

Coming of age in apache vs western culture

Psychology, Child Development



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The transition from childhood to adulthood can often be of smooth nature with a period of adolescence to occupy the space in between the two life stages, though some cultures don't recognize adolescence as a stage of life and have their children pass on from being a child straight on to an adult. Either way, this coming of age for many people is important in almost everyone's eyes as it marks an important stage in their life and existence as a whole. Two cultures could be extremely different and contradict from each other, but still see this coming of age as a crucial part to an individual's life. Take the Apache tribe and any Westernized culture for example; different in essence, but share almost the same level of value associated towards this transition, and executing the importance of coming of age in many different ways. Theories from developmental theorists like Erik Erikson's Theory on the Stages of Psychosocial Development can also stand to relate to the experiences of, and within the transition.

Dating as far back as the 1500's, the Apache are a culturally related Native American-Indian tribe who initially originated from the Canadian and Alaskan regions around 850AD, and eventually migrated to the Southwestern states of North America around 1000AD. Made up of 6 tribes, the Apache includes the Chiricahua, Jicarilla, Lipan, Mescalero, Salinero, Plains and Western Apache. Though over the years the tribe has decreased immensely in numbers, there is said to be around 5000 Apache's to date. It is truly a culture rich in history, culture, value and tradition. Coming of age in Apache society is seen as a medium to serve for many purposes; to personally, spiritually, or emotionally strengthen the individual in all these aspects.

For females, the expression of the important transition between childhood to adulthood is carried out through the Sunrise Ceremony, a formal rite of passage traditionally known as ' Na'ii'ees'. Months of preparation, teaching, as well as expenses, goes into this to fund the sacred practice, which demonstrates just how important and seriously it is taken by the Apache people. The ceremony occurs always on a Friday on the summer after a girl's first menstruation, and is meant to celebrate her transition into womanhood. Over a span of 4 days, the ceremony reenacts the Apache creation story with the girls personifying the White Painted Woman; the first woman of creation and a strong mythological female figure. Each day represents a life stage travelling through being an infant, child, adolescent and finally onto womanhood. The occurrence is meant to prepare the girls for the hardships of womanhood by consisting of many ancient tests of strength, endurance and character which the participant must ' pass' to make her a woman. She must run and dance into all four directions on each day which symbolizes the four stages of life, starting in the east, and on the last night, dance all night till dawn to ultimately test her endurance.

The Sunrise Ceremony offers many benefits not only for the individual partaking in the practice, but also the Apache community as a whole. By the girls personifying the iconic White Painted Woman from their creation story, this allows them an opportunity to deeply connect with their own spiritual heritage, which many are found to find and discover as the true core of themselves for the very first time (Tika Yupaniqui 2001). During the process, some may even find their own unique ability to heal. The ceremony holds a reciprocal relationship with both the participant and the community, with

benefits coming from both ways. The girl not only provides her community with food, gifts, healing and other blessings, but in turn, receives blessings from the community, love, acceptance and the respect deserved as a woman. This rite of passage also plays a significant role in preserving a way of life that almost became extinct. In 1883, the US adopted the Code of Indian Offenses which placed a ban upon many Native American ceremonies, these ceremonies were conducted in secret for nearly a century. In a sense, the Apache almost lost their language and culture until 1978, when the US passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which allowed the revival of the open practice of ceremonies. Only about 1/3 of Apache girls today are said to have a Sunrise Ceremony. Such an event like the Sunrise Ceremony is able to gather extended families and tribes to strengthen obligations of their clan, reciprocity and emotional bonds, as well as deepening the Apache's special connection with their land and their spiritual heritage (Tika Yupaniqui 2001).

Primarily a Western culture, the Australian culture is comprised of multiple cultures intertwined together as well as their traditions. Though this is a case of multiculturalism, the culture as a whole it is still modern and much contemporary at heart. Western Cultures, like Australia, are seen to recognize the period of adolescence while many cultures don't and have their children transition from childhood straight to adulthood. Adolescence can be defined as a stage of life, usually coinciding within the teenage years, where many developmental changes are occurring (including, physical, emotional, cognitive and moral changes). In a westernized society, adolescence can often be viewed as a period of 'time out' where individuals

have the opportunity to develop their interests, their identity and have time for preparation, prior to beginning their adult life. Many also view the stage as an 'in between' time, representing a period of waiting where the adolescents aren't children nor adults. Teenagers in the adolescent period are also portrayed in forms of Westernized media to commonly rebel against authority, and are therefore expected to in this society. This can relate to Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development in regards to the 5th stage: Identity vs Role Confusion, which occurs during adolescence from the ages of 12-18 years old. This stage is often seen to present a teen who undergoes a deep search to find a sense of self and personal identity through a method of intense exploration of aspects of personal beliefs, values and goals. In regards to role confusion which may also be known as the famous 'identity crisis' in a typical teenagers life, they are often observed to experiment with different aspects of life. This may be expressed through the result of rebellion through the form of establishing a negative identity at the same time (Saul McLeod 2018).

