years (liminal period). Friends help each other with work and during difficult periods. Parents have responsibilities towards the younger members. You leave the '*Jonkheid*' when you marry. Your peer group have a role to play in this. You then enter another world with new privileges, rights and obligations (reintegration). A recently married man in Limburg once told me that he would not have missed that period of his life for the whole world. In the '*Jonkheid*' he had learned a great deal about being a man, about solidarity, community spirit and taking responsibility. He wiped away a tear reminiscing about his *Jonkheid* days. He missed his friends. The *Jonkheid* had offered him a supportive structure for becoming an adult male. An adequate initiation into the adult world: an effective rite of passage. The transition of the Polish and Limburg young man exhibits three phases:

- 1) leaving an old role behind coincides with a boy leaving town for a long period of time or being a long term member of an isolated group: separation. The boys are glad, maybe even a little scared, but full of expectation, the fathers both proud and a little concerned, the mothers sad because she has lost her child. The boy enters a new group with new codes, where rules about keeping secrets and a strong sense of solidarity prevail.
- 2) the second phase is all about liminality. The symbolic moment of transition from one phase to another, whether it takes five minutes, five months or two years in the case of some initiations, is considered crucial in this stage. The person in question, a young man is neither boy nor man. He is 'in between'. The British anthropologist Victor Turner named this period 'liminal' after Van Gennep: 'on the threshold.' (van Gennep 1906, Turner 1969). The condition of those involved is fraught with danger for themselves and others. For in this condition they have no clear identity. An intensive period of socialization, an initiation ritual is necessary to bridge the liminal period. The person involved must not get stuck in a period of (semi) permanent destabilization that could threaten his own development or that of his family or social context. They then leave the liminal group, in which strong social ties have grown within the prevailing social values and norms. They will be able to fall back on these ties for the rest of their lives.
- 3) the third phase is the festive return as a man into the social context: family, neighbourhood, or town. One's childhood with few responsibilities and obligations is gone forever.

Phase 1 CHILD'S WORLD	Phase 2 TRANSITION	Phase 3 ADULTHOOD
ROLE A STATUS A BEHAVIOUR A	PERIOD OF VULNERABILITY	ROLE B STATUS B BEHAVIOUR B
SEPARATION (breaking away)	LIMINAL PERIOD (threshold status)	REINTEGRATION (reintegration as adult)

DIAGRAM II: Rite of Passage Structure in the Transition to Adulthood.

### Contemporary Applications

This three phase structure was discovered as a result of comparative anthropological research. Arnold van Gennep, a Belgian anthropologist, recognized the phases in the transitional rituals he had observed in several cultures. He called these structural forms of ritual 'rites of passage' (1906). Ritual is the (cultural) structure associated with transition. Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim thinks that all those taking part in the rites of passage of adolescents to adulthood not only try to solve 'man-

made' problems between young people and their elders but also the conflict between a) instinctive desires b) the role that adolescents want to play in society and c) the role society expects of him/her (Bettelheim 1954). This anthropological approach is in keeping with the theoretical framework put forward in 'Transition and Renewal: rituals in psychotherapy' (van der Hart 1978). In the United Kingdom there are therapeutic communities and ambulatory programs that try to approach the transitional model (Edgar 1990). Upon admittance, all clothing is handed in and everyone receives a uniform. In some cases people's heads are even shaved bare. Here we can speak of genuine separation from the old environment. During the period of admission the client is liminal: on the threshold to becoming healthy (and a mature adult). Being discharged and readmitted into society forms the period of reintegration. Hospitalization, admission into a psychiatric institution, ambulatory (outpatient) therapy, detention after school, can all facilitate in offering adolescents a supportive structure to help them make (a part of) the transition (Gutknecht 1983). The therapeutic treatment itself can be used as a structure for initiation. In South Africa there are a number of probation programs and in the United States several preventive neighbourhood and school programmes that make use of the rite of passage concept. In the Netherlands there are also several programmes that work with part of the rites of passage principles: New Perspectives Amsterdam, Your Project Moroccan Contact Officials), HALT in various cities, First Offenders, Grab Your Chance Rotterdam, Agadir Gouda and Neighbourhood Youth Perspective Utrecht. The 'rite of passage' concept can improve and sharpen up these methods.

### **In Conclusion**

During the ten years of experience I had with mentally disturbed conscripts in the Dutch army, I counselled quite a few young men who gave all kinds of signals asking for support in their struggle to reach adulthood. In 1992 I wrote the following about it: "My research and counselling experiences in clinical psychiatry indicate that there is a great need for adolescents to be initiated. By this I mean a transitional ritual in which personal needs, qualities and questions asked by boys are connected in a realistic way to his future social worlds in terms of employment, marriage, family, religion and politics.." (1992, 59). In the report on group criminality already mentioned above, its editors refer to the situation in the United States where gang problems have not been solved owing to a lack of 'coordinated strategy.' (Hakkert e.a. 1998). However, previous American research has also shown that moves to establish a coordinated intercultural vision already exist that were undervalued. One vision is to regard gangs as a form of self-initiation resulting from a lack of appropriate 'rite of passage' structures (Bloch & Niederhoffer 1958, Yablonksi 1969). Adolescents often give 'preventive' signals at a variety of places to draw attention to their struggle with what seems to be unsolvable dilemmas (Ferberda e.a. 1996). Some of their more serious problems of choice in balancing their loyalties can lead to criminal incidents.

Having a sense of too little security, too little structure to help address the vulnerability associated with their age group and too many negative challenges in peer groups can mean the beginning of a criminal career. If you do not have positive models or no future you have nothing to lose. Quick, easy money getting your daily kicks on the edge of violence and crime is an attractive rite of initiation into the adult criminal world. A group oriented approach is appropriate for the age group and fitting for most young people (Buisse & van der Ploeg 1992). One of the most important tracks to follow in modern criminal prevention youth care would be to give peer groups (back) a role in the neighbourhood or community, such as the *Jonkheid* in Dutch South Limburg. Adjusting primary preventive projects to include programmes based on a rites of passage concept is a promising course for urban environments to follow. Projects could, for instance, aim at early adolescence and tie in with initiation signals given off by young people themselves, their teachers, their parents, neighbours, and youth workers. Adults often refer to the signals given by boys as 'reaching puberty'. This creates opportunities for boys in multicultural and other vulnerable neighbourhoods to enrol in transitional programmes in order to build a strong personality unscathed and enter the adult world with their own ideals.

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**Notes**

\*De Blauwe Schuit (literally The Blue Barge) is a wagon (carrus navalis), that moves on wheels through the city. On board are subjects to the king who have changed into their superiors: of princes, kings and gentlemen. It moves in procession through the city poking fun at authority with irony and turning authority on its head.