Coming of age in Australia and the rites of passage that accompany this transition vary. When reviewing rites that are present in Australia, a mixture of both formal and informal expressions are seen. Though the mainstream view of this transition from childhood to adulthood would be considered more informal, as many of these rites have been identified of this informal nature, rather than formal. For example, the law in Australia can be a common indicator of adulthood. When an individual turns 18, they have a legal status of being an adult, meaning many opportunities open up that they may not have been able to do legally of as a child. This can include being of age to

drink, vote, gamble, leave home and many more. Another common rite of passage in a Western society is getting your driver's license. This signals a sign of growing up rather than a sign of pure adulthood, as you are able to obtain a license at the age of 16. Some examples of an informal rite of passage would be having an 18th birthday party to celebrate the legal age, or attending the infamous Schoolies event at the Gold Coast where about 40,000 were expected to attend in 2013. The actions of experimenting with alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity within the party scene are frequent happenings at an event like this. This notion can also be reflected upon in Erikson's 5th stage of Identity vs Role Confusion as it mimics many teens in our western Australian culture who engage in exploration and experimentation of all sorts.

In summation, the transition from childhood to adulthood in both the Apache tribe and the Westernized Australian culture hold great importance to both. Numerous theories like Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development develop in the context of a Western world and accordingly, relate to a Western experience, which can serve to explain why the theory was able to be applied to adolescents in the Australian society more so than the Apache's. Though this coming of age is viewed and expressed differently between these two distinct cultures, this phase of an individual's life will always be seen as a significant part of the person's journey throughout life, molding them to be the person they will eventually end up living as.

Annotated Bibliography

- Indians. org, 2018, Indians. org, N/A, viewed June 15th 2019. This website was very useful as it gave insight into the history of the Apache tribe, helping to give the context needed to what the culture really is. This source would be quite valid as it is coming from an organization that has trustworthy information as well as records of the Native American Indians, though may include some bias as the people behind the site may come from a native background.
- Broadly Staff, 2018, Inside the Sacred Ceremony That Ushers Apache Girls Into Womanhood, VICE, accessed June 14th 2019. This website as well as the Youtube video within the site was one of the most extremely helpful sources that came to use. It was useful as the information in the video came from the first-hand experiences of an Apache girl going through the rite of passage herself. As this information came first-hand, it would undoubtedly be valid, though may include bias as it touched on the views from an Apache's side only.
- Trenton Judson, 2019, Study. com, N/A, viewed June 15th 2019. This study website was useful to some extent as it was only used for information regarding the Apache's early movements around the lands. The information within the site would be valid, accurate, reliable and truthful as it is assumed that the sources they get the information from are trusted sources, as this is a website for educational purposes. Hardly any bias is present.

- Emily, 2015, Emily, America, viewed June 16th 2019. This website was very useful as it gave an adequate run down on the Sunrise Ceremony. When looking into the author of the blog post more in depth, she is of Native American descent which makes this information contained within the site quite valid. As she is of native descent bias would also have been present as the post is being written in the perspective of an Apache.
- Tika Yupaniqui, 2001, N/A, Tika Yupaniqui, N/A, viewed June 16th 2019. This website was also another extremely helpful site that came in assistance for the information I needed to include for the Apache tribe, as it went into the details of what exactly the Sunrise Ceremony is. The information within this source seemed quite valid and accurate, and little bias seemed to be present.
- Saul McLeod, 2018, Simply Psychology, United Kingdom, viewed June 16th 2019. This site was only useful for the information on Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development which helped me fulfill a requirement on having to refer back to one theorist. The information seems highly valid as it comes from people with a background or career in Psychology. In further analysis, there is hardly any bias as it seems to take all sides equally, bringing all aspects into consideration.
- ABC News Australia, 2013, ABC News Australia, Australia, viewed 16th June 2019. This website was useful for the statistics on Schoolies, as well as accounting for the information on some of the risk-taking behaviours that occur at the event. The information and statistics presented seem relevantly valid as researchers have gone through

stages of research like conducting surveys with real attendants of Schoolies. There seems to be a small amount of bias presented, as through the language and modality used, the tone conveys more of a negative connotation to the event.